



8-2013

Coveting the Backstage: A College Student Audience Study Regarding Authenticity Construction in the Reality Television Viewing Process

Lisa Marie Kruse
Western Michigan University, lkruse@uwlax.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations>



Part of the Social Psychology Commons, Social Psychology and Interaction Commons, and the Sociology of Culture Commons

Recommended Citation

Kruse, Lisa Marie, "Coveting the Backstage: A College Student Audience Study Regarding Authenticity Construction in the Reality Television Viewing Process" (2013). *Dissertations*. 180.
<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/180>

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



COVETING THE BACKSTAGE: A COLLEGE STUDENT AUDIENCE STUDY
REGARDING AUTHENTICITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE REALITY
TELEVISION VIEWING PROCESS

by

Lisa Marie Kruse

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Sociology
Western Michigan University
June 2013

Doctoral Committee:

Gregory J. Howard, Ph.D., Chair
Ann Miles, Ph.D.
David J. Hartmann, Ph.D.
Mark P. Orbe, Ph.D.

COVETING THE BACKSTAGE: A COLLEGE STUDENT AUDIENCE STUDY
REGARDING AUTHENTICITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE REALITY
TELEVISION VIEWING PROCESS

Lisa Marie Kruse, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2013

Television is a major staple of daily life for those who live in the United States and reality television has persisted as a primary genre of television programming. While it is unclear just how much reality television (RTV) viewers are watching, the genre's dominance in primetime lineups suggests that RTV is a main type of programming viewed by television audiences.

Many audience studies have focused on the primary motivations for viewing the genre of reality television converging on four: to satisfy psychological desires (voyeurism, vengeance, and status); to connect with others; to socially learn; and the "quest for authenticity." The current study seeks to understand the experiences within the viewing process of those audience members who view reality television, specifically with regards to the "quest for authenticity," by asking three questions: How do audience members define authenticity?; How is authenticity determined and verified in the viewing process?; and finally, What implications does the process of authenticity verification have for everyday life?

A survey was distributed to 304 undergraduate students at Western Michigan University and 20 students participated in one of eight hour-long group interview sessions. Cultural consonance was employed to reach consensus on the definition of

authenticity and the deviant case of the Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries split was explored to back up findings of authenticity verification from the qualitative interview sessions.

Results from the study indicate that audience members find authenticity an important prerequisite in satisfying the other primary motivations for viewing the genre of reality television. Further, authenticity is thought to describe someone who is real, trustworthy, and credible, but is also a trait that only exists if it is capable of being proven. In verifying authenticity, audience members engage in practices of surveillance collecting pieces of information that they assess on the basis of preconceived notions of the social world and their personal experiences. Future studies regarding the implications for everyday life, notably the macro-level forces increasing motivations to view the genre, conclude the discussion.

Copyright by
Lisa Marie Kruse
2013

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I read somewhere that writing the dissertation results in the loss of several friendships, and sometimes marriages, as well as elevated levels of stress and anxiety for those who choose to stick it out with you. I have found this to be incredibly accurate to my experience in this process, minus the marriage part, and I feel I must begin acknowledging the regret and guilt I feel for putting those I love and care about the most through a grueling process that they reap little to no benefit from. I am sorry to those friends and family of whom I have lost contact with or failed to remember important events, of whom have experienced stress and anxiety as a result of supporting me in this process, and of whom have now realized that the end was very anticlimactic. I am far beyond indebted to you.

I was lucky enough to have a marriage that survived this process and I cannot thank my partner, Josh, enough for being there for me through every episode of panic-induced meltdowns, rage and frustration, and for taking charge in ensuring that our “real life” did not fall apart in the process. You have proven to me that love is strong enough to overcome any obstacle.

I would not be who I am today without the support of my friends particularly Joe and Jen, my “grad school buddies,” and my friends from back home and Kalamazoo. You have all been there to laugh and cry with me and to celebrate these important milestones in my life. Although I have lost some of you over the last couple of years, I will always be grateful to all of my friends, past and present, for the roles they played in my success.

It is always a relief to know that there are some people in your life that have no choice but to stick it out with you. I am so thankful for the support of my mother,

Acknowledgments—Continued

Julie, and my father, David, over the seemingly hundreds of years I have been in school. I also garnered support from my siblings, grandparents, and aunts and uncles. If that was not enough, I gained a wonderful group of in-laws who fell right in step as if they had been supporting a graduate student all their lives. Thanks to all of you for entertaining my long discussions about the rigors of school. These were surely more for my sake than for yours.

Of course, I would not be writing up an acknowledgements section without the expert advice and guidance of my dissertation committee. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Ann Miles, Dr. Mark Orbe, and Dr. David Hartmann for their tireless effort on the draft of the dissertation and to my committee chair, Dr. Greg Howard, for his unwavering support over the last five years. You have taught me so much about the bad and the good and I have learned a great deal from every experience we have had together. You are responsible for releasing this “monstrous vermin” out into the world. Thank you for being an excellent mentor.

Finally, thank you to the Department of Sociology at Western Michigan University and the numerous faculty members who were integral in my success. I am particularly appreciative for Dr. Susan Carlson who has proven to be an excellent role model for an emerging female academic. I am eternally grateful for our friendship.

Lisa Marie Kruse

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER	
I. SITUATING AUTHENTICITY WITHIN REALITY TELEVISION	1
Questioning Authenticity	2
Reality Television and Its Audience	6
Understanding the Audience	13
Authenticity as a Motivation for Viewing	15
The Social Construction of Authenticity	19
A Sociological Analysis of Authenticity and the Viewing Process.....	22
II. AUTHENTICITY AND OTHER MOTIVATIONS FOR VIEWING	27
History of Reality Television.....	28
Tuned In, Drawn To?.....	31
Motivations for Viewing.....	33
The Quest for Authenticity	49
Conclusion	56
III. CONCEPTUALIZING AUTHENTICITY, SURVEILLANCE, AND OUR EXISTENTIALIST DESIRES FOR THE VERIFICATION OF AUTHENTICITY	58
Reality Television and the Permeation of Surveillance	59

Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER	
Defining Surveillance	67
Surveillance and Power.....	70
The Neoliberal, Postmodern Surveillance Society	79
Authenticity and Existential Sociology	88
Authenticity and the Social Construction of the Self.....	94
Goffman, The Self, and Authenticity.....	97
Conclusion	101
IV. METHODS	103
General Constructions of Authenticity and Participation in Reality Television.....	104
Survey	106
Group and Individual Interviews	110
A Deviant Case	118
Strengths and Weaknesses	124
Conclusion	130
V. FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY DATA.....	132
Demographics of Participants	133
Television Viewing Habits	137
Defining Reality Television	146
Perceptions of the ‘Reality’ of Reality Television.....	159
Perceptions of Authenticity: Cultural Consonance.....	167

Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER	
Conclusion	170
VI. FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA	172
Demographics	173
Motivations for Viewing.....	175
Uses and Gratifications	176
Social Learning	191
Connecting With Others	196
The Quest for Authenticity	206
Conclusion	224
VII. THE DEVIANT CASE OF KIM AND KRIS	226
Data Collection	227
Survey Data: Basic Viewing Practices and Perceptions of Authenticity.....	229
The Quest for Authenticity: The Case of Kim and Kris	235
Conclusion	250
VIII. COVETING THE BACKSTAGE	252
What is Authenticity?	254
What is the Quest for Authenticity?.....	257
What are the Implications for Everyday Life?.....	263
Study Limitations	277
Contributions and Conclusions	279

Table of Contents—Continued

APPENDICES	284
A. Email to Instructors for Permission to Administer Survey.....	284
B. Informed Consent for Survey	286
C. Survey	289
D. Emails to Group Interview Participants.....	297
E. Flyers for Group Interview Recruitment	300
F. Instructor Recruitment Letter for Flyer	302
G. Email to Group Interview Participants from Flyer Recruitment	304
H. Informed Consent for Group Interview Sessions	306
I. Group Interview Prompter Questions.....	310
J. Group Interview Demographic Survey.....	313
K. HSIRB Approval	315
BIBLIOGRAPHY	317

LIST OF TABLES

1. Group Interview Sessions	113
2. Survey Demographics	134
3. Western Michigan University Undergraduate Demographics for 2012	136
4. Mediums Through Which Respondents Access Television Programming ..	138
5. Self-Report Gender Frequencies	140
6. Viewing Habits by Gender.....	141
7. Chi-Square Tests, Viewing Habits by Gender	141
8. Portion of Viewing Dedicated to RTV by Gender.....	142
9. “What is Your Favorite Reality Show?” Confusion in Identifying RTV	146
10. Defining/Describing RTV: The Paradox of Reality and Fiction	149
11. RTV Negatively Influences Others.....	153
12. RTV Negatively Influences Society	154
13. Cameras Portray Real Life	156
14. Camera Changes Ability to See Real Life	156
15. Self-Report Racial Classification.....	159
16. Cross-Tabulation on Viewing Habits based on Perception of Reality	163
17. Chi-Square Test, Viewing Habits base on Perception of Reality	164
18. Comparisons of Means for Perception of RTV as Real, by Race.....	165
19. Independent T-Tests for Perceptions of RTV as Real, by Gender	166
20. Authenticity as a Process of Verification.....	167
21. Group Interview Demographics.....	174

List of Tables—Continued

22. “Have You Followed News of the Divorce Between Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries?”	229
23. “How Real Do You Think The Marriage Was?”	230
24. “Who is to Blame for the Dissolution of the Marriage?”	232

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Number of Hours of Television Viewing per Day	139
2. How Real is Reality Television?.....	162
3. Perceptions of Authenticity Regarding the Kardashian-Humphries Marriage	231

CHAPTER I

SITUATING AUTHENTICITY WITHIN REALITY TELEVISION

Several years ago I became curious about the phenomenon of reality programming. I am of the generation that was just old enough to witness the rise of reality programming, starting with the increasing popularity of *The Real World* and exploding with the introduction of *Survivor* and *Big Brother*. Once thought to be a “fleeting fad,” reality television (RTV), has proved to be a media staple dominating primetime and a majority of cable and network lineups. While the popularity of reality media is contested (Pozner 2010), many in the U.S. report the programming as a mainstay of their viewing practices¹.

Overall, those watching television do so an average of five hours and 11 minutes per day and they increased this average by about 22 minutes per month over the last year. While African Americans and women top the charts (with the highest hourly rate per day), U.S. Americans across race, ethnicity, gender, and age groups are tuning in for significant portions of their day (Nielsen 2011a). Digital Video

¹ Jennifer Pozner (2010) in *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*, provides evidence that non-reality television programming is often cancelled at the height of its popularity in order to fill the time slot with the cheaper alternative, reality television. While Nielsen reports that reality programming is the favored programming for teens and college age populations, it is unclear whether or not the programming is immensely popular for the general population or just overly prevalent in primetime lineups.

Recording (DVR) devices and “time-shifted viewing” practices are allowing even the busiest of people to watch their daily dose of T.V. Indeed, television is the dominant form of entertainment for the U.S. American family (Putnam 2000) and reality programming is a common genre of program available for viewing.

Questioning Authenticity

The current study seeks to understand audiences of RTV and their experiences in the viewing process. Audience studies focusing on the genre have concluded several motivations for viewing. Many of these will be discussed in a later section and Chapter Two but of particular interest to this study is the idea that individuals are motivated by a desire or “quest for authenticity” (Hall 2009; Andrejevic 2006; Rose and Wood 2005; Andrejevic 2003; Jones 2003; Hill 2002; van Zoonen 2001) and the “verification of authenticity” (Dubrofsky 2011; Dubrofsky and Hardy 2008; Andrejevic 2002). The quest for authenticity can be explained as one where audience members navigate between what is “real” and what is “fantastic,” or those scripted and unrealistic elements of the program (Rose and Wood 2005) seeking to determine who or what is authentic in a process labeled “savvy viewership” (Cloud 2010; Andrejevic 2003). Further, it can also be understood in terms of motivations for choosing reality programming over other types of genre because of the claim to represent real-life situations (Hall 2009; Papacharissi and Mendelson 2007; Reiss and Wiltz 2004). As Annette Hill (2002) notes, “part of the attraction in watching BB [*Big Brother*] is to look for a moment of authenticity...the game is to find the truth in the spectacle/performance environment” (p. 337). Work by Mark Andrejevic (2004)

confirms that individuals take seriously the quest for authenticity particularly when responsible for determining the outcome of the show, as is the case in competition-based programs where audience members are responsible for voting off participants. While competition shows are only a particular type of reality program, to be discussed in further detail below, Alice Hall (2009) indicates that the draw of reality television or its uniqueness in presenting “real people” means that the quest for authenticity is a motivation for reality television in general.

The determination by the audience of a participant’s authentic behavior is part of a constant negotiation, or a verification of authenticity. Rachel Dubrofsky (2011) argues that, “proof of authenticity relies on the ability to appear consistent across disparate social spaces and at different times” (p. 117). To be considered authentic, then, is to remain consistent in behavior over a lengthy period of time and in different circumstances. Reality programming and the embedded surveillance practices prove to be a useful tool in determining consistency of the self as we are able to watch others over a period of time as they engage in different activities and interactions in different settings and social situations.

In general, Andrejevic (2004; 2003) argues that reality programming has proven to be a successful campaign for surveillance practices because it shows the positive consequences that can come out of the use of surveillance, namely the ability to determine the authenticity of others as well as the capacity to prove an authentic self. In doing so, audience members become desensitized at the very least, to the many forms of surveillance that occur in their everyday life. To illustrate the broader

acceptance of surveillance, Andrejevic notes that *The Real World* struggled to find participants in the first season of the show but are now inundated with audition tapes from tens of thousands of applicants. The problem is that as viewers become desensitized to the more Orwellian nature of surveillance practices, they become more willing to submit information about themselves up the channels to reap the rewards of surveillance including fame, wealth, and customized services and products (mass-customization). As Dubrofsky (2011) articulates, “what is particular to reality TV is the suggestion that surveillance of the self is not only acceptable but desirable” (19). Understanding the quest for authenticity is intertwined with examinations of surveillance and the “surveillance society” (Lyon 2007) within the everyday life of the neoliberal citizen and the responsibility of the self. Chapter Three will examine these theoretical implications related to authenticity.

The seemingly integral role that authenticity plays in reality programming and its overflow into everyday life, led this research to focus on the quest for authenticity and the verification of authenticity within the viewing process. My primary research question seeks to understand how audiences define the term authenticity. As will be discussed later, the term authenticity is ambiguous and while the literature discusses the term synonymously with “being real,” “trustworthy,” (Andrejevic 2006; Gamson 1998), and “consistent” (Durbofsky 2011; 2007), it is unclear how audience members understand authenticity in their lives and within reality programming.

It is also important to understand what authenticity means with respect to reality television. A second question pursued by this study seeks to understand the

process of how authenticity is both determined and verified by viewers over time. Understanding that reality television is a process of editing (Seagal 1993) and that RTV cast members are almost always unknown to audience members, it is unclear how the audience is able to determine the authenticity of the participants and the show. Further, it is potentially the key to understanding the impact viewership and the action of authenticity determination and verification has for everyday life.

Finally, it is important to understand how constructions of authenticity manifest themselves in everyday life. Audience studies have sought to understand the ideological messages propagated by this genre of programming, concluding that dominant ideological belief systems are not only portrayed through the programming but also received and accepted without much critical reflection (Cloud 2010; Sender and Sullivan 2008; Tincknell and Raghuram 2002). Therefore, dominant stereotypes and prejudices are reinforced from depictions of these ideological constructions on reality programming (Boylorn 2008; Orbe 1998) as well as other idealized cultural elements such as consumerism (Everett 2004) and instant gratification (Sender and Sullivan 2008). As Mark Orbe (1998) discusses in his analysis of *The Real World* and the show's portrayal of African American males, stereotypes of marginalized and oppressed populations are reinforced through media portrayals and this is a "powerful source of influence because they...are presented not as mediated images, but as real-life images captured on camera" (p. 42). This idea of reality television as "real" is a central concern regarding the representation of authenticity in reality programming. While viewers understand moments of the show to be scripted and even heavily

edited, they still believe that some of the show is “real” and those determinations that we make regarding authenticity have the potential to reinforce stereotypical portrayals of participants.

Understanding authenticity, how it is defined, how it is determined through the viewing process, and ultimately, what implications this process has for everyday life is an important contribution to the study of television viewing practices and the relationship between media consumption and real life. As will be outlined in Chapter Four, respondents were asked about their understanding of authenticity and how they go about determining the authenticity of reality programming. Additionally, a “deviant case,” or a situation where the authenticity of a reality television star has been called into question was examined. By examining the process of authenticity and how it is determined or called into question in a deviant case clarifies how viewers construct and define the concept in relation to participants on reality programming.

Reality Television and Its Audience

Before turning to a short introduction of the main motivations for viewing, it is important to discuss the terms that tie these concepts into the research at hand. Understanding the genre of reality television and the audience that tunes in is about as complex as understanding authenticity and the motivations for engaging in the viewing process. What is interesting in light of this discussion, and alluded to by Heidi Penzorn and Magriet Pitout (2007), is that for such an elusive phenomenon, reality television is, at least seemingly, recognizable by audiences. Yet it is difficult to

define. Perhaps this phenomenon is best illustrated in Justice Potter Stewart's concurring opinion in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964) regarding hard-core pornography:

I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description, and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that.

This statement seems to indicate that understanding common characteristics is the key to defining the genre and understanding how audience members come to identify programming as reality.

Reality Television and Sub-Genres

There is little consensus over how to define reality television. Mark Orbe (2008) indicates that “reality TV has emerged as a catch-all phrase to describe a wide range of entertainment programs” (p. 345). Further, Jane Roscoe (2004) states that, “reality television has become stretched a little beyond analytical usefulness” (p. 175) and “in many ways, audiences define reality TV in relation to what it is not” (p. 192). Lisa R. Godlewski and Elizabeth M. Perse (2010) go on to state that, “despite the sustained popularity of reality television programs, existent research regarding this burgeoning genre is limited, even lacking a clear definition” (p. 149). It is seemingly a phenomenon with no clear boundaries or distinguishing features and there is no real consensus about how to define the genre of reality (Hall 2009; Nabi et. al. 2003).

Penzorn and Pitout (2007) speak to this when they state that,

Despite the fact that audiences immediately know what is meant by the term reality television, a clear and concise definition of the genre remains elusive. Instead it seems more valuable to describe the inherent nature and mutually

inclusive genre characteristics of these programmes, rather than argue the merits or lack thereof of proposed definitions (P. 65).

Understanding the specific and inclusive characteristics is not clear-cut and imposes several problems on the process of defining. Many definitions hold similar elements such as technological characteristics, defining the genre by how it has been made possible via the advancement of technology, notably handheld video cameras (Murray and Oullette 2004; Kilborn 1994). Definitions also speak to the idea that the genre is relatively unscripted (Murray and Oulette 2004; Kilborn 1994), and that it often involves real people as opposed to paid actors (Andrejevic 2004). However, these characteristics are not necessarily consistent themes across reality programming. For example, not all reality television programs rely on handheld video equipment and many use high-tech, expensive recording equipment (Pozner 2010).

Jennifer Pozner (2010), Beth Montemurro (2008), and Orbe (2008) argue that reality programming often involves much editing, storyline construction by writers and producers, and contrived situations and settings that serve to question the “reality” or “realness” of the programming. Richard Kilborn (1994) illustrates this nicely when he states, “what networks dub reality TV comes at us with musical cues on the soundtrack, manipulative editing...all enacted by a cast of wannabe models, actors, and game show hosts” (p. 4). In many shows participants are accused of being on the show to further their professional careers or achieve fame beyond the 15 minutes afforded to them. In shows like *American Idol*, contestants are paid a stipend to participate, resulting in problems when trying to determine the deciding line between paid and unpaid actors. The rise in celebrity reality programming further

complicates this divide. The idea that settings, situations, and encounters are often contrived leads to the notion that participants are indeed acting in situations.

It is also the case that when dealing with anything related to technology and popular culture, a definition is often outdated as soon as it is printed on the page (Holmes and Jermyn 2004; Corner 2002). However, some scholars have indicated that out of the literature a more consistent and agreeable definition of reality television is emerging. While “sweeping generalizations fail to acknowledge the great diversity [of] this ever-expanding genre” (Orbe 2008: 345), one thing that does seem to remain consistent across this diverse genre is the idea that reality television represents people engaging in real behavior. Thus, it is possible to define reality television, a diverse and ever-changing genre, by the claim that what it presents on television is real interactions. Therefore, I find Murray and Oullette’s (2004) definition particularly useful. They state,

What ties together all the various formats of the Reality TV genre is their professed abilities to more fully provide viewers with an unmediated voyeuristic, yet often playful look into what might be called the “entertaining real.” This fixation with “authentic” personalities, situations, and narratives is considered to be Reality TV’s primary distinction from fictional television and also its primary selling point (P. 4).

As a more critical definition of the genre, Murray and Oullette’s offering allows for the real and unreal moments of the show to be included in the genre and it gives central attention to what is considered to be the main difference between reality programming and other television shows. While the use of “authentic” personalities will prove problematic for this analysis and its focus on what is considered authentic, the claim is that all participants of reality programming are acting in a manner that is

consistent with their real personalities regardless of celebrity status or ultimate motivation for participating on the program.

Sub-Genres of RTV

In trying to distinguish characteristics within the genre of reality programming, some have attempted to define sub-genres within the program. Nabi (2007) used cultural consensus mapping and found that audience members could consistently recognize and agree upon only two salient characteristics, competition and romance. Beyond these two there were no clear distinctions consistent enough to warrant classification. She concluded that determining specific characteristics that serve to classify shows within specific sub-genres may prove to be less fruitful than understanding if and why audiences appear to be attracted to certain themes of reality programming.

Orbe (2008), in an attempt at classification, has concluded that there are five subgenres of reality television. The first, “competition,” encompasses those shows that play on the game show structure of the 1950s and 60s, that of individuals competing against one another for a “prize.” These include shows like *Fear Factor* where participants engage in several rounds of “tests” to prove they are the most fearless of the group and deserving of the cash prize. Competition reality television programs also include shows such as *Top Chef* and *American Idol* where participants show off their talent for a chance to win an opportunity for a high-profile career, and many are characteristic of pitting individuals against one another for a chance to win

money (*For the Love of Money*) or love (*The Bachelor*). “Court Shows” represent reality programs that focus on some aspect of the criminal justice system or criminality (*COPS, The First 48, Judge Judy*), and “Documentary Style Reality TV Shows” or “Docusoaps” are those reality programs where the daily lives of either real people or celebrities are documented for audience members to serve as passive viewers. The fourth subgenre is that of “transformative improvements,” those shows where some aspect of the individual, whether their physical body or appearances, mental state, family, or space, is changed, often drastically (*The Biggest Loser, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, Tim Gunn’s Guide to Style, Intervention*). Last, Orbe identifies “hidden cameras/hoaxes” as a subgenre where some sort of prank is either a mainstay of the show (*Candid Camera, Punk’d*) or a part of a larger plot (*Joe Millionaire, My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiance*). The author discusses how the “hidden camera/hoax” characteristic of the show is often embedded in shows that appear to be characteristic of other subgenres until it is revealed that the whole thing was a sham, so to speak.

It is often hard to decipher between subgenres on particular shows as many have shared characteristics. For example, *The Biggest Loser* is “transformative” in that the contestants lose significant amounts of weight during the program, but it is also characteristic of the “competition” subgenre because the contestants are competing for a monetary sum. Further, elements of the program mirror elements in the subgenre “docusoap” in that the contestants’ daily lives are chronicled. While these “daily lives” are unique to the particular show, Orbe indicates that some

“docusoaps occur within special living environments created/created by producers of the show” and “within this subgenre participants are often times given specific tasks and activities to engage in” (p. 348). Overall, there is seemingly much overlap to these subgenres and the potential for confusion and differences in the classification process.

Further, understanding viewers of docusoaps as passive is seemingly contradictory to contemporary understandings of the audience and interactivity in reality media. As I will discuss in the next section, audience members are now thought to be active in their viewing processes. While there are different meanings of what active viewing is and looks like, viewers of docusoaps often have access to interactive tools to comment on and be involved in the show. For example, blogs and forums exist to “watch and discuss” and individuals are often able to tweet and text during the show. These are particularly popular with docusoaps (*The Hills*, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, *Real Housewives*) and tweets and forum posts are often run on a “ticker tape” at the bottom of the screen while any particular episode is aired. While it is certainly not the case that everyone engages in these activities, they are available for viewers and many do engage in these behaviors, lending evidence that the process of viewing these shows and others can be more of an active process than a passive one (Livingstone 2004).

Last, the subgenre “court shows” is too limited to encompass all shows intended for this category. Courts represent a small portion of the criminal justice system and the process of criminality as a whole. Many shows that fall within this

categorization make no mention of courts and they have no purpose in the show. For example, the shows *Unsolved Mysteries* (at least those particular stories focused on crime) and *America's Most Wanted* involve discussing instances of criminal behavior that have remained unsolved and where the offender has not been caught or (possibly) identified. Further, shows like *The First 48* focus not on the court process but rather on homicide detectives and their pursuit of identifying a victim's killer. While each of these shows indirectly relates to the courts, labeling the subgenre "court shows" is somewhat misleading as a categorization.

Overall, it is difficult to accurately define and classify reality programming but coming to understand better the characteristic makeup of reality media and ways to define the genre is important. Even though these definitions do not speak to how the population of audience viewers defines the genre or its characteristics, something future research should continue to focus effort on doing, commonalities can help to develop a perimeter on the genre for the purposes of explaining the phenomenon and understanding its historical progression. These subgenres, rather than being useful in categorizing reality television shows, are useful descriptives of the different elements present within the genre.

Understanding the Audience

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) states that the audience is really a verb, defined as "the action of hearing; attention to what is spoken" (Retrieved June 23, 2011). This definition suggests that the term audience is referring to more of a behavior rather than a group of people. Thus, we participate in behaviors that lead to

audiencing. As an audience, we are constantly active. In fact, the transition into an interactive media world has led to a reevaluation among scholars regarding audience members. For example, Sonia Livingstone (2004) has suggested that the history of audience studies has situated viewers as the “sit back on the couch, family audience in the living room” (p. 76), a description that highlights the audience as a passive and homogenized mass of people. Livingstone argues that the idea of the audience as passive is a thing of the past and that audience members are instead active in their relationship with the media. Even the premise behind what it means to be an audience member suggests an active component.

The idea of the audience as active has important implications for the study of reality television. As Livingstone (2004) argues, what has been a private activity for many years is increasingly becoming public once again. Through interactivity with others and with media technology, we are seeing viewing practices in a public sphere more so than ever before. Further, we now understand the process of media consumption to be a reciprocal relationship. Taking this into account when engaging in audience studies is difficult. On the one hand, scholars should be careful to avoid characterizing the influence of television as direct while, on the other hand, realizing that such influence is occurring (Ruddock 2007). It is ideal to strike a balance and achieve a study that provides evidence about the reciprocal relationship. Sonia Livingstone (2004) describes this when she writes that,

After half a century of television audience research, we know that processes of media influence are far more indirect and complex than popularly thought. We know that not only does the social context in front of the screen frame the nature of the engagement with what is shown on the screen but that in many

ways which we can now elaborate, people are active in shaping their media culture (P. 79).

The audience, then, activates participation in reality television in two ways. First, audience members are viewing programming, which involves the action of taking in information. Second, they are actively engaging through interactive participation that can lead to critical reflection of the program and the potential to shape and influence the medium. Thus, to understand the audience we must understand that the relationship between the viewer and the media is indirect, complex, and reciprocal (Ruddock 2007; Livingstone 2004). Laura Grindstaff and Joseph Turow (2006) illustrate the complexity of the audience when they state that, “people are not reducible to television viewers, and television is not simply received and used as a material resource in everyday life...audiences may respond to, and interpret, media texts in a variety of ways” (p. 116). The audience is increasingly active in their viewing practices and they are increasingly interactive with the programming they are viewing. This is particularly the case for reality television.

Authenticity as a Motivation for Viewing

As discussed above, research investigating the relationship between audience members and reality programming has found many different motivations for viewing. For example, Janet M. Jones (2003) and Lisbet van Zoonen (2001) concluded that the basic motivations for viewing reality programming among their participants was a quest for authenticity, to establish ties with others, and to legitimize behaviors performed in private. As van Zoonen (2001) states, “we rediscover on television what

has become ever more invisible in the world around us, the private life of ordinary people” (p. 672). When Jones (2003) asked her respondents why they watched reality television, the most common response was that it gave viewers insight into others’ behaviors.

Further, Randall Rose and Stacy Wood (2005) argue that, “consumption of reality programming represents a sophisticated quest for authenticity within the traditionally fiction-oriented entertainment paradigm” (p. 284). Overall, authenticity has been a consistent theme in the reality television literature. Several audience studies have found a desire for authenticity to be a significant motivator for choosing to view this type of programming (Andrejevic 2006; Rose and Wood 2005; Jones 2003; Pecora 2002; van Zoonen 2001).

Surveillance and Authenticity

While there are certainly differences based on the type of programming, all reality television has been linked to the common characteristics of “selling reality” and as will be shown through the course of this study, the mixture of real and scripted elements, called the “entertaining real” (Rose and Wood 2005; Murray and Oullette 2004). With that in mind, there are several possible explanations for why authenticity would prove to be an important component to reality programming. Kilborn (1994) states that reality television claims to offer a “relatively unmediated view of reality” (p. 422) and, as will be discussed later, constant surveillance is thought to provide an excellent indicator of authentic behavior (Dubrofsky 2007). Participation in shows

that claim no scripts may provide an opportunity to engage in surveillance practices to verify authenticity because it is assumed that the more an individual is watched, the likelier it is their authentic nature will be revealed (Dubrofsky 2007; Jones 2003).

Surveillance serves the purpose of verification of authenticity for the simple reason that individuals will eventually act in a way consistent to their true self. Surveillance allows for constant monitoring that can occur 24/7. Even if someone is putting on an act, this inconsistent behavior will not last forever. If this is the case, reality programming is the prototypical verification process. The show promises constant tracking of participants in most of their daily activities. There is the realization that even though much that was filmed is not shown, and that there are constructed elements to the programs, the participants exist within a realm where the camera is constantly trained on them. If at first these individuals attempt to act or deceive others, their real self will emerge at some point because without a script, it is impossible to be anything but authentic for that long of a period of time (Jones 2003; Andrejevic 2002). Surveillance, both the processes of watching and being watched, appears to play an important role in the verification of authenticity.

Thus, there are two processes at work when using surveillance and RTV to determine authenticity. In one vein, surveillance serves to prove authenticity to others, what Rachel Dubrofsky (2007) calls the “therapeutics of the self” defined as “the process of affirming a consistent (unchanged) self across disparate social spaces, verified by surveillance” (p. 266) Her argument is that individuals have a vested interest in proving consistency in order to prove authenticity. This interest arises out

of a cultural prescription of individualism and charges of self-responsibility. Failures to be an authentic person or to adhere to social prescriptions of contributing to society are met with backlash in the neoliberal world. Reality television is often a site for transferring messages that those who are not able to “control” themselves, who lie and deceive, who put up an act, or in any way act inconsistently, are detriments to society (Sender and Sullivan 2008; Sedgwick 1993).

In a similar vein, Mark Andrejevic (2006) argues that in the postmodern world we engage in “lateral surveillance,” or the action of watching one another. While arguably there have always been processes of monitoring others, watching in the postmodern era more often involves strangers and is done through sophisticated but accessible surveillance tools. This type of surveillance exists because we are charged more and more, with the responsibility to take care of ourselves in order to take care of the larger social world. A key component to a “better” self is being consistent, a prime indicator of being real or authentic. An authentic self is thought to be one that can contribute to the well-being of the social world.

In the other vein, we also seek to better ourselves by proving that we are capable of “savvy viewership” through the processes of negotiating “personalized reality contracts.” Jones (2003) found that an important activity for those who watch reality programming is determining whether those who they are watching and investing their time connecting with are behaving in a consistent, authentic fashion. Through viewing, talking with others, and catching up with entertainment news, the individual develops a contract with each participant of the show where the viewer

determines whether or not that individual is exhibiting an authentic self. Through this process viewers indicate feeling as though they are capable of not only critically analyzing the participants on the show and determining scripted and unscripted moments, but also detecting authenticity in “real” life. Being charged with bettering society by bettering the self not only refers to being an authentic person but also to being a person who can detect inauthenticity in others. Chapter Three and Chapter Eight examine further, the neoliberal world and the role that media, particularly reality television, has in reinforcing individualistic notions of self-responsibility.

The Social Construction of Authenticity

In all this talk about authenticity, there is a problem. While authenticity is said to be a crucial element in reality television, to say nothing of everyday life, the term is nebulous. It is one of the “simple words” that Neil Postman (1988) cautions against in his essay “Defending against the Indefensible,” that seems obvious enough on its face but that reveals enormous complexity when subjected to even mild scrutiny. If authenticity is such a critical aspect of RTV and everyday interaction, then we need to unpack this term and explore how it pertains to our everyday experiences.

The literature on reality television has only begun to look at the perceptions of audience members (Montemurro 2008). Those that have focused on the audience have only started to delve into the process of consuming the genre (Livingstone 2004). While the desire for authenticity has been identified as a primary motivation for viewing this genre, we have yet to examine fully how authenticity is constructed

through the viewing process. How do we make determinations of authentic behavior when we have little interpersonal exposure to those we are judging?

In her autoethnography, Robin Boylorn (2008) examined her experiences with viewing African American women on television, concluding that representations of this population served to reinforce erroneous stereotypes. These representations left her feeling as if she had to behave in a certain way to maintain consistency with these constructions as they were thought to portray “authentic” behavior for women of color. Additionally, Pozner (2010) argues that “we continue to watch because these shows frame their narratives in ways that both play to and reinforce deeply ingrained societal biases about men and women, love and beauty, race and class, consumption and happiness in America” (p. 17).

One of the most influential studies in this vein is Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis’ (1992) audience study on *The Cosby Show*. They found that viewers were deeply involved in the show and, therefore, related it to reality. White viewers had an African American family with whom they could identify and African Americans were happy that the show did not reinforce black stereotypes. Unfortunately, the portrayal of a “nice” and successful black family on television reinforced the myth that if African Americans were unsuccessful in achieving the American dream, they had only themselves to blame. They concluded that the representation of the Cosby family on television led to a state of “enlightened racism” characterized by the insistence that “everyone, regardless of race or creed can enjoy material success” (p. 73), and that racism, if it exists, does so only through interpersonal relationships. The evidence

from these studies suggests that we actively interpret stereotypes as they are presented on television and, further, that we continue to watch television because what is portrayed remains consistent with our preconceived notion of the way things really are. For example, Pozner (2010) argues that on the production side of RTV, shows are edited in such a way to play off cherished beliefs about the nature of people. In other words, reality television uses ideological beliefs and stereotypes to hook viewers.

Further, many studies have concluded that while we understand the scripted nature of reality programming and engage in “savvy viewership,” we hardly ever examine critically the ideological messages of the shows (Cloud 2010; Skeggs 2009; Sender and Sullivan 2008). Katherine Sender and Margaret Sullivan (2008), in their examination of *The Biggest Loser* and *What Not to Wear*, found that even though viewers were critical of how the shows were capitalizing on the participants’ embarrassing weight issues and recognized that each show suffered from a lack of diversity, they still uncritically accepted and internalized the ideological messages of the show: that those who are overweight suffer from some sort of inner turmoil and that obesity is problematic to the individual and society. In an examination of *The Bachelor*, Dana Cloud (2010) found that individuals constructed what she terms the “irony bribe.” Viewers come to criticize the scripted nature of the show, including the editing and production tricks, as well as the over the top storylines of fantasy dates (at least in the case of *The Bachelor*), while also accepting the ideological messages of love and courtship portrayed by dating shows (i.e. marriage is important, “soul

mates” and “true love” is achievable, and courtship should involve sweeping, romantic gestures). Criticizing the scripted elements of the show allows viewers to justify their viewing practices of the show as “trash television,” their “guilty pleasure,” and provides an opportunity to get lost in the ideological narratives, the fantasy story.

This evidence suggesting that RTV portrays unrealistic situations, events, and people drawing upon stereotyped representations, and further evidence suggesting that we enjoy these elements of the programs while failing to criticize them, alludes to the possibility that authenticity determinations and verification may be based on preconceived stereotypes of individuals and situations.

A Sociological Analysis of Authenticity and the Viewing Process

More broadly, Beth Montemurro (2008) has put out a call for the “Sociology of Reality Television,” arguing that the discipline of sociology has much to contribute to the subject. She observes that most of the work done about reality television is situated in the field of communication. While sociology has investigated television as an industry that plays a significant part in the economy as well as in the distribution of mass culture (Grindstaff and Turow 2006), the concern for Montemurro (2008) is that “although many of the articles and books about reality television investigate themes with which sociologists are quite familiar (identity, stereotypes, social structure), missing from most of the current analyses is systematic use of rigorous sociological methodology, perspective, and theory” (p. 85). Specifically, Montemurro argues that a sociological focus on the consumption of reality television and the

perception of audiences, one that includes understanding the particular motivations for viewing, is long overdue. While studies have certainly undertaken this calling, examinations using a sociological framework are relatively absent in the literature.

Outline of the Study

This study will be concerned with how audience members construct authenticity by, first, looking at the conceptualization of authenticity and, second, understanding the process of authenticity construction through viewership. Additionally, a “deviant case” became available prior to the start of data collection and I was quick to include it into the strategy for data collection. Èmile Durkheim ([1938] 1982) argues in *The Rules of the Sociological Method* that understanding the normal requires an understanding of the abnormal or pathological. Robert A. Stallings (2002) furthers this point when he states that through understanding and studying the “exception,” we better understand the “rule” and offers up not only Durkheim’s justification of using the abnormal but also Garfinkel’s practice of the “intentional creation of exceptions in order to learn about the routine” (p. 283). Kai Erikson (1969) illustrates this practice nicely in his study, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*, where, by studying the deviants, he uncovered the moral contours of a community. To put it in the words of Lou Reed (1990), “they say the bad makes the good and there’s something to be learned in every human experience.” Therefore, using a case where authenticity is called into question may lead to a better understanding of how some are deemed authentic.

The deviant case in this study is the marital split between RTV star Kim Kardashian and professional basketball star Kris Humphries. Announcing their break-up just 72 days after their wedding, many fans and the celebrity news media have cried foul arguing that the whole wedding was a ploy to make money. Shortly following the split, the E! Network aired the premiere of the second season of *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, a show that promises to air for fans the demise of the marriage. Thus, audience members are tuning in to watch the unraveling to make determinations of whether or not the wedding and the relationship were “the real thing” (Ford and Schutte 2011). The details of the divorce, the show, and the Kardashian family will be discussed in chapter four along with the specific methods and strategies for analysis.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the reality television literature, notably the studies that have looked at the audience. I outline the literature on the motivations for viewing, concluding that there are four main motivations for viewing. First, audience members seek to satisfy the psychological desires of voyeurism, vengeance, status, and ritualism. Second, viewers look to RTV to connect with others. Third, viewers also tune in to reality television to socially learn. Finally, viewers are motivated by a “quest for authenticity” as they seek to verify authenticity through the viewing process.

Chapter Three outlines the conceptual framework for the study, building on surveillance studies, existential sociology, Meadian notions of the self, and Erving Goffman’s dramaturgy. Using the literature on surveillance, I argue that public and

private spaces are more muddied than they appear to be and, further, that the idea of having a private space was historically unrealistic. In contemporary society, this comingling of public and private has caused a lot of tension and uncertainty both because we expect so much privacy and because we seemingly feel as though we have too much. Thus, we rely more and more on surveillance practices to fill in what is missing, particularly in that we live in a surveillance society. Ways of understanding authenticity are situated within the postmodern, neoliberal, surveillance society.

Chapter Four outlines the survey and interview methods employed for this study and the strategies for data analysis. This chapter also includes a discussion of the use of Internet message boards and forums to examine the deviant case of Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries. Strengths and Limitations of the methods and analysis conclude the discussion of methods.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven report the results of the study produced by the methods outlined in chapter four. In Chapter Five, the survey results are presented. These results mainly cover descriptions of viewing practices for the respondents, their conceptualization of reality television, and their understanding of authenticity. Select qualitative data is presented where applicable. Quantitative analysis based on comparisons of race and gender examine the potential differences of understandings of authenticity and the reality of RTV.

Chapter Six outlines the findings from the qualitative interviews. Much of the findings here center on motivations for viewing and the quest for authenticity. The

case is made that audience members are looking to determine authenticity in order to satisfy other desires for viewing, notably connecting with others and socially learning. Further, authenticity is verified using three interrelated processes: seeking out alternative media sources, assessing the reality through the structure of the show and the timing of events, and most importantly, on preconceived notions of the social world based on personal experiences and secondhand knowledge.

Chapter Seven provides evidence of the conclusions from chapter six by looking at the case study of Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries. Data from the surveys, interviews, and message boards are provided to support the patterns found in discussions about general viewing practices. Essentially, the deviant case provides support that audience members use the three processes of authenticity verification in the viewing process to make determinations of the presence of authenticity within the genre of reality television.

The concluding chapter summarizes the major findings along the lines of the three major questions posed in this study. Further, the findings are discussed including the conceptual framework and the theoretical contributions of surveillance studies, existential sociology, and Goffman's theory of dramaturgy. The chapter also suggests several future studies that pursue questions linked to authenticity and surveillance in the RTV viewing process. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the contributions of the study to the sociology of reality television.

CHAPTER II

AUTHENTICITY AND OTHER MOTIVATIONS FOR VIEWING

The [participation in social media and reality television viewing] suggests a nostalgic yearning for authenticity, for ties with others like oneself, for familiarity and communality, and for the social legitimization of one's own private experiences. Such yearning is not appeased by regular culture... After all, art does not deal with the ordinary, the everyday, but with the exceptional. Neither is it smoothed by regular culture... that dictates that private life remains excluded from society and publicity.

Lisbet van Zoonen (2001: 672)

One of the key questions surrounding research on reality television is the question of *why*. Why do audience members choose to watch reality television? Why do they tune in? Much of the scholarly literature on RTV has undertaken an examination of this question when it became clear that the genre was more than a passing fad. Such a pervasive part of popular culture has to be understood in terms of what has drawn viewers in and led to its popularity over the years. The motivations for viewing are also the key to understanding how individuals use the genre and for what purposes.

In the coming pages I will outline the history of reality television, which is admittedly difficult due to the lack of consensus over a definition and defining characteristics of the genre, and then discuss the literature on reality television, particularly the audience studies that have focused on the question of motivations for viewing. Over several disciplines including communication, media studies,

psychology, and sociology, there is consistency regarding motivations for viewing, which I conclude take four main forms:

- to satisfy desires of ritualism (having programming on in the background or to pass time watching television), voyeurism, and self-importance (which involve desires of status and vengeance);
- to connect with others;
- to socially learn, both in forming and transforming one's identity and reinforcing behaviors performed in private;
- to engage in the quest for and verification of authenticity.

The final motivation is the primary focus of this dissertation given the relative lack of investigation into this particular draw and its striking similarity to motivations for engaging in surveillance practices.

History of Reality Television

The genre of reality television is thought to have a long-standing history that is diverse in the types of programs that have been offered. Some have identified its history in terms of waves to illustrate the pervasiveness of the genre over time while also highlighting how it has changed. These waves include a “game show” wave (Griffin-Foley 2004), a “real crime” wave, and the “survivor wave” (Montemurro 2008; Holmes and Jermyn 2004). Brigit Griffin-Foley (2004) argues that the reality genre has been around since at least the mid-19th century starting with the popular penny press magazines to which people anonymously submitted scandalous stories of their lives to be printed and consumed by the masses. They were widely popular.

Prior to the invention of the television, radio shows were reality-esque. The “game show” wave of reality television marks the transition of these reality radio shows to the television.² Essentially, the game show phase, starting in the 1950s through the 1970s, is characteristic of shows that feature new contestants each segment, rather than following the same participants over a long period of time, and is centered around a game that typically ends with a cash prize. Not usually recognized in the reality television literature as RTV, these games shows are thought to be the television precursor to the genre of reality programming encompassing many of the elements that have become notable about the genre.

In the 1980s, the reality genre began to focus more on criminal activity, and popular reality shows like *COPS*, *America’s Most Wanted*, and *Rescue 911* were immensely popular, inciting scholars to name the period the “reality crime” wave (Montemurro 2008). While many of these shows were about crime, the waves of reality television programs also speak to changes in structure and production. Looking at the everyday jobs of police officers proved to be a cheaper alternative to fictional programming that demanded organized plots, skilled actors, and elaborate sets. In other words, the genre introduced the immensely successful focus on criminal justice professionals but it also introduced ways of reducing the costs of producing television shows. Similar to the game show wave, non-actors were featured.

However, the reality crime wave also introduced the idea of looking at the daily lives

² Bridgit Griffin-Foley does not discuss the transition from radio to television and the first reality programs as the “game show wave” but rather discusses the period as predominantly game shows. I applied Beth Montemurro (2008) and Su Holmes and Debra Jermyn’s (2004) terminology of wave to describe this era.

of people with interesting careers, either changing the people from episode to episode, or following a group of individuals over a long period of time. This wave also introduced the idea that sets were not required to make a successful show (Montemurro 2008).

The “Survivor” wave, named after the show, *Survivor*, starts at the turn of the century when shows like it and *Big Brother*, focused more on surveillance, fly-on-the-wall format, chronicling the lives of individuals over a lengthy period of time (often called “docusoaps”). The “Survivor” wave is thought to encompass the current generation of reality shows (Montemurro 2008; Holmes and Jermyn 2004) that incorporate major elements of the last two waves while also reintroducing constructed sets (i.e. the *Big Brother* house) and increasing invasiveness of privacy in its organization around features of surveillance.

It is important to note that these waves define a predominant characteristic of shows but that shows during each wave in the history of the genre can certainly encompass other characteristics. For example, *An American Family*, aired in 1973 (during the “game show” wave) encompassed traits more prevalent in the “survivor” wave. Further, many current reality shows are reminiscent of game show formats and feature crime-related content alongside the docusoap structure.

The literature does not agree on what is considered the first reality television program (Kjus 2009; Penzhorn and Pitout 2007), but the two shows put forth most often in the literature are *Allen Funt’s Candid Camera* (Penzhorn and Pitout 2007) and *An American Family* (Montemurro 2008; Pecora 2002). The latter may be

considered the first contemporary reality show in that it featured one family over the course of a season and their personal strife (the parents were in the process of divorcing and the show featured the coming out process of one of the sons) (Gilbert 2005). It is clear however, that reality television has been around for a considerable period of time (Griffin-Foley 2004) and that it has been, and continues to be, a main staple of programming. Further, it is not likely to disappear anytime soon (Penzhorn and Pitout 2007), despite claims that question the reality of its popularity (Pozner 2010).

Tuned In, Drawn To?

Another curiosity pertaining to the popularity of reality television is that while many report the genre as “trash television,” “cheap entertainment,” or as one of their “guilty pleasures” (Pozner 2010; Biltereyst 2004), the genre has dominated prime-time line-ups and is the only type of programming on some channels (Pozner 2010). However, whether this attests to its popularity is not so clear. Pozner (2010) suggests that the dominance of the reality genre is due more to the fact that RTV is a cheaper, non-union alternative to fictional programs. She states that popular shows, such as *Firefly*, were canceled at the height of their popularity and replaced with cheaper, less popular reality shows that do not need to garner high viewership to net a profit. The prevalence of reality television, therefore, is not necessarily an accurate reflection of viewer preference. As Pozner states,

One of the entertainment industry’s biggest myths is that media companies bombard us with ad-rich, quality-poor unscripted programming simply because we demand it. Not so. These shows exist for only one reason: They’re

dirt cheap. It can cost an average of 50 to 75 percent less to make a reality TV show than a scripted program (2010: 14).

While not a central question in the study of reality television undertaken in this dissertation, an effort has been made to understand better audience perceptions of their viewing habits, how popular the genre is, and whether or not they believe reality television will continue. Although RTV has proved to be a powerhouse in the new millennium, it is unclear whether or not this study is coming on the cusp of its collapse. Dubrofsky (2011) has indicated that, “although RTV continues to be a mainstay of television programming, it has decreased in popularity in the last few years (most markedly apparent in the decline in scheduling of RTV shows during prime time)” (p. 114). To gauge the veracity of this claim about the declining fortunes of RTV, respondents in this study were questioned about the popularity of RTV programming.

While I disagree that there are no other reasons that reality shows appear in lineups save for the lower cost of the programming, Pozner (2010) presents compelling evidence for the preference by networks of RTV over fictional television. However, if there were no demand for reality television, the genre would not exist. The demand is still there, as the results of this study will suggest, but whether this demand is waning and whether we fully understand the draw to the genre of RTV is questionable.

Questions about the popularity of the genre make it all the more important to understand the motivations for viewing. Of the audience studies of the genre of reality, many have looked at the motivations for viewing and have found several that

lead audience members to the programming. These motivations are general and specific, as well as psychological and sociological. The next several pages in this chapter will outline four major motivations for viewing the genre.

Motivations for Viewing

Psychology's Uses and Gratifications

Psychological analyses of motivations for viewing the genre have relied on the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) approach. A psychological theory, U&G states five assumptions about the human condition and viewing behavior: first, selection of media is purposeful and, further, goal directed; second, people select media to satisfy personal desires; third, both social and psychological factors influence how people use and participate in media; fourth, media have to compete with other types of communication; and finally, while people are typically more influential than the media in the viewing relationship, this is not always the case (Rubin 1993). In other words, psychological research on reality television concludes that people make a rational choice to view reality television. With so many other types of media entertainment from which to choose, the genre is selected in order to satisfy psychological desires or sociological needs.

Some studies using the U&G approach have found only generic motivations for viewing, such as ritualistic viewing practices of passing time or the novelty of the genre (Papacharissi and Mendelson 2007). Others have found more in-depth desires for viewing. Steven Reiss and James Wiltz (2004) elaborate on the theory of U&G by identifying 16 basic joys that every human being pursues to varying degrees based on

prioritization. The authors collected surveys from 239 respondents, asking them to prioritize the basic joys and report on how often they watched reality programming. They found a strong correlation between prioritizing self-importance and viewing reality television. Thus, the most significant motivation for viewing reality programming was status and the desire to satisfy the basic joy of self-importance. Further, and related to self-importance, Reiss and Wiltz also concluded that RTV viewers were more motivated by vengeance than non-viewers. In other words, reality television is an outlet for audience members to feel more important than those they are viewing (vengeance) and also to feel as though achieving fame and wealth is within reach (self-importance/status). Audience members tune in essentially as an outlet to the frustration of their own lives and the participants on RTV make them feel better about themselves.

The Problem of Voyeurism

Much of the U&G literature has tried to understand how voyeurism fits into motivations for viewing (Baruh 2010; 2009; Papacharissi and Mendelson 2007; Reiss and Wiltz 2004; Nabi et. al. 2003). Surprisingly, many have been unable to link voyeurism as a significant motivation for viewing (Papacharissi and Mendelson 2007; Reiss and Wiltz 2004; Nabi et. al. 2003). For example, Nabi et. al. (2003) found in their survey of 252 respondents that while viewers reported some motivation for getting a peek into others' lives, voyeurism is not appropriate to the study of reality television for several reasons. First, participants of reality shows are aware that they

are being viewed, but a voyeur takes pleasure in watching someone who is unaware of being watched. Second, censoring and editing occurs within the program and so while many shows portray sexual behavior, explicit sexual behavior is not shown. RTV does not provide the sexual outlet for the voyeur. Third, reality show viewers watch because they are curious about the lives and interactions of the participants and not their sexual behavior *per se*. Fourth, individuals indicate a desire to view reality television to increase self-awareness and personal identity. The voyeur's primary goal is sexual arousal.

On the other hand, Lemi Baruh (2010; 2009) argues that voyeurism does have a place in discussions about motivations for viewing reality television. The problem is not with the application of the motivation but with its limited, and overly clinical, definition. If we reconceptualize voyeurism to frame it in terms of how it is manifested in viewing reality programming, we will find it to be a significant motivator in viewing reality television. Traditionally, voyeurism is thought to be a psychological disorder, and many are not willing to admit to voyeuristic tendencies. Baruh argues that previous studies looking at voyeurism and RTV have suffered from measurement error. Self-report measures on voyeurism are susceptible to false reporting because many do not want to equate their behaviors to what is considered a psychosexual disorder.

Instead, Baruh (2010; 2009) contends that we should think of reality television viewers as motivated by "trait voyeurism," characteristic of the "normal voyeur," an individual who is less interested in high-risk peeking than consensual forms of

viewing. The trait voyeur is opportunistic in satisfying needs, using reality television to satisfy the thrill of looking and listening because it is a medium that allows one to learn about what is typically private or forbidden. In an initial study and a follow up (Baruh 2009; 2010), survey results showed that participants were more willing to report voyeuristic tendencies when the motivation was reconceptualized to represent the more normalized idea of trait voyeurism.

A Critique of Uses and Gratifications

In normalizing voyeurism, Baruh's work complicates the idea of voyeurism as a specific trait. While not everyone engages in psychosexual peeping, is it possible that some people do not engage in trait voyeurism? If there are non-voyeuristic individuals, are they in the minority and, further, who are they? If watching others proves key to the processes of socialization, it is likely that instead of identifying another key trait among a select group of people, Baruh (2010; 2009) is instead pathologizing a normal, social process that is now occurring in reality television but that has always been a part of social makeup.

Further, Reiss and Wiltz's (2004) study on the motivations for viewing that stem from basic desires of human beings is limited in its generalizability. Yet the authors make grand claims about the universal quality of these desires. Desires of self-importance, status, and vengeance as described in the article and as related to motivations for viewing reality television are cultural traits of Westernized societies, particularly the United States. While the authors do claim that motivations differ based on types of shows, they make no mention of how these desires translate to non-

westernized countries or countries outside of the U.S. Goals of fame and wealth are not universal.

These criticisms aside, I believe that the desires of feeling important and the need to achieve status and vengeance are motivations for viewing. I do not believe that they stem from universal human desires. Rather, they are symptomatic of U.S. society. In other words, they are culturally bred desires. Further, while “trait voyeurism” likely explains most of the viewing behavior of audience members as well as general engagement in everyday social life, it is important to understand that viewers enjoy getting a “glimpse” into the private lives of others. While it is likely that this desire has always been part of our social makeup, contemporary notions of privacy and increasing emphasis on the individual may say a lot about why we are enjoying “trait voyeurism” through reality television. In outlining the theories considering contemporary culture as a “surveillance society,” a “postmodern world,” and the individual who lives in this society, a “neoliberal self,” implications for trait voyeurism, or why audience members are looking to tune in and engage in this behavior will be examined further.

Reality Television as Resources for Living

Rather than focus on how to categorize the processes of viewing reality television in terms of voyeurism, it is more useful to take the idea as a motivation for viewing and examine how and why reality television has proven to be an arena where audience members are “peeping” into the private lives of others, or at least motivated by the thought that they are. While this discussion is more appropriately housed in the

conceptual framework of surveillance studies in the next chapter, it is useful to briefly introduce the theoretical framework for understanding these processes better. A surveillance society is one characteristic of the proliferation of surveillance into everyday life to the point that it is commonplace and unremarkable (Lyon 2007). Further, many have indicated that practices of surveillance are no longer reserved for agents of control but, rather, are accessible and used by the masses (Lyon 2007; Mathiesen 1997). Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson (2000) argue that the advent of privacy in the modern era has left individuals with the responsibility for creating an identity and understanding how to behave, both in private and public. In other words, privacy has prevented us access to witnessing important moments in the lives of others, these situations that serve to help us form and transform our behavior appropriately. Further, privacy prevents individuals from connecting with others through shared experiences. The widespread use of surveillance, then, is used to get around the barrier privacy has instilled between individuals.

Therefore, one motivation for viewing reality programming is to aid in developing identities and reinforcing public and private behaviors performed in “real” life. The (trait) voyeuristic tendencies we used to engage in when we lived in more close-knit and public environments are now applied to a genre that boasts showing real people in real situations. Dubrofsky (2007) and Andrejevic (2006) discuss this as “lateral surveillance,” also discussed in chapter three, that refers to a responsibility, seemingly self-imposed, to take care of ourselves and make sure that we learn how to

behave appropriately. Beverly Skeggs (2009) discusses this as Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens's (1991) "individualization thesis." This thesis,

Suggests that in a post-industrial society, the individual is now compelled to make her/himself the center of her/his own life plan and conduct. Self-responsibility and self-management thus become key features of the 'new' reflexive self. 'Reality' television which foregrounds the display of self-performance by 'ordinary' people doing 'ordinary everyday-ness' with new levels of televisual representational play offered us the perfect site for exploring self-making, self-legitimation (Skeggs 2009: 628).

Thus, in our more private, deregulated environment, we take more responsibility and look toward everyday applications of surveillance to achieve identity formation and appropriate social responses. RTV provides an acceptable form of voyeurism that televises examples of socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, both private and public, as well as avenues for viewing reactions to these behaviors by other participants, audience members, and society in general.

Lisa R. Godlewski and Elizabeth M. Perse (2010), through a self-administered questionnaire of 464 respondents, of whom 223 were college students, found that the motivation for viewing reality television grows out of a desire to socially learn. The realistic quality of RTV makes the genre an ideal tool for the purposes of learning new things about existing in the social world in that audience members were looking to identify with participants. The more realistic or real the participant was perceived to be, the more the audience member could identify with participants on the show, leading to increased engagement and the ability to learn from watching the participants.

In a similar study, Michael A. Stefanone and Derek Lackaff (2009), through a self-administered questionnaire of 311 respondents, found that viewers were motivated by a desire to engage in non-directed self-disclosure (NDS) and the more they watched the genre, the more they engaged in this type of behavior. NDS is characterized by the sharing of thoughts, feelings, and information about oneself to no one in particular. This is a prevalent trait in many reality television shows, specifically in the incorporation of “confessional rooms” and voice-over interviews where participants discuss feelings and opinions regarding their experiences. These sessions and interviews are aired in a way that suggests they are being put out there to a non-specified other in that the questions posed to participants are edited out. In other words, viewers do not hear the producers or other crewmembers posing questions to the show participants. In some cases, show participants are responsible for turning on and off a stationary camera in a soundproof room. Most often, the information shared in NDS behavior on RTV is of intimate beliefs and opinions of others, private information of one’s life, and reactions to the behaviors of other participants on the show.

van Zoonen (2001), in an ideological examination of *Big Brother* and its immediate and long-term success, tackles the idea of privacy and social learning as it is related to our motivations for viewing. The author begins by stating that, “*Big Brother* provides the first key to understanding the collective desires and needs awakened by the programme” (p. 670) and further, “*Big Brother’s* success...proves...that the...division between the public domain...and the private

with its own code of conduct is not widely accepted or appreciated, and has moreover lost its social functionality” (p. 672). van Zoonen concludes that we look to reality television to combat the private-public divide in order to exist in a social environment where learning from others is key. In other words, the success of the reality show, *Big Brother*, where the fly-on-the-wall element is central, shows that the programming has proven useful in getting a glimpse into the private lives of others. Further, audience members tune in to see private moments of the participants on the show.

A couple of studies done in the field of reality television provide specific examples of the use of the genre for the purpose of socially learning. First, a recent study by Daniel J. Lair (2011) examines the show, *The Apprentice*, concluding that the series is useful for the “21st century business professional.” In general, the article argues that reality television acts as “equipment for living” by providing viewers with information that helps them to navigate reality and make sense of the world. *The Apprentice* specifically relates to the institution of work, helping viewers understand the ever-changing nature of the environment of the workplace. Citing Oullette and Hay (2004), Lair (2011) argues that, “reality TV shows us how to conduct and empower ourselves as enterprising citizens” (p. 77). While work is the focus here, the author points out that reality television covers many of the major life experiences of individuals, including weddings, the birth of a child, losing weight and other transformations, and achieving success. For the institution of work, “the transition from an industrial to an information-based economy unquestionably produced

dramatic upheavals in the social organization of work” (p. 79) and people need to understand how to operate in this new environment. *The Apprentice* illustrates how one can be successful in this new type of environment. Lair supports the argument on the basis that many Ivy League schools, including Harvard and Yale, use episodes of the show in their business courses.

Anna Everett (2004) examines some of the more obvious examples of social learning through reality television in focusing on “transformation TV.” For Everett, transformation television, or the “home makeover” and “self makeover” shows, traffic in “desirable fictions of plentitude, pleasure and power” (p. 160). What may not be so obvious is Everett’s conclusion that audience members are drawn to this type of reality television for more than the simple reason of learning socially appropriate behavior and ways of succeeding. Specifically, viewers are drawn to this type of RTV because of the promise of achieving the appearance of material well being through cheap or easy ways of transforming our spaces and ourselves to reflect achievement in consumer society. The author, in discussing the home improvement type of shows specifically, states that, “unquestionably, the show has tapped into the deep recesses of U.S. Americans’ undying belief in the American Dream of home ownership and now affordable home improvement despite an economy in recession” (p. 170). Audience members learn to present themselves, and their homes, in a way that portrays an identity with middle- to upper-middle class status.

It should be noted that identity formation in the United States is at least partially tied into consumption practices and transformation television, as evidenced

in Everett's (2004) study provides support for the existence of this relationship in the genre of RTV. The genre teaches us that, as members in a consumerist society, identity formation and transformation is equated with purchasing power.

Katherine Sender and Margaret Sullivan (2008), in a mixed methods audience study involving 1800 online surveys and 55 phone interviews, examined several motivations for viewing behavior related to the shows, *Biggest Loser* and *What Not to Wear*. One particularly salient conclusion the authors reached is that RTV shows such as the *Biggest Loser* not only illustrate transformations for the purposes of learning, they also sell "identities." Identity (trans)formation is portrayed as a process of buying the right products. In *What Not to Wear*, audience members are taught that transforming the self is often achieved by simply purchasing the right clothes. The hosts of the show convince the participant that failures at work and home, troubles with friends or with their outlook on life are mainly due to failing to dress appropriately. Not only do viewers learn how to dress appropriately, as most of the show's participants break norms of attire and are subjected to a process of resocialization, but viewers also get the sense that appropriate dressing involves spending thousands of dollars on a few items of clothing. Shopping for a new wardrobe takes place in New York City, in designer clothing stores, and contestants are given several thousand dollars to complete the look. Thus, appropriate style is at least middle class style. There are also tips peppered in each episode on how to achieve the look on less without compromising style. While class is not the only

aspect of a person's identity, on reality television shows viewers are taught that it is the primary element.

However, it is the analysis of *The Biggest Loser* that perhaps best illustrates the idea that identity is tied with consumption. The show features workout tips and motivations for changing one's life wrapped up in a continuous advertisement for products. Similar to Naomi Klein's (2000) theory of the "essence of branding," where products take on a life of their own and become an identity or way of life, *The Biggest Loser* shows us that to be a fit person, one needs to not only workout, but also wear certain types of clothes, drink certain types of water out of specific containers, and eat brand-specific food. The show has been so successful in marketing the idea of weight loss through identity transformation that many "Biggest Loser" products, including weight loss videos and frozen meals, have been released to the market with widespread success. The message of the show is that transformation comes from buying the right products (Sender and Sullivan 2008). While it is also necessary to work to change, the change is thought more achievable through these products. Further, the transformation into a new identity appears more authentic if one looks the part.

Connection with Others—A Community Through Television

In the same way that we are viewing to learn how to behave socially, it is also suggested that we are watching to forge connections in our social world. Daniel Biltereyst (2004) uses Robert E. Lane's (2001) argument in *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies* to explain our draw to reality programming. According to

Biltreyst, Lane argues that Western society is struggling with a fundamental paradox: at the height of material gain and wealth, individuals are suffering from unhappiness and unease. The erosion of social solidarity in institutions and interpersonal relationships is to blame, Lane says, because we need intimacy and strong relationships in order to be happy. Biltreyst (2004) believes that reality programming, in valuing intimacy and interaction as evidenced in their confessional rooms and voice-over interviews, is providing a replacement for our social deficit. This is possible through Manuell Castell's (1996) concept of identity in the network society, or the

Complex process where an individual defines him/herself and constructs an identity meaning on the basis of a set of cultural attributes. In a network society, where media are so prominent, identity construction is more than ever an individual task with many opportunities and possible avenues (Biltreyst 2004: 9)

So viewing practices, particularly in relation to NDSD are useful in social learning and social learning is useful to forging connections with one another. Our loss of direct and public interaction with others means that we view the responsibility of identity construction as ours and ours alone, rather than one that is a communal process. While it is clear that audience members do not engage in identity formation without the influence of the social and cultural environment, they have come to believe that it is necessary to rely on surveillance practices in order to develop identity and find information on the processes of doing so. This is the case, according to Haggerty and Ericson (2000), because at least some of what helped with identity

formation, the more intimate and everyday lives of others, has now, in the modern world, become veiled behind the wall of privacy.

van Zoonen (2001) draws from the success of *Big Brother* to argue that what is desired from reality television is “everyday communality,” or a connection that counteracts the increasing breakdown of social ties in a world dominated by capitalistic trends toward deregulation and individualism. The author was struck by the instant success of the show, indicating that the sudden and widespread popularity is indicative of the show engaging “a social cord, a subconscious collective yearning, a deep-rooted invisible need” (p. 670). In line with Haggerty and Ericson’s (2000) claims, van Zoonen (2001) is arguing that the instillation and proliferation over time of privacy has led to a deficit in social connection. Similar to the argument above, van Zoonen’s data from her qualitative interviews make the case that not only are we socially learning and reinforcing behaviors by viewing, but also connecting with participants on the show through sharing these private experiences. Further, we are forging connections with people who exist in our everyday life through discussions of the show as common ground, as ways to explore and learn about behavior, and to open up discussions of those things relegated to the private sphere:

If I could see what my sister is like with her girlfriends, how the math teacher talks to his wife, how my parents behave among adults, I would not feel the need for a substitute for life. But I don’t see all that. How do you learn how to read people if you only know three kinds: kids your age, teachers and parents? *Big Brother* is the only programme we watch and discuss everyday with the whole family. At last, we have a common friend, about whom we can talk, think and gossip (*Anna*, van Zoonen 2001: 672).

Thus, van Zoonen (2001) argues that, “evidently the real adults in [Anna’s] environment no longer offer such frames of reference, or not to the extent required because they have all withdrawn into their own private surroundings” (p. 672). Reality television is presenting the opportunity to renegotiate the private-public divide.

An interesting component to van Zoonen’s (2001) argument is the presence of interactivity in reality television viewing as part of this process of connection. “The combination of television and Internet platforms in *Big Brother* has created a collective experience characterized by a desire for everyday communality and by a rebellion against the norms of civilized public culture” (p. 673). In other words, audience members are pushing back against norms of individuality and privacy in engaging in interactive forums and viewing the programming. This may be the reason that reality television is often described as a “guilty pleasure” or “trash television.” In being taught to stay out of others business and to maintain spheres of privacy, engaging in viewing practices evokes feelings of guilt and the need to downplay the importance of involvement.

First, the paradox here is that the process of learning to behave appropriately in society necessarily takes away some of the ability to learn social norms. In an attempt to learn and connect with others, viewers are attempting to change the current structure. Second, *Big Brother* was revolutionary in the introduction of 24-hour surveillance feeds of the house that viewers could watch anytime on the Internet. The 21st century, or *Survivor Wave*, of RTV is increasingly characterized by interactivity

such that viewers are more active in their viewing (Livingstone 2004). This includes catching up with participants on social networks, posting in forums and blogs, voting for favored contestants (Holmes 2008), and more recently using Twitter to discuss the show in several ways: many programs now have live tickers that broadcast tweets as they come in, some have “social media rooms” where viewers can tweet to the host or co-host to be read and discussed “live,” and viewers can also tweet participants and follow them as they post to Twitter.

Interactivity is becoming more prevalent in RTV and the future of study for this phenomenon will be discussed in the concluding chapter. For the purposes here, it is important to at least briefly note the presence of interactivity because it has important implications for connections with others, in terms argued by van Zoonen (2001), but also in terms of NDS. Hal Niedviecki (2009) examined the presence of NDS through our use of reality television and other social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and “online diaries” (blogs, forums, etc.). He argues that we are engaging in this type of behavior to reconnect with one another in an increasingly isolated world. Similar to Stefanone and Lackaff’s (2009) and Papacharissi and Mendelson’s (2007) conclusions of NDS as an alternative to interpersonal communication, we are engaging more frequently in communicative behavior that is non-directional and putting more of ourselves out there for others. While we may have a particular person or group in mind when we post a status update, link to a page, or put up a photo, we are essentially putting it onto a medium

that is accessible to any of our friends and sometimes even strangers (Dubrofsky 2011).

What all of these scholars argue (Dubrofsky 2011; Niedwiecki 2009; Stefanone and Lackaff 2009; Papacharissi and Mendelson 2007) is that this behavior, watching others and desiring to be watched, is not simply narcissism. There is a social need to connect with others. More traditional means of doing so have eroded leaving television and the Internet as our viable options. If Robert D. Putnam (2000) was correct in his conclusions that we are indeed “bowling alone,” it seems, ironically, that we have looked to, what at least partially, got us there in the first place.

The Quest for Authenticity

Jones’ (2003) study on *Big Brother* in the United Kingdom culminates this discussion on connecting with others through her conclusions that individuals form a “personalized reality contract” with participants on reality television programs. In what is still considered to be one of the largest RTV studies, Jones collected 20,000 web-based questionnaires over three years from fans of *Big Brother*. These questionnaires included both qualitative and quantitative data and were run consistently over the period to frame for patterns. The purpose of data collection was to examine “how audiences engage in multiple delivery platforms to create their own meaning and argue that the empowerment that comes through live viewing 24 hours, seven days a week with the added draw of interactivity, allows the viewer to *own* the process of viewing” (p. 404, emphasis original). Jones also sought to understand motivations for viewing concluding that individuals were drawn to the programming

because it allowed them to learn from others in terms of how participants dealt with emotions (often relegated to the private sphere) and also to bridge ties with others through making assumptions about their authenticity. Thus, the viewer creates a relationship with the participants of RTV that is predicated on determinations of authenticity, or the personalized reality contract. Audiences engage in viewing over a long period of time, discussing the show with others, and utilizing interactive mediums to determine whether or not they can connect with the show's participants. The viewer then, owns the process of viewing through active engagement of authenticity verification. Ultimately the question becomes: is this person authentic?

Much of the literature has found “authenticity” as a significant motivation for viewing. Related to the idea that individuals must learn to enact our identities from watching others, increasingly having to rely on technological surveillance to satisfy this requirement, authenticity detection is sold by the reality genre as something to be learned from watching this type of programming. Authenticity and the complexity of our understanding of the term is a central tenet of this dissertation as the term is discussed interchangeably in the RTV literature with “being real” with little to no examination into the depth of the term and its relationship with the genre of reality television. For example, Rose and Wood (2005) discuss “authenticating acts” as behaviors that serve to reveal the true self. Hill (2002), as quoted in Andrejevic (2006), states that, “part of the attraction in watching BB [*Big Brother*] is to look for a moment of authenticity in relation to selfhood...the game is to find the truth in the spectacle” (p. 400-1). Andrejevic (2003) discusses our viewing practices in *Survivor*

to be that of looking to “squeeze out a bit of authenticity—of real emotion.” Hall (2009) discusses perceived authenticity on the part of the viewer as involving “how well it is believed to allow viewers a true and unmanipulated window into the lives and characters of real people” (p. 516). As Dubrofsky (2011) and others (see van Zoonen 2001) illustrate, emotionality and overly emotional outbursts on programming is thought to be the “point of entry” so to speak, of seeing into the authentic self of those being viewed.

Dubrofsky (2011; 2007) and Andrejevic (2006) discuss authenticity and its relationship to surveillance in that surveillance serves to “verify authenticity” and that an individual is only considered real or trustworthy and thus, authentic, if they can maintain a consistent self while being watched in various social situations and settings. For example, Dubrofsky (2011) argues that “participants need to show, on camera who they really are—that they are authentically, on camera, the same person they are (ostensibly) in their own lives...that they can be consistent on camera and off” (p. 117). Thus, “a good RTV participant (one who gives off the impression of being authentic) behaves on RTV as he or she is imagined to behave in an un surveilled space” (p. 117). Authenticity is maintaining a consistent self, of being able to verify that one is always behaving in a way that is true to their authentic self.

Ironically, then, the presence of cameras leads to questions of authenticity but it is also thought of as the way that authenticity is determined. In the next chapter, I will turn to an indepth discussion of surveillance practices and their relationship to reality television and the process of verifying authenticity. In discussions about the

presence of authenticity as a motivation for viewing, surveillance is introduced as part of the reality television viewing experience but the genre of television as a surveillance practice is not explicitly examined but rather assumed (Dubrofsky 2011; 2007; Andrejevic 2006; 2004; Jones 2003). Authenticity, more specifically the quest and verification of authenticity, is discussed in terms of a desire for viewers to engage in savvy viewership (Dubrofsky 2011; Cloud 2010; Andrejevic 2006; Hill 2005; Rose and Wood 2005; Jones 2003). Savvy viewership is the process where viewers come in with an understanding that RTV is not reality as presented but rather real moments coupled with fantastic or scripted elements. With this motivation the challenge is to identify moments, this idea of owning the viewing process *a la* the “personalized reality contract,” where people and situations are real and can be trusted.

Paradoxes and Ironies in RTV

The idea that reality programming in all of its scripted glory is being used for the purposes of learning about others and ourselves as well as verifying and constructing authenticity, should be enough to allude to the idea that this genre of programming is riddled with paradoxes and ironies. Here I will note three main paradoxes of reality television, derived from Rose and Wood (2005), to argue that the point of the genre and the major draw is not about showing events that are completely real. Rather, the idea is that reality programming has fantastic and scripted, or unreal, moments within the show and they are what make the genre useful and desirable.

Rose and Wood (2005) employed in-depth interviews and journals (where participants recorded their experiences during the viewing process) to conclude that viewers understood and were motivated by the idea that reality programming is a mixture of authentic and inauthentic moments. It appears that the mixture between scripted and unscripted elements of the show is necessary to satisfy desires for authenticity because it is less about blatantly observing authentic moments and more about being able to identify authenticity within moments of inauthenticity. Since we are motivated to quest for and verify authenticity, the reality genre must employ the paradox, or ironic pairings, of scripted and real moments, all touted as being completely real.

Rose and Wood (2005) identify three paradoxes or ironies of reality programming. The first is that the “situation” within which participants of the show are placed is both real and fantastic. For example, *Paradise Island* was a show in which couples who had landed upon hard times in their relationship went to a remote fantasy island, complete with five star accommodations and limitless food and alcohol, to determine whether they should stay together or split up. The twist was that they were separated from one another into two different mansions in the company of several very attractive single men and women who were put there to tempt them away from their current partner. The context of the relationship troubles and temptations to stray are very real, but the location and situation of the show is largely fantastic.

The second paradox encompasses our need to identify with participants of shows while also viewing the more entertaining scenarios that only storybook

characters, namely villains and beautiful people, can provide. It has been shown, Rose and Wood (2005) argue, that, “disliked characters induce increased, rather than decreased, involvement” (p. 292). Characters who stir up a lot of controversy receive a lot more attention and opportunity within the reality television industry. In *Rock of Love*, Lacey Conner filled the role as the show’s villain and as a result received a lot of airtime. The show features rocker Bret Michaels of the former rock band, *Poison*, and his “quest for love.” Around 20 women participate in various competitions and activities to win dates with Bret and, ultimately, love and affection. Each episode culminates with an elimination ceremony where one or more contestants are sent home. In the season *finale*, two women vie to be the one presented with an engagement ring. Lacey, a season one contestant, was involved in several controversies, including many attempts to get other contestants to fight and break under pressure, actions that would have (and did) led to elimination. Lacey ended up coming in third place, eliminated one episode before the final. Forums and blogs dedicated to the show questioned the authenticity of Lacey’s continuous appearance on the show, arguing that Lacey would have been gone long ago had it not been for the ratings boost that came with the antics. One fan on the forum “tv.com” calls Lacey a “producer’s choice:”

She keeps the show interesting so the producers force Bret to keep her on the show. If you look at the call order...she is consistently called at the end. Which I admit could mean jack squat, but I think it means something. Looking at Jes's call order she's almost consistently 2nd, 1st, and 3rd twice. In the Super Fan episode, everybody was telling him that Lacey was horrible for him. All he had to say was "Yeah, but there's just something about her" (Retrieved March 5, 2013).

Further, Lacey was invited back for subsequent seasons to serve as a guest judge and give Bret advice on the compatibility of the women competing. Lacey also accepted an invitation to a spinoff show called *Rock of Love: Charm School* and was a contestant on the show *I Love Money 3*. While only one example, villains tend to do well on RTV achieving some stature of celebrity.

Finally, Rose and Wood (2005) identify the tension between spontaneity and scripted moments (those parts of the program that have either been heavily edited or orchestrated by the production team) as the third paradox within the genre. Spontaneous moments appear to be the climax of the episode surrounded by a more controlled and structured storyline. Scripted moments are desirable to promote an enjoyable viewing experience. A completely unscripted show would take away the entertainment value and desire to view because, it is theorized, audience members want to navigate between the inauthentic to identify the authentic. And they enjoy the fantastic elements that are truly entertaining.

Cloud's (2010) examination of message board forums and contradictory ideological messages within *The Bachelor* provides more evidence of the importance of the paradox of scripted and unscripted moments. The author found that audience members were only able to justify watching "trashy television" because they could make fun of the scripted nature of the show. Being able to point out scripted elements of the show that they did not take seriously eliminated or reduced the embarrassment of admitting that they enjoyed the show. This example, the creation of the "irony

bribe” highlights the idea that motivations for viewing are not only reserved to satisfy desires but may be useful in other ways.

Conclusion

The idea that the paradox of authentic and inauthentic serves as a buffer for greater enjoyment of the show only alludes to the various ways that we enjoy and seek out reality television for particular purposes. In moving forward, the dissertation turns to an examination of the meaning of authenticity and the motivations for the quest and verification of authenticity through the surveillance literature and an examination of authenticity through the self, postmodernism, and existential sociology. I will argue that we are motivated to identify authentic moments and participants to satisfy these other main desires of viewing, basic enjoyment and voyeurism, socially learning, and connecting with others. In other words, without the authentic, these other motivations would not be present for the genre of reality television. What is notable about this statement is that it opens up lines for further exploration into a deeper why question: what sort of implications does this have for everyday life? Is reality television useful?

Before turning over to the methods and data analyses chapters, the next chapter outlines major work in surveillance studies, especially those attending to RTV. In addition to understanding the motivation to view reality television in terms of authenticity, this study attempts to make the case that RTV is a surveillance practice. The next chapter will also introduce literature on authenticity to frame the exploration of the term undertaken in this study. It is, ultimately, important to not

only understand the draw to the genre but also to appreciate what that means for its viewers.

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUALIZING AUTHENTICITY, SURVEILLANCE, AND OUR EXISTENTIALIST DESIRES FOR THE VERIFICATION OF AUTHENTICITY

Literature on reality television often touches on themes within surveillance studies. Some scholars studying the phenomenon of surveillance have argued that reality television has served a useful function in promoting the use of surveillance practices, particularly in increasing acceptance of the presence of surveillance through highlighting the positive consequences of its use (Andrejevic 2006; 2004; McGrath 2004; Kilborn 1994). Additionally, I argue, RTV is serving as a way for everyday people to engage in surveillance practices in their daily lives. It is important to understand what implications the overwhelming presence of surveillance has for our everyday lives, the social environment within which we operate, and the interaction between the two.

I begin this chapter by laying out the literature that blends surveillance with reality television studies. This work includes arguments that RTV has promoted the spread of surveillance proving beneficial to the emergence and maintenance of the “surveillance society” (Andrejevic 2004; Clissold 2004; McGrath 2004). Further, some have made the argument that reality television is a surveillance practice useful for connecting with others (Niedwiecki 2009) and transforming the self (Johnston 2006; Hill 2005). Finally, Pecora (2002) argues that surveillance via reality television

has proved useful in satisfying desires to “test and verify reality” and Holmes (2008) presents the opportunity to discuss the postmodernist claims of hyperreality (Baudrillard 1983) as they relate to representations of reality on television in arguing that the meaning of actions are placed on interpretations of others.

Following this discussion, I attempt to define surveillance and situate this study within the postmodern, neoliberal surveillance society. Many scholars argue that we are now living in a world where surveillance practices are commonplace and unremarkable (Lyon 2007; McGrath 2004) and where increasing individualism has led to self-responsibility in an unstable and unsure world (Monahan 2010; Skeggs 2009; Richter 2007). Truth testing and authenticity verification through surveillance practices become more prevalent and necessary (Pecora 2002). Meanings of authenticity are outlined using literature from existential sociology to show that understanding authenticity in the self and others is a process of understanding the social world. Finally, I examine the definition of the self and identity and its presence in the postmodern, neoliberal world despite critiques that in this world the “self is dead.” Median notions of reflexivity and the social construction of the self are posited as processes of self-construction achieved through impression management (Goffman 1959).

Reality Television and the Permeation of Surveillance

Reality television, argues Andrejevic (2004), has facilitated the spread of surveillance in contemporary society. Generally speaking, it is thought that watching reality programming naturalizes the status quo in a surveillance society. The more we

watch others and watch others being watched, the more we get used to the idea of being watched and accept that the consequences are not always negative. In discussing motivations for viewing reality programming, it has become clear that audiences find many reasons for tuning in to the particular genre, including authenticity verification, social learning, attachment and identification with others, and satisfying desires of trait voyeurism. These motivations are satisfied through the process of watching others, of surveilling.

The Watchers and the Watched

Some of these, however, are also satisfied through being the object of the gaze. As Lyon (2007) states, “if the classic surveillance novels depict life under the oppressive gaze, and the ‘cinematic society’ unmasks the voyeuristic desire to watch, then the advent of ‘reality TV’ turns the lens once more to focus on the desire to be watched” (p. 152). While many more are watching, many more are also willingly submitting to the practice of being watched and are getting the opportunity to do so. It seems as though we are not only watching others to verify their authenticity or realness, but also subjecting ourselves to the scrutiny of surveillance.

Andrejevic (2006) argues that individuals engage in what is called “lateral surveillance,” or the process of willingly submitting themselves to being watched to show that they are keeping ourselves “in check,” or within the stated expectations of an “invisible other.” Maintaining these expectations confirm an authentic existence. As discussed in the first and second chapters, we are seemingly welcoming the

chance to be watched by others and engage in the practice of self-monitoring to affirm to ourselves, and others, that we are a consistent, authentic person (Dubrofsky 2007; Andrejevic 2006).

Su Holmes (2008) has argued, in line with symbolic interactionists, that we no longer place the meaning of the act with the actor or the text, but with how the action is received. Thus, we are being invited to become participant-observers of our own lives and, in doing so, “test ourselves to see what we will do, how we will perform, and what we will look like in the process...as if we are a self-conscious sociological experiment” (p. 353). Understanding how to behave in certain situations is a process of understanding how the actions are interpreted. We look for authenticity in the interpretation to establish authenticity in the action. Indeed, Janet Jones (2003) found that the reality television stars she talked to described their experiences as informative in that they were able to really find out who they were.

Interpretation is key, argues Jean Baudrillard (1983) because reality is presented as simulacra, “objects that have no reference to anything real but instead constitute a simulated form of reality itself...[they] are ‘hyperreal’ — more real than any reality could be and thus, suck the life out of actual events” (Richter 2007: 1926). Reality is interpreted from simulations or models of reality. For Baudrillard, reality television is one of those models. He takes on the show *An American Family*, portraying the absurdity of the marketing for the show in its claims that the family lives as if the cameras were not present, as if “TV wasn’t there.” For Baudrillard, the show was a “truth experiment,” a way to interpret the simulation to determine what

was real and what was not. Television, in this way, was a sign of the end of the spectator. Instead, television comes to life with the merging of the message with the medium, connecting individuals and informing through signs of reality that also prove to alienate and manipulate viewers in presenting ideals rather than reality.

The primary purpose of watching, and being watched, as Vincent Pecora (2002) explains, is that reality television and its elaboration of surveillance practices serves as a safe medium that taps into a desire to test and verify reality. He believes that “modern culture has become dominated by the practice of testing reality” (p. 348). Therefore, we are participating when we watch RTV in a “quest for real life that requires surveillance for its—for our—verification” (p. 348). Further, it is thought that surveillance practices have the capacity to show what is really occurring. Thus, individuals turn to surveillance practices to prove to others that they are authentic and to also quell their uneasiness that they may not be able to identify reality or authenticity in others.

Elizabeth Johnston (2006) compares 18th century fiction to present day reality television to show the parallels in the two modes of entertainment. However, she argues that while 18th century fiction was perceived as a fictional portrayal of depictions of desire (ideals), for reality television audience members appear to be viewing the genre as though what is portrayed is really happening. In other words, Baudrillard was correct in claiming that the sign is more important than the signified. “If on television it *appears* that the playing fields are leveled, if it *seems* that the good guy...comes out on top—then that must be how things *really* are” (121). The ideal is

interpreted as reality. While reality is presented as a simulation, it is also interpreted through the notion that surveillance is capable of presenting authenticity.

RTV as Propaganda

Reality television not only promotes surveillance practices as a way to verify authenticity. Surveillance is also promoted through this medium by the promise of a “mass-customized society,” one that allows for special and custom ordering, or in other words, a tailoring to specific, individual needs and desires. We vote on reality programming to keep our favorite contestants, we allow corporations to keep track of our purchasing records in order to suggest future purchases, and through advanced technology we can design custom clothing and other accessories to fit our desires. Our consumer practices become more efficient because we are being watched (willingly) while we consume (Andrejevic 2006). It is not necessarily the case that we accept surveillance but that we see its “Janus-faced nature,” (Lyon 2007) or the positive consequences of consumer monitoring outweighing most of the potential negative outcomes of information collection.

Hal Niedwiecki (2009), in his analysis of the uses of social media, concludes that we voluntarily “put ourselves out there” because we want to feel reconnected to a community largely lost in our over-populated, advanced post-industrial society. He argues that individuals feel increasingly isolated and alone in our physical spaces; therefore, surveillance is seen more positively in its ability to connect with one another virtually. We send personal information “up the channels” not necessarily

because we believe in and trust surveillance practices, but because we see the negative consequences of being on stage outweighed by the positive consequences of being able to reconnect with others. While not always this rational in our use of reality media, the desire to connect with others is the overarching motivation for participating in surveillance practices of this sort.

While the idea that we are increasingly isolated and alone, losing our connections with others, is contested in Fischer's (2011) *Still Connected*, a rebuttal to Putnam's (2000) *Bowling Alone*, it may be that we perceive ourselves to be more isolated or that reality television offers a more convenient way of connecting to others. Whatever the reason, many have found that people tend to use surveillance and RTV to connect with others and understand and even transform our behaviors.

Annette Hill (2005) argues that we are also using surveillance in the form of reality programming to transform ourselves. The genre provides a medium where we learn what to wear, how to act, and generally how to live. She states that, "if ethics is about right and wrong ways to live our lives, then we can learn about moral values from watching and talking about popular factual programmes. In this sense, reality programmes offer life lessons to audience members" (p. 183). As argued in chapter two, reality television becomes "equipment for living," and we watch the genre to verify our actions, behaviors, and identities as appropriate (Lair 2011; Holmes 2008; Dubrofsky 2007; Andrejevic 2006; Everett 2004). Evidence that reality television highlights many important life moments is used to show that audience members turn to the genre for self-formation and transformation (Dubrofsky 2011; Taylor 2011;

Lair 2011; Johnston 2006). Of course, the ideal presented as reality here is that appropriate behavior is that of the white, middle class (Dubrofsky 2011; Sender and Sullivan 2008; Johnston 2006).

Beyond finding positive consequences of engaging in surveillance practices, McGrath (2004) argues that reality television serves to quell our uneasiness with surveillance and the “hidden camera.” Participants, knowing that they are being watched and actively signing on to be filmed and put on television, experience a much less threatening reality of surveillance than the Orwellian alternative. It is also comforting, he says, to know that while the environment is constructed, the participants are real and, further, seemingly unscathed from their brush with everyday monitoring.

Similarly, Andrejevic (2002) states that, “reality television is playing an important role in redefining the gaze of big brother from one as a hostile and forbidding concept to one of the benefits of high-tech surveillance” and that we are now equating “submission to comprehensive surveillance with self-expression and self-knowledge” (p. 253). He discusses the difficulty MTV had recruiting people for *The Real World* prior to taping the first season. The thought of being on camera all day for several months was unappealing to most. Today, in its 28th season, tens of thousands of people in their early twenties send in audition tapes hoping to make the cut. Surveillance in this sense has been translated into a sparkling opportunity and participants on many reality shows are thought to be lucky to get their “15 minutes of fame.”

Bradley Clissold (2004) identifies another way that reality programming has served to reduce our anxiety of living in a surveillance society. In what is arguably one of the first reality shows on television, Allen Funt's *Candid Camera* boosted the popularity of the genre for its ability to calm "simulation anxiety," the constant fear that one's actions are being secretly monitored. The show achieved this by providing comic relief at the end of a scenario in which individuals were unaware of being watched as they were subjected to confusing and frustrating scenarios. *Candid Camera* aired during the height of the Communist scare and the Cold War and served, Clissold (2004) concludes, to alleviate the common fear of constant monitoring.

While there may still be a definite space dividing the world on screen from the physical realm of the surveillance society, there is also some overlap. Reality television promotes the proliferation of surveillance and our continual engagement in being watched and being a watcher by providing scenarios that show the positive aspects of these activities. Further, Surveillance is perceived to make our interactions with others more likely to happen, as well as more efficient, help us to make determinations about the authenticity of our environment and behaviors, as well as the behaviors of others, aids in identity development and redevelopment, and even provides the potential to achieve status and wealth. Further, surveillance is thought to be useful in the customization of consumption practices.

However, it is also suggested in much of the literature that reality television reinforces white, middle class patriarchal ideals by presenting these ideals as reality (Taylor 2011; Dubrofsky 2011; Skeggs 2009; Sender and Sullivan 2008; Johnston

2006). Many have also questioned how much power “everyday people” garner when using surveillance and whether engaging in surveillance practices, both as watcher and watched, is more beneficial or more harmful. Before discussing power and surveillance, I turn now to a short discussing on defining the phenomenon.

Defining Surveillance

The concept of surveillance is difficult to define as new technology and changes in the use of the practice have led to continuous reconceptualization of the phenomenon and its practice. Gary T. Marx (2002) illustrates that the problems of the dictionary’s definition of surveillance are in its use of the words “suspected person” and “close observation.” The author explains that engagement in surveillance practices are not necessarily reserved for suspected people and do not necessarily involve close observation. Surveillance, Marx argues, is no longer restricted to crime control and safety measures nor is there a clear-cut distinction between the watcher and the watched. Surveillance is applied in a multitude of situations and contexts. Further, we do not always engage in close observation. Surveillance is something that can take place from afar and does not always include visual practices. Some examples of alternative ways we watch others include satellite surveillance, dataveillance (the collection of textual information), and especially following 9/11, audio surveillance.

This outdated definition of surveillance also fails to account for the processes of self-monitoring. Several scholars argue that individuals are increasingly watching themselves due to the realization that others may be watching as well (Andrejevic 2006; Marx 2002). Discussed above as “lateral surveillance,” this practice of

“keeping ourselves in check” is certainly not a new phenomenon and Andrejevic makes clear that “human society has always been characterized by various forms of peer monitoring, just as all governments have developed mechanisms for monitoring their citizens” (2006:397). Instead he situates the practice of lateral surveillance as a distinct mark of the postmodern, neoliberal world.

Lateral surveillance is one in which members of the populace are enjoined to take responsibility for their own welfare. Understood as a skill for negotiating an era in which responsibility for the management of a proliferating array of risks is offloaded onto the citizenry, lateral surveillance is another technique translating the goals of political, social, and economic authorities into the choices and commitments of individuals (2006:397).

Lateral surveillance is a process of peer-to-peer monitoring process where the onus of responsibility is placed on the self, not just to keep the individual in check but also to protect them from others (Monahan 2010). Through the process, individuals willingly submit to surveillance practices designed to collect personal information and extend greater control over the populace. In other words, Andrejevic believes that reality television is sold to the viewer as a way to practice authenticity detection in the age of social responsibility. But, further, RTV serves as useful propaganda for willingly submitting to practices of surveillance under the guise of individual choice (Andrejevic 2004).

Dubrofsky (2011) illustrates that reality television promotes the idea that what is caught on film is thought to be authentic, and viewers, in receiving information via surveillance practices, believe they are gaining privileged and private information. This idea also promotes the use of surveillance practices to portray an authentic self. Similar to the idea of reality television as propaganda presented by Andrejevic

(2004), Dubrofsky argues that “what is particular to reality TV is the suggestion that surveillance of the self is not only acceptable but desirable” (19) in that individuals are capable of proving an authentic self to others. Lateral surveillance then, is unique to the postmodern, neoliberal world in which individuals feel compelled to prove authenticity to others and to verify the authenticity of those others through practices of surveillance because the rhetoric of contemporary society is that of self-responsibility. This is perhaps why Elizabeth Johnston (2006) felt compelled to ask the following question; “We have always been a voyeuristic society, so why now, more than ever, do we crave viewing, ad nauseum, the minutia of people’s daily lives?” (115).

I find the definition of surveillance assembled by Greg Howard and Elizabeth Bradshaw (2010) to be useful in that it encompasses the many ways that the phenomenon is present, including in the form of reality television. They claim that,

Surveillance involves the collection of information by specific means for particular purposes. Of course, this overarching definition neglects some important details. In order to produce a more nuanced understanding of surveillance, we would like to stress seven of its defining features, including its concern with information management, its dependence on instruments for recording observations, its need for an orientation or purpose, its use of data processing mechanisms, its tendency to produce a response on the part of the surveillance agent, its capacity to influence the awareness and experience of those subject to observation, and its ability to produce a counter-response or resistance amongst the observed (P. 162-3).

This broad but distinct definition allows for the incorporation of many types of surveillance practices among many groups of people and for purposes that range from the more traditional crime control to the newer forms of self-monitoring. Further, it

also acknowledges that surveillance often elicits a response both from the watcher and the watched, and this response can be in the form of resistance.

Adopting this definition for the purposes of this study makes sense because a definition that lists out features of the practice of surveillance can illustrate more explicitly how an action is a practice of surveillance. In making the case that RTV is such a practice, one can illustrate that audience members watch to collect information on others through various instruments including television, and for the purposes through which the literature on motivations has described. Further, this definition puts forth the idea that surveillance involves the processing of data. I argue that this process involves the verification of authenticity. Additionally, the discussion about responses to surveillance is useful in showing that viewing is an active process. As Livingstone (2004) has argued, we must look at television viewing as an active process and audience members as engaged in the practice.

Surveillance and Power

An interesting theme in the literature on surveillance is the idea of power and the question of who holds the power in a surveillance society. Christopher Dandeker (1990) outlines Michel Foucault's (1975) conception of power as,

Not a thing possessed by an individual or group, but a *strategy*, the effects of which are realized through a network of relations and tactics. This network is in a constant state of tension, owing to the resistance of those subjected to it, and so power is always in the process of being achieved. Power involves a constant process of struggle, reaching into the depths of social structure (Dandeker 1990: 23, emphasis original).

Power is dynamic, a fluid process achieved through social relations, including processes of struggle and knowledge acquisition. Further, Foucault (1977) understood power to be related to surveillance practices, particularly in terms of discipline and self-monitoring. As surveillance practices are increasingly available to “everyday people,” and if power is a fluid process, does power get redistributed as more people engage in watching?

Niedwiecki (2009) argues that our fascination with peeping, or viewing reality television and other mediums that allow us a glance into others’ lives, is “a bold attempt to decentralize power, a grassroots campaign to return to individuals the capacity to tell their own stories about who they are and how they live” (p. 207). Similarly, McGrath (2004) argues that the eye of surveillance is not always turned to the masses, and advanced technology has proven to benefit those traditionally without power. Discussed as the “caught on tape” scenario, all it takes is one amateur taking video of an abuse of power to turn the tables. Both Niedwiecki (2009) and McGrath (2004) conclude that no one is in complete control of surveillance and it is imperfect in its application. However, McGrath (2004) takes somewhat of a fatalistic approach to surveillance, arguing that we must accept surveillance because we have no choice but to live in an environment where the practice is present.

Andrejevic (2004) refutes the claim that power is decentralized, instead arguing that the mass public is powerless. Participation by this group in surveillance practices is further serving to imbalance power in favor of those who have always been in a position of authority. In calming our fears regarding surveillance through

positive examples, those in positions of power, namely capitalists, are able to get us to give up more information (knowledge) and, thus, they are able to further control and profit from us. If people believe that they have more power in a surveillance society, it is only because of a false sense of security. In using the example above, it has been argued elsewhere that reality television is edited, leaving the viewers with storylines that have been manipulated by the production crew. Thus, we are not privy to the private lives of others but the lives that those in power want to portray to us.

Mathiesen (1997) agrees that power has not seen a significant shift or decentralization. While we live in a viewer society or synopticon, where the many are also watching the few, it does not appear that the many have the same power as the few as it is still the few that largely dictate what is watched. As an example, Mathiesen discusses the main character, Winston Smith, in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He acknowledges that within the story, the many were also watching the few: "through the screen in your living room you saw big brother, just as big brother saw you" (p. 233). While both were capable of watching the other, Winston was surely not privy to watch as much of big brother as big brother was of Winston. Further, reality television, just like big brother, and like the panopticon, appears to be useful in promoting self-regulation and management along ideals than the redistribution of power.

This is because there is a crucial problem with the synopticon: the influence of the few over the many watchers. Mathiesen (1997) argues that only certain types of people are invited to be a part of the management of the screen, those he calls the

“institutional elites,” who wield significant influence. Those onstage ultimately take cues from those behind the scenes, signifying that those behind the scenes are really the ones in power as they transfer their influence through the medium of the actor on the stage. Sender and Sullivan (2008), in their analysis of reality television, argue that there is a lack of diversity among those who participate on RTV and that only certain types of people are there to represent “real people.” Further, it has been well-known since Debra Seagal’s seminal article, “Tales from the Cutting-Room Floor” (1993), that producers of reality television dictate storylines and behaviors of participants through editing footage, manipulating environments and people, and in purposefully selecting cast members (Orbe 1998).³

Interactivity and Power

Power will prove to be a particularly salient topic in the years to come as “Interactive TV” continues to take hold of the genre and expands to even more mediums and possibilities. Through interactive television, audience members are able to connect with a show on many levels, even in capacities such as commenting on what is occurring during the course of an episode. In this particular example, audience members can “tweet” comments to a show and certain ones are posted on a “twitter feed” at the bottom of the screen. Many shows have also incorporated

³ A recent episode of National Public Radio *This American Life* episode, “Gossip,” portrays this manipulation particularly well. The program invited a former RTV show producer to the show to discuss how she would manipulate the cast members into fighting with each other and even fall in love. The episode, number 444, can be listened to online here: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/444/gossip>

“viewer’s choice” where audience members vote to add or remove someone from the show. While the process varies, often YouTube videos of potential candidates are posted on show websites and the audience submits votes for whom they want to join the show. Further, many reality programs that feature competitions have some sort of voting mechanism for either choosing who should win or should be the “fan favorite.” More recent and extreme examples of interactivity include shows where the audience determines how a person should behave toward the other cast members (*Glass House*) and where self-proclaimed “fanatics” join the cast to compete for money (*Bachelor Pad*). Through this type of interactivity, referred to by Holmes (2008) as “You Decide,” the illusion of control is sold to the viewer in the “promise” of determining the outcome.

Lyon (2007) illustrates that surveillance has always been tied up in issues of power and power relations. Surveillance has expanded and progressed as a means to apply power in society in ways that classify and categorize others, just as it can be wielded by those traditionally disempowered. To complicate matters further, Marx (2002) discusses the idea that social control has been somewhat flipped in what he class the “new surveillance society,” a society where:

New technologies for collecting personal information...transcend the physical, liberty enhancing limitations of the old means...[and] probe more deeply, widely and softly than traditional methods, transcending natural...and constructed barriers that historically protected personal information (P. 9).

In this new structure, the wealthier may be watched and controlled more than other classes, particularly the lowest classes, because they use more devices with surveillance embedded within them (Marx 2002). Further, in Andrejevic’s (2004)

“mass-customized world,” where surveillance is tailored to benefit capitalists and their consumerist goals, the wealthy prove to be the most ideal customers and, therefore, are monitored more frequently. Although the idea that the wealthier are subject to more intense applications of surveillance practices is debatable, there is a general consensus that surveillance is differentially applied across class lines.

Lyon (2007) agrees with the arguments that reality television seeks to normalize surveillance practices and, further, that entertainment-based surveillance is fueling the growth of consumption practices in our “mass-customized world.” In this society, Lyon argues, individuals are taught to engage in behavior spun as benefiting the consumer while displacing power and control. Basically, “if surveillance has to do with strategies of control, then these have to be thought of...as the price paid for regimes of government through freedom” (2007: 62). While this quote is discussing the idea that we trade some of our freedom and privacy for the good of society and our safety, this idea can also be applied to the notion that we only come to accept surveillance practices if we can see the positive trade-off. Unfortunately, in many surveillance scenarios “consumers are unwittingly recruited to ‘being watched’ in ways that are primarily of benefit to those who ‘watch’ them” (p. 155).

Surveillance, Power, and Privacy

In discussing social control, power, and the permeation of surveillance in everyday life, it is necessary to turn the focus to a discussion of privacy. Privacy is constantly violated on reality television as it is in surveillance practices in general.

Bathrooms and bedrooms have cameras and microphones, and intimate moments are shared unabashedly on air to upwards of millions of viewers. Surveillance in a postmodern world means that not only are individuals more accepting of violations of privacy, but that they consider these violations as commonplace and even as desirable in their trade-offs (Pecora 2002).

Of course, this could mean that things are reverting back to the way things were before privacy became such a concern. As Nock (1993) argues, “concerns related to personal privacy...are more typical of modern-day American society than of Colonial or early-American times...privacy as we *now* understand it was less important and less widespread” (vii). Nock goes on to define personal privacy “as the legitimate denial of access to, or scrutiny of, one’s behaviors” (1993:vii). It is clear from this definition that RTV is violating privacy but much of the literature on motivations for viewing suggests that this violation is necessary. In other words, privacy has been an unwelcome addition and the barriers of privacy have prevented socialization and the connection with others.

Haggerty and Ericson (2000) discuss contemporary surveillance practices as a “surveillant assemblage,” a process where individuals are “decorporealized” and information is split or gathered by various mechanisms then reconstructed in ways that serve particular purposes. The idea here is that our selves become pieces of information that can be separated from the whole and reordered in various ways, either to represent the person as a whole in various different combinations. A respondent in Jones’ (2003) *Big Brother* study illustrates this nicely as they discussed

how the show produces and reproduces participants' characters: "It's all you, albeit a refracted image of you!" (p. 409). Thus, the result of the surveillant assemblage is a "data double" that is produced for its utility in a particular context. Therefore, others reconstruct the data double in whatever way they deem necessary for the particular purpose at hand and the original actor relinquishes control over this "mirrored" representation. As the authors state,

While such doubles ostensibly refer back to particular individuals, they transcend a purely representational idiom. Rather than being accurate or inaccurate portrayals of real individuals, they are a form of pragmatics: differentiated according to how useful they are in allowing institutions to make discriminations among populations. Hence, while the surveillant assemblage is directed toward a particular cyborg flesh/technology amalgamation, it is productive of a new type of individual, one comprised of pure information (Haggerty and Ericson 2000: 614).

The surveillant assemblage takes on a rhizomatic shape, a metaphor for "its phenomenal growth through expanding uses, and its leveling effect on hierarchies" (p. 614). In line with several of the arguments above, the surveillant assemblage is responsible for increasing the rate of self-monitoring. Haggerty and Ericson argue that because we know we are being watched, we engage in behaviors where we watch ourselves and our actions to ensure that we deliver an appropriate representation of who we want to be or, in other words, so that our data double mirrors our ideal self. This may prove futile because individuals are powerless to control the representation the data double presents after being reordered by others.

Haggerty and Ericson (2000) also discuss the rise and fall of privacy in modern society. Privacy did not exist prior to the advent of capitalism, specifically before people started flocking to city centers.

Premodern living arrangements typically consisted of individuals residing in rural villages where they knew and were known by their neighbours. The mass movements of individuals into cities ruptured these long-standing neighbourly and familial bonds. Individuals in cities became surrounded by streams of unknown strangers (P. 619).

This new arrangement allowed for anonymity and privacy. Further, individuals were given the freedom to develop their own individual identities. However, Haggerty and Ericson discuss this as less of an opportunity and more of an immense responsibility; “modern individuals are now compelled to be free, to establish identities and life projects in the face of radical uncertainty about correct courses of action” (p. 619). The problem is that the ability to behave and act consistently with societal expectations regarding “identity” relies now on examples that “manifest in discrete bits of information which break the individual down into flows for purposes of management, profit and entertainment” (p. 619). In other words, the representation of the whole, this “refracted image” of a person is not necessarily an accurate presentation of who they are. Rather, this representation can be manipulated and ordered to suit different purposes.

Enter reality television. As was discussed in the last chapter, one motivation for viewing is related to being able to watch others and to understand how these others behave. Audience members rationalize the behaviors performed in private from these viewing practices and seek to come to a better understanding of what should be expected from others. The exploration into authenticity within this medium is all the more important because it seems that in the process of viewing, audience members apply what is observed to their own identity construction and in judging the

authenticity of others. As many audience studies have discussed (Lair 2011; Sender and Sullivan 2008; Everett 2004) RTV shows emulate a particular identity (Klein 2000) showing viewers how to behave and react (Holmes 2008) in order to encompass that identity. As will be argued in the coming chapters, authenticity verification is important for this process of identity construction.

The major problem for Lyon (2007), then, is not the erosion of privacy but rather, the stereotyping and categorizing of individuals by surveillance practices. For Lyon, privacy is a “product of modern Western ‘possessive individualism’” (p. 184). Privacy, if it ever did exist, is a modern construction, and it is unclear if it is ever achievable or desirable. The motivation literature discussed in the last chapter alludes to the idea that we are turning to RTV in order to remedy the relative lack of transparency in the social world. That we are watching others on television to potentially supplement what we used to learn from interactions with others in our everyday life means that Lyon’s concern regarding stereotyping in surveillance is well placed, particularly because our desires for watching are thought to hinge on this notion of discovering and verifying authenticity.

The Neoliberal, Postmodern Surveillance Society

We must go beyond surveillance practices and understand the broader implications of the contemporary structure of society. As Lyon (2007) and others (McGrath 2004; Andrejevic 2004) have stated, we now live in a surveillance society. Lyon (2007) describes surveillance societies as existing “wherever personal data-capture is woven into the texture of everyday life and where constant clustering and

sorting of groups and individuals has become so commonplace that it is unremarkable” (p. 183). In line with changing definitions and applications of surveillance in modern society, surveillance has been applied to facilitate the growth of capitalism and the organization of bureaucracy, but it has also provided a source of punishment and spectacle that manifests itself within individual self-discipline (Foucault [1975] 1995). In postmodern times, surveillance is seen as a “superpanopticon,” a world where surveillance has been universally applied and exists not only within agencies but also within individuals, both as watchers of others and of themselves. Lyon (2007) discusses this type of society as one that objectifies the body because the “body is no longer a bastion to be protected as ‘private space’” (p. 55).

While this quote signifies the increase in surveillance practices, it may be more accurate in describing the experience of men, as women have always been subjected to scrutiny under surveillance, not privy to “bastions” of privacy (Johnston 2006). Moreover, new surveillance practices may be increasing the objectification of every body, but it is more invasive and detrimental to those who have already been subjected to the gaze, notably women. As Johnston (2006) shows in her article of reality television programs that feature dating competitions, surveillance is key to the transformation process (social learning, social connections). However, transformation revolves around a moral order and the subjects of the show are often “working class, particularly working class women who have long been seen as ‘threats to the moral order and who must be monitored, controlled, and reformed’” (p. 127). While the

gaze is being expanded into “everyday uses” and people who were not traditionally subjected to surveillance are now being monitored, there is still an imbalance toward controlling and monitoring a certain population for the purposes of achieving a certain ideal.

As discussed above, Thomas Mathiesen (1997) states that we are no longer living in a society restricted to the few watching the many, but rather a viewer society he calls a “synopticon” where the many also watch the few. In other words, we are both the watched and the watchers, complicating the dialectic between the two (Lyon 2007). Surveillance goes beyond the idea of discipline and control in its usefulness in consumption practices, identity formation (and reformation), and authenticity verification, playing a major role in our everyday lives, both as the watched and the watchers.

Postmodernity and the Neoliberal Self

That individuals have found surveillance practices “useful” is not surprising given the ambiguous nature of the post-industrial, postmodern society. Terry Eagleton (1996) describes postmodernity as,

A style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity, and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation. Against these Enlightenment norms, it sees the world as contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of skepticism about the objectivity of truth, history, and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities...Postmodernism is a style of culture..., a depthless, decentred, ungrounded, self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralistic art which

blurs the boundaries between 'high' and 'popular' cultures, as well as between art and everyday experience (P. vii).

Existence in postmodern times is an ambiguous and confusing one with multiple, simulated realities (Baudrillard 1983) and no clear answers. Pecora (2002) illustrates how surveillance has become a tool to work against this ambiguity and how individuals, who have become less trusting, seek out ways of verifying the authenticity of others. As Richter (2007) argues, "as the world, or knowledge about the world, becomes ever more complex, it becomes ever more difficult to live in" (1925).

Frederic Jameson (1984) argues that postmodern times lead to social relations that barely scrape the surface, lacking in depth and meaning. In turn, individuals use other means to connect to one another. This explains why reality television and other mediums are being used to communicate, connect, and socially learn. Desire among audience members to connect via surveillance practices through the medium of television is also a product of neoliberal ideals of individuality; the idea that the individual is responsible for the self, including identity (trans)formation and societal contributions (Vander Schee and Kline, Forthcoming; Allen and Mendick, Forthcoming; Taylor 2011; Skeggs 2009; Sender and Sullivan 2008; Pecora 2002), and the protection of the self (Monahan 2010).

Several scholars, including much of the recent reality television literature, have been making the connection between surveillance, reality television, and the "neoliberal self." Citing work by Christopher Lasch (1979) and Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck (1992), these reality television scholars argue that the neoliberal self is

one that accepts the illusion that they have limitless freedom on offer and are completely responsible for the creation of the self as well as its management and safety (Monahan 2010; Skeggs 2009; Sender and Sullivan 2008; Pecora 2002).

Pecora (2002) argues that the neoliberal self is narcissistic, “exploiting interpersonal relationships for their own benefit” (354). Further, this narcissism has led to expectations of being watched or watching others, and increasing desires for fame and notoriety. Reality television sells itself on each of these characteristics.

Others argue that this narcissism is not simply a product of inflated egos and sense of importance but rather a survival mechanism in a world with little regulation. Sender and Sullivan (2008) apply Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (1993) “epidemics of the will” to the study of reality television arguing that audience members are intrigued with shows that feature weight loss and addiction because of anxieties related to free will in the neoliberal age (Sender and Sullivan 2008). Sender and Sullivan summarize their argument by describing the neoliberal citizen as,

Governed by free will and consumer choice, constructed in relation to the figure of the addict, unable to cope with the endless freedom on offer. The neoliberal moment that demands self-disciplined, self-directed, willing citizens both produces and requires their nemesis: the undisciplined, food-addicted, lazy fatty (2008: 580).

The authors believe that fear and the desire to maintain self-control drive audiences to watch reality television and this is part of the reason why programs that feature transformations are so popular. Some watch to feel better about their efforts at self-management while others watch to learn how they too, can become a more responsible citizen.

Sender and Sullivan (2008) concluded that while audience members were critical of shows like *The Biggest Loser* in terms of capitalizing on embarrassing moments of the participants and even the lack of diversity on the show, audience members were uncritical of the underlying ideological message that “fat people” have only themselves to blame (for their lack of control) and are also a detriment to society. Their lack of self-regulation has harmed others in society.

In a forthcoming article, *Neoliberal Exploitation in Reality Television: Youth, Health and the Spectacle of Celebrity Concern*, Carolyn Vander Schee and Kip Kline also argue that the neoliberal ideals of self-management are present in ideological representations of reality shows that focus on people with weight issues. Further, they argue that these messages are extremely harmful and also contradictory, particularly for younger viewers. They conclude that, “while youth are expected to effectively manage their own health, reality television sends them the clear message that they have failed miserably in this responsibility and it is necessary for an expert (read=celebrity) to step in and save them” (p. 11).

There are a couple of issues with their conclusion. First, Third-Party Perception theorists have found that people believe that there are certain populations that are more susceptible to messages in the media than others, notably the very young and the very old. Yet, this is not necessarily the case and often, this thinking is about displacing personal susceptibility onto others. In other words, audiences do not want to believe that they are being “duped” by the media (Leone et. al. 2006). Discussing youth as more influenced plays into this thinking and many studies have

found that adults of all ages are susceptible to ideology in reality television (Skeggs 2009; Sender and Sullivan 2008). Second, while the “celebrity swooping in” to help the individual who has not been able to help themselves is contradictory to the messages of neoliberalism, the way the help is portrayed is more in line with neoliberal thinking than the authors let on.

For example, contestants on *The Biggest Loser* are constantly told, and often reiterate in interviews, how lucky they are to be on the show in that most people do not get the opportunity for help. Additionally, the contestants and audience members are told that each participant on the show is capable of making these changes on their own, but have been fortunate enough to gain access to an easier and quicker way of achieving their physical and psychological end-goals. In fact, the show survives on its message that anyone can achieve the weight loss transformations they see on the show. This is evident in segments that are predominantly instructive (to audience members) and in the many products with *The Biggest Loser* brand name on the market (food, drinks, weight loss videos, etc.). The message is still that the individual is ultimately responsible for their predicament and that addictions that lead to losses of self-control must be remedied. The show equates purchasing power with personal ability and responsibility.

Beverley Skeggs (2009) employs Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens’ (1991) “Individualization Thesis” that claims that individuals in the neoliberal world are now required to be narcissistic as they are charged with the responsibility of socialization, management of the self, and responsible for their own safety. She

argues that reality television, which shows the “everyday lives” of “everyday people” is useful in being reflexive about how to live in the neoliberal world. She claims however, that this “everyday life” is reinforcing of white, middle class ideals through acts of shaming and the illusion of meritocracy.

Elizabeth Johnston (2006) also agrees that illusions of meritocracy help to promote neoliberal ideals. In order to sign on to ideas of managing the self, citizens must feel that hard work and discipline will pay off. She argues that, “Americans think their success is largely determined by factors within their control” and that they “are not aware of how the economy does not privilege the middle class” (121).

Torin Monahan (2010) discusses the neoliberal self in terms of what he calls a “risk society” or a postmodern, neoliberal world where citizens are taught that there are threats to their safety lurking in every corner yet no one to come to their aid should an attack to safety materialize. In other words, the neoliberal citizen, who Monahan terms the “insecurity subject” is taught to be very afraid of the world they live in and not to depend on anyone else for protection. He cites governmental campaigns and PSA’s that promote “disaster-preparedness” and protection as partial proof that the neoliberal citizen is responsible for their own self.

Overall, the neoliberal self is an individual who believes that they must fend for themselves. The authors presented here discuss that surveillance and reality television prove to be useful tools in identity (trans)formation and protection in a world where self-management is key. In fact, surveillance and reality television have been cited as the tools for the construction of the self (Allen and Mendick,

Forthcoming; Johnston 2006). In their upcoming article, Kim Allen and Heather Mendick argue that reality television is integral in the development of the self as charged by the neoliberal ideal. They add to the description of the neoliberal self claiming that, “being oneself is a requirement of contemporary social relationships of governance oriented around norms of compulsory individuality, choice, self-responsibility, and self-reinvention: the neoliberal self...works upon itself in order to better itself” (p. 1-2). Further,

Authenticity is central to these forms of selfhood, for they rely on the idea of an ‘inner’ self; the ability to overcome obstacles to ‘knowing oneself’ is central to the neoliberal project of self-actualisation. Authenticity is a moral duty: it is only through these processes that individuals can achieve fulfillment and foster a sense that one is a good, a worthy person.... The production of the neoliberal self requires ongoing ‘identity work.’ Authenticity is something that we must work to produce, as we seek to construct an identity as normal and unique (P. 2).

Here is where a true paradox comes in: in a world that charges individuals with being individualistic, it is no wonder that individuals seek to achieve an authentic, original identity. However, this world also teaches them to conform to societal expectations for the purposes of self-management and control. The authors conclude that audience members are convinced that reality television participants have an authentic self, or that a “true self” exists, however this authentic self is judged against ideological representations of middle-class ideals. Those deemed inauthentic are “value-less” individuals while those thought to be real upheld cultural ideals.

Authenticity and Existential Sociology

The notion of a unique and authentic self has been the object of consideration for existentialism and existential sociology. Existentialism concerns itself with asking questions about the existence of human beings in the modern world arguing that each individual has a unique existence and is ultimately free to pursue an authentic experience. The problem is that many are incapable of realizing their full potential because the influence of society hinders the realization of the self. This realization is dependent on the awareness that social reality is a product of positivism and capitalism. It is thought that only during times of struggle, such as war, can people start to see through their simulated and ordered world becoming aware of their authentic existence (Barrett [1958 1990]).

Existential sociology emerged in the 1970s as a micro-level focus on individual experience based on the tenets that reality is social constructed and that each individual's understanding of the world is based on emotions and personal experience (Manning 1973). For existentialists and existential sociologists, the key to understanding experience is to understand the idea of authenticity and the construction of an authentic identity. For existential sociology, the authentic self is necessarily tied to understanding the social world. In other words, rather than authenticity the result of breaking free from the social world, it is the result of coming to understand this world.

Understanding Authenticity

Gavin Rae (2010) argues that in order to understand authenticity we must understand the opposite, alienation, and, further, the socio-historical context within which constructions of authenticity are housed. Rae illustrates that authenticity is dependent on historically situated definitions of the concept. That is, “each conception of the authentic self is a normatively grounded socio-historical construction of what the actual self *should* strive to look like” (p. 22, emphasis original). It was not until the 17th century that the concept of the individual was created. Thus, the idea of the authentic self was incapable of existing prior to the conceptualization of individualized existence. Authenticity is ultimately tied to culture because while it is about understanding our unique personality, it is also about what we believe to be morally right and wrong. Morality can only be understood in the context of the particular period of time in which authenticity is being examined. Thus, Rae describes authenticity and its opposite, alienation, as “inherently ethical concepts that can be used to describe not only the ethical validity of the actual self’s way of life, but also how the actual self should act” (p. 22). Our ethical and moral beliefs are ultimately a product of our contingent understanding of the environment we live in or choose to rebel against. Therefore, we understand authenticity this way: if we fail to conform to the ethical and moral standards with which we agree, we feel alienated; if we conform to the ethical and moral standards against which we wish to rebel we feel alienated. It is only when these two overlap that authenticity within the individual is achieved.

Thus, Rae uses Ferrara's conception of the antagonistic and integrative conceptions of the authentic self to explain that:

Different conceptions of the self will lead to different understandings of authenticity and alienation. If the authentic self is characterized in an antagonistic way to society...then the actual self will be alienated if it integrates itself into the norms and values of its society. However, for those conceptions of the authentic self...that define the self in an integrationist manner...integrating into a certain form of community is precisely what authenticity requires (Rae 2010: 28).

This categorization is an attempt to explain how the self still dictates the meaning of authenticity through an incorporation of societal influence. In other words, the reflexive nature of the construction of the self leads individuals to subjectively understand what is morally and ethically right. Authenticity is judged on the basis of whether or not that individual feels they are behaving consistently with what they believe to be right. Rae concludes that one overcomes alienation and understands the self to be authentic if, "the actual self...*exists* in the manner deemed authentic...accurately *understands* what it is to be authentic...and...reflectively understands that it is actually living in accordance with what is *deemed* authentic" (2010: 30, emphasis original). There is great complexity in understanding our authenticity in that we have to first come to an understanding of what that means for us and how our behavior conforms to that subjective reality.

Weinstein and Weinstein (1978) argue that one cannot discuss authenticity as a social phenomenon because authenticity does not exist in an objective sense. This does not mean, however, that authenticity is solely housed within individuals. They state that, "society is not only present as a circumstance surrounding human

existence, but it runs through human existence in such a way as to be inseparable from it” (p. 41). Therefore, individuals in understanding their authentic existence do so from the standpoint of “being-in-the-world” (p. 43). In other words, authenticity is judged against a backdrop, that of the social world. According to the authors there are two parts of the self, the “present acting self” and the “reflective self” of which the reflective self is the judge of the acting self. Thus, “active transcendence is essentially a position from which one judges one’s participation in the world generally, and, more specifically, in society” (p. 43). We cannot separate society from our understanding of authenticity. Further, the idea of two selves is reminiscent of Meadian claims of the “I” and the “Me” discussed in the next section. Weinstein et al. (1978) and Rae (2010) appear to be arguing that like the construction of the self, authenticity is a process of socialization.

The idea of societal influence framing authenticity is continued in Joaquin Trujillo’s (2007) analysis of Weber’s “Class, Status, and Party.” Trujillo argues that these three things necessarily order our world and our relations to it. Class, status, and party dictate our command of the economy, and of honor and power. We understand our relation to the world and our authentic self in terms of the level of command we hold because of our standing in each of these three areas. Trujillo states that, “there-being” used interchangeably with authenticity, “is thrown into a world whose meaning is ordered by the unequal distribution of economy, social honor, and power. These things structure total meaningfulness. There-being commonly [leaves] them to achieve its ‘self’” (p. 353-4). Because finite resources are allocated in an unequal

manner, the true self can never be understood by our relationship to them. Thus, adherence to class, status, and party is an inauthentic existence.

Charmé (1991) argues that the powerful in society identify the groups that make up the other. If these others in society were capable of looking back at those in power, the oppression practiced by the dominant group would be revealed. The joke, however, is on those in power. “The ‘distinction’ of the privileged is not a liberating transcendence of nature after all. The natural qualities of the masses offer a refreshing escape from the suffocating blanket of civility in which the bourgeoisie wraps itself” (p. 253). To be distinguished is to be inauthentic. It seems as though there is a common assumption that authenticity is antithetical to civility and so the demands of society are to be resisted. Further, through promoting inauthenticity as the status quo, those in power can maintain their way of life. No one can be ousted from an authentic way of life but maintaining inauthenticity as desirable allows the powerful to label the other and restrict access to the upper echelons of society. Charmé concludes that:

The inauthentic self...finds security in the fixed rules and values of the world of civility and...refuses to call into question the comforting structures and institutions of society. What marks the person of authenticity is the desire to maintain distance from those structures, to call into question and to change them...Authenticity, thus, is subversive power that destabilizes the tempting desire for orderly categories and certainties, and wages guerilla warfare on the manifold forms of bad faith (P. 253-4).

This seems to suggest that an authentic existence exists apart from society. Sartre argues that it is only by being stereotyped as an outcast and oppressed in society that individuals can truly be separated in their existence from the dominant structure and come to understand their authentic selves. In this vein he “identifies

authentic existence with this freedom of human consciousness to transcend, or at least impose order and meaning on the realm of nature and the body” (Charmé 1991: 251). Therefore, “the requirements of civilization...may...be experienced as an external imposition on the natural tendencies of the self. A part of us may regard civilization as a path of inauthenticity that leads inevitably to alienation” (p. 251). So those who are most ostracized from civilization are those who are most capable of separating from the inauthentic experience that societal expectations bring. As a child, Sartre embraced his “ugliness,” describing it as a “visa stamped on his face that might gain him admission to the ranks of the authentically marginal and a way out of the world of the marginally authentic” (p. 252).

An Authentic Existence

While Charmé (1991) and Sartre may argue that authenticity only exists independently of the influence of society, it is unclear whether this is true or even possible. While not going so far as to say that authenticity is independent, Rae (2010), and Weinstein and Weinstein (1978) agree that understandings of authenticity are inseparable from social influences. Trujillo (2007) and Charmé (1991) go on to argue that because this influence comes from those in power, understandings of authenticity are an inauthentic existence.

While it may be impossible to ever understand if there is an authentic existence apart from the influences of society and culture, it is notable that there is a conception of authenticity, at least within Western culture. Because a major draw for

audience members is a quest for authenticity means that there is some desire for achieving authenticity and identifying the trait in others. Whether or not these understandings of authenticity are truly authentic is not the right path of inquiry. As Weinstein et al. (1978) and Rae (2010) both conclude understandings of authenticity are a process of conceiving or constructing the self. Thus, understandings of authenticity are wrapped into determinations of what we believe to be true of the social world based on our experiences in the socialization process. In this way, existentialists and symbolic interactions can converge on understandings of the self and authenticity.

Authenticity and the Social Construction of the Self

The purpose of the dissertation is to understand audience members' conceptions of authenticity, how the authenticity of others is determined, and what implications this has for audience members' daily lives. While it may not be the goal of existential sociologists to conclude that authenticity is ultimately a process of societal influence, it seems that the interpretation among individuals of authenticity is based on the process of understanding authenticity described by Rae (2010) and Weinstein et. al. (1978). Much of what they discuss of this process, particularly an "acting self" and a "reflecting self" is reminiscent of George Herbert Mead's ([1934] 1967) theory of the development of the self. Further, if the construction of the self is linked to understandings about authenticity, then authenticity verification is determined through the presentation of the self. This final section discusses the self

and identity in terms of Mead's Social Behaviorism and the presentation of this self (Goffman 1959).

Understanding the Self

For Mead ([1934] 1967), the self is the central concept of a person's personality, or the part of the personality that is composed of self-awareness and self-image. He believes that the self is created through the exchange of symbols within social interaction, in that the individual develops the ability to take on the role of the other, reflecting on intentions of behaviors and reactions to them. Taking the role of the other allows individuals to become self-aware. Self-awareness develops over time through the reflexivity between the "I," that acting self, and the "Me," the understanding of how actions are interpreted. Using the concept of the "looking-glass self" developed by Charles Horton Cooley (Richter 2007), Mead concludes that our understandings of the self, or self-image, is based on how we think others see us. In other words, the key to developing the self is to be able to take on the perception of a "generalized other," or the societal and cultural norms and values we use to evaluate our actions. The development of the self, who we believe that we are, is a subjective process of understanding what society expects.

The "Self is Dead"

Postmodernists have criticized symbolic interactionism (SI), particularly with regards to theories of the self proclaiming that the "self is dead." Peter Callero (2003)

has remarked on the divide between postmodern theory and symbolic interaction stating that, “symbolic interactionism has been largely absent from discussions about the new ‘self’ in postmodern times” (p. 115). While Callero does not believe it to be possible to fully remedy the differences between the two, he argues that elements of SI are useful to theorizing this new self within a “contemporary society marked by increasing individualization of social life and the emergence of ‘identity projects’” (2003: 115).

Particularly, he proposes organizing the new understanding the self along the themes of power, reflexivity, and social constructionism. First, he argues that newer scholarship has contributed the important idea that the “self is constituted within relations of control and is deeply embedded within systems of knowledge and discourse” (Callero 2003:118) however, there is no room for theorizing about resistance to these dominant discourses. There are no absolutes when it comes to dominant rhetoric and many come to question ideological messages received through sites of interaction (such as the media). For Callero (2003) the idea of reflexivity within modernist theories of the self is useful in remedying this lack of space for considering resistance. Reflexivity refers to the process, unique to humans, of social experience where individuals develop that “capacity to become an object to one’s self, to be both subject and object” (p.119). In other words, the Mead notion of the development of the “generalized other” through a reflection between the acting self, the “I” and the social self, the “Me,” leads to an understanding of the self that

processes dominant discourses coming to subjective understandings about what this means for them.

Even though it can be noted that the self is a product of power relations in society, illustrated as well in the previous section on authenticity and existentialism, this is not the complete picture. Instead, the self is reflexively created through the influence of power (which allows for resistance to said power) and social interaction. This means that the self is a social construction. However, Callero (2003) also argues that the processing of the self is a universal human trait. He states that, “the self, defined in terms of a basic semiotic process of interpretation, is a defining feature of human nature and is thus both transhistorical and universal” (p. 119). However, the reflexivity of the “I” and the “Me” is a process of interpreting symbols that are social constructed and historically contingent. The self “is a joint accomplishment, neither completely determined by the social world nor pregiven at birth” (p. 122). Understanding the self ultimately means understanding the historical and cultural context the self is situated within. In arguing that the creation of the self is a unique and universal human capacity, it also means that theories of the self cannot be left behind.

Goffman, the Postmodern Self, and Authenticity

The self is thought to be composed of multiple identities that an individual identifies with and that are useful in navigating actions and social interactions. These identities are not always voluntarily taken on by the individual but will heavily influence how individuals behave in society. Callero (2003) describes identities as,

Distinct parts of the self defined by the meanings and expectations associated with network positions and role expectations. Positions are defined as elements of a social structure and have associated with them behavioral expectations that emerge from patterns of interaction and remain relatively stable over time. When the meanings of social roles are internalized, they are said to have become part of the self. Social interaction thus produces the resources for constructing the self (role identities), which in turn guides patterns behavior defining the social structure (P. 125).

Identities are the links that connect the individual to the social and cultural. Sheldon Stryker (1980) discusses identities as the designations that people make about themselves. These designations are ultimately based on social position and roles the individual has learned to internalize and take on. Thus, we present the self through identities and the presentation of self is an important part of social interaction and the resulting reflexivity of the “I” and “Me.” Further, the idea that individuals have multiple identities and roles illustrates that tension can arise in the process of defining and presenting the self to others which can lead to issues of authenticity.

Front Stage and Back Stage Performances

In the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) focused on the interaction of cooperative teams in society and the presence of dramaturgy, or the view that interactions in society are a series of performances by actors toward an audience. Goffman expands on Mead’s notion of the self and the components of “me” and “I” in adding that people experience a tension of who they really are and what they are socialized to be. The self ends up as a product of interactions in society and actors engage in impression management in order to pull off a performance that illustrates who they believe they are expected to be in the eyes of others.

For Goffman, the social environment is broken into the front region, or the “front stage,” the back region, or the “back stage,”⁴ and the outside. However, no environment encompasses only one of these three and the nature of a setting can change from one to another. The front region is comprised of the physical setting or the scene necessary for a performance to take place and the personal expressions actors use to portray themselves to others. These expressions serve to encapsulate the actor’s appearance and manner in order to portray their social status and role. This is where it proves to be the most difficult to tell when people are being authentic and vice versa. We know that we are performing and that others are watching and it is at these points when we make sure to act in a way that portrays ourselves as we would like to be seen.

The back stage is where actors can let their guard down. In putting on a performance on the front stage, individuals are always concerned about pulling off the ideal persona and so must hide aspects of their actual self that may contradict the ideal self. This back stage allows for some relief from worrying about possible contradictions within their actual self that may put off their audience members. It is this back region that surveillance and reality programming promises to show and what we are waiting for when viewing this type of program. In theory, it is here

⁴ Goffman discusses these areas as regions but the term stage has been used interchangeably in later adaptations of Goffman’s work. While using region is most true to his original analysis of how the self is presented to others, stage is also an appropriate term particularly in light of the dramaturgical orientation of this work.

where individuals act the most authentically and when we are capable of seeing who they “really are.”

The outside area encompasses all the individuals who are not engaged in the interaction, being neither the actor nor the audience. We all occupy the outside area at some point in our lives and it is a part of the social environment. However, it is not necessarily important to focus on the “outside area” save to question whether, with increasing surveillance in contemporary society, this area is becoming smaller. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the front and back stage areas of our social environment.

In performing for others and viewing performances, Goffman argues that we engage in mystification and role distance. Mystification basically means that the actors are distancing themselves from those for whom they are performing in order to prevent the audience from questioning their possible contradictions while also trying to create a feeling that the performance they are giving is unique to this particular interaction. This relies on the idea that in trying to present ourselves to others, we will always suffer from contradictions in our performance because, at best, what we are portraying to others is an idealized representation of ourselves. The more distance we put between our audience and ourselves, the less likely it is that the audience will be able to spot the contradictions in our performance.

In another attempt to reduce contradictions in our performance, we engage in role distance. Individuals, Goffman argues, identify with several different roles and so never completely adhere to one single role. Keeping other roles in mind means that

we are able to commit to the role within which we are currently acting out our performance while also maintaining consistency across other roles.

Later, in his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*, Goffman (1963) argues that individuals hold characteristics that can serve to discredit their presentations of the self. While discredited individuals are those who are already discredited and work solely to reduce the tension of their stigma, we are all discreditable or, in other words, we have characteristics capable of leaving us stigmatized that are either not immediately perceivable or not known by others. In order to prevent ourselves from being discredited, we engage in information management, or performances that prevent others from finding out about our potential stigmas. As we gain access and are privy to the back region (and instances where individuals are not necessarily engaged in information management) the chances of being discredited increase.

Conclusion

Reality television has proved useful in many ways. As Andrejevic (2004) has argued, RTV promotes the proliferation of surveillance by showing examples of how surveillance practices are useful in society. This is important because contemporary society is characterized as a “surveillance society” where practices of watching are increasingly high-tech but also commonplace and accessible to those traditionally relegated to being the watched. The postmodern world is one where the boundaries between the real and the fake are blurred and multiple realities are present (Baudrillard 1983). Thus, Pecora (2002) argues, individuals are obsessed with testing

a verifying reality. Surveillance practices are sold on their ability to show and present the truth and individuals find the practice useful in truth testing, particularly through a genre that promises to show “real people” in “real situations.” Beyond desires for the verification of truth, individuals are also increasingly charged with managing the self. This includes protecting the self (Monahan 2010) but also to construct the self in a way that contributes to the well-being of society. Increases in privacy and isolation in the neoliberal world has made it increasingly difficult to engage in processes of reflexivity central to the development of the self. Thus, individuals seem to be engaging in surveillance practices through reality television to form and transform the self (Sender and Sullivan 2008; Rose and Wood 2005). Further, many are subjecting themselves to the processes of surveillance to prove to others an authentic self, one that is consistent across multiple spaces (Dubrofsky 2007). Surveillance promises to provide a “peek” into the backstage, beyond the presentation of self, useful for making determinations of an individual’s consistency with their presentation on the front stage with what they would traditionally keep from audiences.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

This purpose of this chapter is to outline the methods of data collection and analysis undertaken in the dissertation. To answer questions about authenticity and the construction of authenticity in the viewing process, I used a mixed methods approach with the incorporation of useful data available from extant texts (Charmaz 2006). I engaged in two methods of data collection, a survey as well as group and individual interviews. A method commonly used in anthropology to understand subjective interpretations of phenomena, cultural consensus, was partially adopted within the survey and qualitative interviewing to conclude a consistent definition of authenticity based on the targeted audience's perception. I also collected data from Internet forums relating to the break-up of Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries that serves as an instantaneous reaction to an actual case where authenticity is called into question within the realm of reality television. The data, with the exception of the pre-existing data from the forums, are presented in stand-alone chapters following this extended discussion of methods. I engaged in triangulation where relevant and the pre-existing data were incorporated into sections that dealt with the examination of the break-up between Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries.

General Constructions of Authenticity and Participation in Reality Television

This study is exploratory and descriptive. While much literature talks about authenticity in the viewing process (Dubrofsky 2011; Hall 2009; Andrejevic 2006; Rose and Wood 2005; Andrejevic 2003; Jones 2003; Hill 2002; Andrejevic 2002; van Zoonen 2001), it is unclear what this really entails. The methods described in the following pages were set up to describe the consumption of reality television and processes of viewing while exploring the nuances of the process. I will first outline the population of the study before moving into separate sections that describe the various methods of data collection—the survey, group and individual interviews, and the case study of Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries.

Defining the Population of Study

Generally speaking, Nielsen (2012a) data suggests that, in the United States, television viewing makes up 20% of our everyday, with an average of five hours and 11 minutes per day (Nielsen 2011a), and 34 hours per week (Nielsen 2012a).⁵ While it is clear that television is a major part of our lives and that average people are filling large portions of their day watching, it is less clear who is watching reality television and how much of it. In other words, it is difficult to determine the sampling frame for

⁵ Nielsen (2012a) has released a new term “binge viewing” to describe the trend of constant media viewing now capable with streaming videos from Netflix, hulu, amazon, etc. and portable devices that support these videos (cell phones, ipads, ipods, e-readers, etc.).

reality program viewers because data regarding television viewing does not identify the characteristics of viewers nor how often they engage in viewing the genre of reality television.⁶ The wide variety of programming seems to suggest that reality program viewers are diverse in their demographic characteristics with no specific type of group categorically a “reality program viewer.”

However, many studies on reality television have selected college students as their population of interest because they tend to be a convenient pool for academics and also because 18- to 24-year-olds are identified as the predominant viewers of the genre of reality (Barton 2009; Stern 2009; Andrejevic 2003; Nabi et al. 2003; Oliver and Armstrong 1995). While certain network and cable stations have been scaling back on the number of reality television programs in the line-up, stations targeted to college students, such as MTV, are almost exclusively made up of reality television programs.

For this study, undergraduate college students were selected as the target population. The sampling technique can be described as both convenient, given my ties to the university and access to students, but also purposive, in that the age-group identified as the heaviest viewers of reality television also happen disproportionately to be undergraduates. Recruitment procedures varied by method employed with survey respondents recruited using a different strategy than those who participated in the interview sessions. These recruitment procedures will be discussed at length in the sections below.

⁶ With the sole exception of Nielsen data listing the most viewed shows of the week by racial categorization.

Survey

The first method of data collection is a closed- and open-ended survey asking respondents about basic reality television consumption, definitions of reality television and authenticity, perceptions about the reality of reality television, and opinions regarding the Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries divorce. The overall goal of the survey was to understand how, when, and even if, college students are still watching the genre of reality, what types of programming they engage in, whether or not they engage in interactive mediums, and how they understand the vague concepts central to this study, reality television and authenticity. The survey questions were formulated from my understanding of the scholarly literature on the subject and included questions about the consumption of RTV as well as questions related to the main research questions posed in this study (Converse and Presser 1986).

A pretest was conducted on students in my sociological theory course. The purpose of the pretest was to ensure that the meaning of each question was understood. Participants in the pretest were instructed to take the survey and note any points where a question was unclear or confusing (Converse and Presser 1986). The only critique involved the question regarding defining authenticity. Participants in the pretest believed that respondents should have the option to either define or describe the concept of authenticity. The survey question was changed accordingly.

Participants were solicited through convenience sampling. I emailed all instructors and professors teaching the introductory sociology course in the spring of

2012, asking for permission to attend a class session and distribute the surveys (APPENDIX A). The introductory course in sociology was chosen because I have rapport with those teaching the course and, therefore, fared a better chance of gaining entry. This course is also part of the general education requirements at Western Michigan University so I was able to reach a diversity of majors and minors in this course. I also limited selection to the introductory courses to eliminate instances of multiple responses from the same participants who may be enrolled in multiple courses in which recruitment was performed. Following Nabi's (2007) study on classifying sub-genres, I aimed for 200 completed surveys.

Out of the nine sections offered during the semester, I attended six sections of *Principles of Sociology* (the introductory course) and collected 308 completed surveys. Students were given a brief, ten-minute introduction for informed consent (APPENDIX B) that included a basic overview of the purpose of the study, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, and a brief description of how the data would be analyzed, stored, and later destroyed. Further, participants were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary and they could choose not to take the survey, to stop taking the survey at any time, or to refrain from answering any questions. Instructors were given the opportunity in prior email correspondence to provide extra credit to students but the extra credit had to be tied to the students' attendance that day rather than whether or not they successfully completed the survey. Finally, students were instructed to tear the final sheet off the back of the survey (APPENDIX C). I used the surveys as part of the recruitment strategy for the

individual and group interviews. Students were given the opportunity to list their names and contact information if they were interested in participating in a longer discussion about the topic of reality television. Those interested were instructed to fill out this form after it had been torn off the survey and to deposit the completed form in a separate box to the left of the box used for collecting the surveys. This was to ensure that their names would not be tied to their survey responses. Following the reading of informed consent, I presented an opportunity for the participants to ask questions to clarify confusion and to address concerns before starting the survey.

I exited the room while the participants completed the survey and left behind the boxes for completed surveys and group interview sign-up sheets to be deposited and collected by the instructor. I either returned to the room 20 minutes later, the end of class, or had the surveys returned to my desk at the choice of the instructor. Before going through the survey responses, I checked the survey box for any group interview sign-up sheets and separated them from the survey stack. For the most part, sign up sheets and surveys were placed in the appropriate boxes; however, there were a few respondents who had either put both the survey and the torn sign off sheet in the same box or had filled out the sheet and left it attached to the surveys. When this happened, I separated the sign off sheets from the surveys and added them to the appropriate stack.

The closed-ended questions were entered into the statistical software program, Predictive Analytic SoftWare (PASW), and run for basic descriptive statistics. The open-ended questions were coded for general themes and consolidated into main

patterns for the purposes of reporting. The quantitative data from the survey portion of data collection will be presented in the next chapter and also coupled with the qualitative data collected where relevant. The main purposes of the data are to describe viewing practices, introduce complex issues of authenticity to be elaborated upon with qualitative data, and to begin the process of defining the terms authenticity and reality television.

Cultural Consonance

Meaning is difficult to assess and is often different for individuals based on life experiences and the constructed “cultural space” (Dressler et. al. 2005). Assessing meaning in a study of a human phenomenon, then, can be rife with validity issues. Pretesting of survey instruments has shown that when assessing the meaning of a question, respondents go for what seems to make the most subjective sense for them (Converse and Presser 1986). Understanding consensus goes beyond simply asking participants to define a term. It is also the case that certain concepts warrant a closer inspection due to potential conflict in definitions by the researcher and the respondents or even among respondents.

In light of this, the survey goes beyond collecting descriptive statistics regarding the use and perception of reality television, to also encompass a larger process of coming to consensus with respect to relative meaning. To understand the definition of authenticity, I performed a portion of a method of data collection and analysis called “cultural consensus,” here deemed “cultural consonance.” The idea of

this method is that it embraces the subjective nature of meaning in the process of collecting data while also allowing for replication (Dressler et. al. 2005). The more systematic approach combines open-ended survey questions that ask respondents to list characteristics or state definitions of a particular concept with methods such as qualitative interviewing and ethnographic research that allow for subjectivity. The difference between cultural consensus and cultural consonance is that I conclude consensus from qualitative responses rather than sophisticated statistical calculations that are considered valid with a larger, representative sample (Dressler et. al. 2005).

Survey respondents were asked to either posit a definition of authenticity or to list characteristics that describe the term. The responses were coded for patterns that elucidated the various, unique ways that participants have defined or described authenticity. This list was then presented to participants in the group and individual interviews to determine what they deemed to be the most appropriate way to define the concept of authenticity based on their perception. How respondents concluded in the qualitative portion of data collection is the definition that is used for authenticity.

Group and Individual Interviews

Group and individual interviews were conducted following the completion of the survey portion of data collection, and participants were recruited using two different procedures. As described above, survey participants were given the opportunity to sign up for more information about the qualitative portion of data collection as they were completing the survey. I received 52 sign-up sheets with the names and emails of interested participants. I sent emails to each individual

(APPENDIX D). Participants at the time of survey distribution and in the email correspondence, were reminded that signing up did not mean that they would be participating in a group or individual interview but rather would have the opportunity to do so. Thus, interested participants were asked if they still wanted to participate in the group. If so, they were also asked to indicate their level of reality television viewing and if they were available on Monday afternoons or evenings.

The goal was to schedule interviews based on three categories of viewership, a process referred to as “segmentation” (Morgan 2004): little to no reality television viewing; moderate to extensive viewing; and those who were familiar with the Kardashian reality shows and had followed the break up between Kris Humphries and Kim Kardashian. Group times were restricted to Monday nights at either 5:30 or 7:00 p.m. to reduce the amount of conflict in trying to schedule a common time among several people and due to scheduling restrictions with the moderator and assistant moderator (Krueger and Casey 2009). Of the 52 respondents who indicated interest, I was able to successfully schedule ten people to three different groups. Reminder emails were sent to those scheduled on the day before the scheduled session (APPENDIX D). Focus groups are typically characterized as three or more participants; however, with the low response rate and failures of some scheduled participants to show up, one of the three groups had two participants and the other two had three participants.

To remedy the low response rate from the first round of recruitment, I also posted flyers around the campus building (APPENDIX E) asking for interested

individuals to contact me to participate. I also distributed flyers in the mailboxes of sociology instructors with a letter asking them to share the flyer with their class (APPENDIX F). This round of recruitment was more successful. I had 20 individuals contact me (APPENDIX G) and 12 participate over five group sessions. I separated these participants into the same categories of viewership, but as I will discuss in the results, there seems to be little difference in the viewing practices and knowledge of reality television between the three groups. The sole exception is that groups specifically chosen for their knowledge of the Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries break-up had more knowledge of the couple and the reality show than the other groups. Therefore, I scheduled two extra groups of participants who were mixed on their level of viewing practices but who were not followers of the Kardashian shows or the demise of the marriage between Kim and Kris. The final two groups consisted of two people and one person, and the other three groups based on original categorizations consisted of a four-person group, a three-person group, and a two-person group (See Table 1).

I attribute the low response rate of the first round of recruitment to the period of time that passed between the survey distribution and the scheduling of focus groups. Surveys were collected in the spring semester (March and April) of 2012 and the scheduling of interviews was postponed to the fall semester (September) because many students are gone during the summer months. Further, the restrictive schedule of Monday nights prevented some individuals from attending. I tried to schedule the sessions as soon as possible or as close to the email correspondence to prevent

scheduling conflicts, but inevitably some individuals failed to show up due to conflicts that emerged.

Table 1. Group Interview Sessions

Group	Category of Viewership	N
One	Little to No RTV	2
Two	Kardashian Group	2
Three	Regular Viewers	3
Four	Little to No RTV	4
Five	Regular Viewers	3
Six	Kardashian Group	4
Seven	Mixed Group	2
Eight	Mixed Group	1
		20

The standard N for focus groups seems to be between 20 and 40 participants total over four to six groups, in either smaller groups, with an average of four to six participants (Hall 2006; Morgan 2004), or larger groups with upwards of ten participants (Skeggs and Wood 2008). Issues with recruitment and scheduling made it difficult to form groups of six and ten, and even though focus groups were mostly at the minimum of three participants per group (Morgan 2004), the data collection method might be better described as group interviews. I found that the smaller groups created productive conversations where individual voices did not get lost and we were able to carry on a depth and breadth of conversation in a short period of time

(Hollander 2004). However, the smaller groups prevented the emergence of a true group generated discussion characteristic of “focus groups” (Morgan 2004) and I will consequently be referring to these as group interviews.

In that I also had one group where only one scheduled participant showed up, I am also describing this data collection method as one encompassing individual interviews. I did not want to turn away potential data even if this complicated the notion of the second phase of data collection.

I concluded data collection following this final interview despite having low numbers in each group because I was lucky enough to see very obvious and clear patterns emerge early from the data, leading me to saturation on several accounts (Charmaz 2006; Morgan 2004). In the concluding chapter of the dissertation, I will illustrate other patterns that have emerged from the data central to the third question about the manifestation of authenticity in everyday life that are useful pathways for future research.

Group and individual interviews are common methods used in audience studies on reality television (Skeggs 2009; Hall 2006) and the dominant method among the few sociologists who are studying reality television (Allen and Mendick forthcoming; Skeggs 2009; Skeggs and Wood 2008). Further, David Morgan (2004) illustrates that it is common practice for focus groups to be paired with other methods of data collection, notably surveys. Qualitative interviewing is useful for providing narrative elaborations of quantitative data collected in survey research (Hesse-Biber 2010).

The group and individual interviews were semi-structured. I developed a list of questions (APPENDIX I), allowing for the possibility of taking the conversation along tangents or other topics of conversation related to reality television. I wanted to foster a more natural discussion of reality television and to allow for potentially important topics of conversation that I may not have thought of to emerge. As this is an exploratory project using a grounded approach, semi-structured interviews were most appropriate. The questions developed were organized by three basic lines of inquiry in the research: the first attempting to understand how audience members define authenticity; the second examining how authenticity is determined and verified through consuming reality television; and the third, looking at how authenticity is manifested in everyday life, if at all. Additionally, basic questions about media use and perceptions of the reality of the programming were included to qualitatively expand qualitatively on quantitative conclusions reached with the survey instrument. Owing to these parallels, some of the results from the qualitative group and individual interviews will be presented as relevant with the quantitative results from the survey.

Interview sessions were scheduled for an hour and participants were sent several emails including the initial contact⁷, scheduling a session, and a reminder email (APPENDIX D and G) of the upcoming session. Each participant was instructed to arrive five minutes before the session to complete a demographic survey (APPENDIX J) and look over the informed consent form (APPENDIX H). At the

⁷ The initial contact email differed by recruitment. In the first recruitment strategy, I contacted potential participants. In the second, those interested contacted me first.

beginning of each session, I read over the main parts of the informed consent form and had each participant sign and return the form to me. The demographic survey and signed portion of the informed consent form were submitted to a taped box with a slit in the lid for depositing the two pieces of paper. Demographic data collected was completely anonymous.

Participants were given ten dollars to participate in the focus group and the chance to win a hundred dollars. The informed consent slips were their entry to the drawing, which was conducted at the conclusion of the qualitative data collection phase of the dissertation. Participants were given the ten dollars at the beginning of the focus group and instructed that the incentive was not tied to their participation and that they could leave if they no longer wanted to participate. They were also instructed that they could leave at any point during the session and that they could decline to answer any questions or participate in any line of discussion.

The structure of group interviews eliminates the possibility of anonymity and confidentiality. I attempted to provide as much confidentiality as possible by encouraging participants to keep the conversation within the session. Further, participants were given the opportunity to select a pseudonym to be used in the reporting of their responses in the dissertation. Real names were rarely used in the discussion and, when this occurred, pseudonyms were swapped in during transcription. I ensured that no pseudonyms overlapped with any of the participants' real names.

Each session was recorded using a video and audio recorder⁸. Audio recordings were used to transcribe each session for the purposes of coding. I employed an assistant moderator to take notes during the session as a way to summarize the discussion and also to note anything that struck her as interesting (Krueger and Casey 2009). At the end of each session, the assistant moderator read through the summary and participants were allowed to confirm or refute conclusions made by the assistant moderator as a way to check the validity of our understanding of the conversation. In one case, an interviewee was able to clarify a point they had made earlier in the session. Otherwise, participants confirmed our conclusions as accurate.

Following the interview, I transcribed each session. The word documents and audio files are being saved on my computer. Following the completion of the study, the files will be placed on a hard disk and stored in the principal investigator's office for three years before being destroyed.

Data from the focus groups were coded by emulating Kathy Charmaz's (2006) grounded coding approach. Although I have a sophisticated understanding of the literature, having done the literature review prior to collecting data, Charmaz argues that we all come into data collection and analysis of data with preconceived notions of the phenomenon of study. James Gilsinan (1991) discusses this, in the field of criminology, as the "hermeneutic circle," or the idea that "in order to bring a

⁸ Video recording was implemented as a back up technique and to serve to pick up any important nonverbal communication. Problems with the video camera and the inability to decipher movement and discussion from the tapes left me to eliminate the video recorder from data collection early on this process.

scientific understanding to the problem of crime and its control, criminologists already must understand something about crime and its control” (p. 207).

While all research starts with some basis of understanding, I attempted to eliminate from initial coding, as much as possible, any preconceived notions or understanding of reality television and authenticity. Following each interview session I engaged in initial coding. I named segments of data line-by-line and then went back through to find particular themes in the initial naming of segments. From there I engaged in another round of coding that involved organizing data by themes. I found several dominant themes within the data early on that proved consistent through the other interview sessions and made sure to discuss these themes with other groups. I reached saturation on several themes relevant to the questions asked in the dissertation that I will report in the sixth chapter. I will conclude the dissertation with a discussion of several other emergent themes that warrant investigation.

A Deviant Case

On October 31, 2011, just 72 days into their marriage, Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries announced plans to split and divorce. Their wedding special was still airing on the E! Network and fans were still perusing photos of the wedding and honeymoon sold to various media. The news was met with outrage from fans and was followed with accusations that the marriage was inauthentic, expertly orchestrated to earn the couple upwards of a quarter of a million dollars per day, or 18 million dollars total (Clemens 2011). Three weeks following the announcement to split, fans were anxiously awaiting to tune into the second season of *Kourtney and Kim Take New*

York, which aired on E!, because the season promised to chronicle the final days of Kim and Kris' marriage. Debate and speculation surrounding the marriage gained momentum with accusations on both sides about the cause of the demise. Curiosity was peaked. The season premiere garnered eight percent more viewers than their first season and proved to be in the top 20 showings in the network's history, despite much discussion and movement toward "boycotting everything Kardashian" (Thompson 2011).

Who Are the Kardashians?

The Kardashians represent an odd phenomenon in reality programming where stars are born and attention is paid to those who are, at the very least, ordinary people with an interesting twist to, at the other extreme, D-list socialites or celebrities. The original show that spawned much of the publicity for the family, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, chronicles the everyday interactions of the family and events that are inconsequential for anyone outside of the family. Many credit the mom, Kris Jenner, married to decathlon great, Bruce Jenner, for her expert business skills of marketing the family in such a way that they have achieved international recognition and fame, making collectively upwards of 65 million dollars per year for their reality programs and various sponsorships (Newman and Bruce 2011).

Kris Jenner is currently in her second marriage to Olympian Bruce Jenner. Previously, Kris was married to Robert Kardashian, famous for representing O.J. Simpson in the 1995 trial for the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson. Robert and Kris

have four children together, Kourtney, Kim, Khloe, and Rob Jr. Robert Kardashian Sr. died in 2003 of esophageal cancer (Newman and Bruce 2011). Kris has two children with Bruce, Kendall and Kylie, and Bruce Jenner has two children from a previous marriage (Newman and Bruce 2011).

Leading up to the 2007 premier of *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, much of the family rested on mom Kris and daughter Kim's social ties with the Hilton family, Kim gaining socialite status for many sidekick appearances with Paris Hilton. The family's fame catapulted with the release of Kim Kardashian's highly controversial sex tape with musician Ray J, brother of hip-hop and R&B superstar Brandy. It is the highest grossing sex tape for the production company, *Vivid Entertainment*. Both Ray J and Kim have gone on to be successful reality television celebrities, Ray J starring in a several seasons long reality dating show, *For the Love of Ray J*, and Kim's sex tape was used to promote the idea of a reality show for the Kardashian family to Ryan Seacrest (Newman and Bruce 2011).

The show, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, has proven to be the most successful show the E! Network has ever aired, and has resulted in the spinoff shows, *Khloe and Lamar*, *Khloe and Kourtney Take Miami*, and *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*. Other family members have enjoyed success and fame as well. Rob Kardashian was on the last season of *Dancing with the Stars* and it is rumored that the show wants Kylie or Kendall Jenner to be on the next season. Kendall and Kylie have also released a jewelry line (Finlayson 2011) and many of the family members are part of sponsorships, clothing lines, and perfumes orchestrated through their social

networking sites, notably Twitter, with million dollar paydays. It is reported that Kim Kardashian makes upwards of 25,000 dollars for mentioning a product on Twitter and can demand anywhere from 100,000 to 250,000 dollars for a personal appearance to an event (Newman and Bruce 2011).

Kris Humphries, a professional basketball player, proposed to Kim Kardashian during the filming of the sixth season of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. Following the proposal, Kim with mom Kris, negotiated a contract with *E!* to produce a wedding special and sold the rights for the ceremony, aiming to be the American equivalent to the royal wedding. Photos from the ceremony and honeymoon were sold to *People* and a special article was run in the magazine chronicling the big day. Most of what was needed for the wedding was donated or given at a reduced rate in exchange for the high publicity received for being a part of the event. When all was said and done, Kim and Kris Humphries netted 18 million dollars from their wedding day (Clemens 2011).

The dissolution of the marriage between Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries just 72 days after their nuptials, a marriage that was chronicled from conception to completion on reality television, proves to be an excellent “deviant case” for this analysis in that the marriage and both parties are being questioned for their authenticity. Fans, disappointed and embarrassed that they were possibly duped by the pair into believing that the couple was really in love, are now scrambling to renegotiate themselves as “savvy viewers” and to understand whether or not what

they witnessed was real or fabricated for the purpose of profit. Several boycott sites⁹ have popped up that are calling for the family to be removed from the line-up on television, for the press to stop giving them attention, and for fans to stop purchasing products sponsored by any member of the family. With a record number of viewers for the second season premier of *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, the show chronicling the demise of the marriage, it is clear that many have yet to determine which side they will take.

The show, *Kourtney and Kim Take New York* aired November 27, 2011 until the season *finale* on February 12, 2012. This is the second season to chronicle the lives of Kourtney and Kim Kardashian as they relocate to New York City to open and run the third *D-A-S-H* clothing store. In the second season, viewers have been promised an inside look into the demise of the marriage between Kim and Kris.

Fan Forums as Secondary Data

The main methods of data collection, the survey and the group interview sessions, included questions related to the Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries separation. Survey respondents who reported that they had been following the news of the break-up were asked questions related to their perceptions of the authenticity of the marriage and who they believed to be at fault for the demise of the relationship. Further, those who indicated that they had watched the second season of *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, the RTV show that chronicled the demise, were asked if the

⁹ For example, <http://www.boycottkim.com/>

show had changed their opinions about the authenticity of the marriage and, if so, how had it changed.

The group interview sessions were segmented into viewership categories with one group identified as heavy viewers of the Kardashians and followers of the Kim and Kris Humphries relationship. Although specific groups were organized to discuss the relationship, almost every group had something to say about it. Groups discussed their perceptions of the reality of the marriage in the semi-structured format and many of the discussions touched on aspects of Kim's new relationship with Kanye West as well as her former relationships.

To supplement the survey questions and interview discussions related to the Kardashian deviant case, I pulled responses prepared by audience members from forums and boards dedicated to discussions about reality programming, specifically those related to the Kardashian family and *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*. This is a relatively accessible source of data and useful as illustrated by Miles (2008) when she states, paraphrasing Reed (2005), that, "the Internet...is altering the circumstances under which communication can occur because it is characterized by an unusual degree of immediacy and spontaneity. Online texts are generated, posted and read almost instantaneously" (p. 2). These message boards and forums can provide immediate reactions to the divorce announcement, the resulting drama and media spectacle, and to each aired episode of the show, something not possible through the other methods of data collection in this study. Further, Charmaz (2006) argues that extant texts are useful in that they are easily accessible as pre-existing data

sources and complement ethnographic and interview data. There are a plethora of sites dedicated to the discussion of all things related to reality programming¹⁰, but the two main forums that dedicate space to *Kourtney and Kim Take New York* are the E! Network website and RealityTVWorld.com.

Responses were pulled that comment on the marriage, the question of its authenticity, and discussions about the culpability of either Kim Kardashian or Kris Humphries, including discussions of the portrayal of the marriage on the show, *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*. Meant to be a supplemental piece to data collection, responses will be used to illustrate patterns found in the other methods of data collection or examples that refute conclusions made from the main methods of data collection.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Joseph Maxwell (2010) defines mixed methods as involving the use of variance and process approaches to bring two ways of thinking about phenomena together. Further, he argues that the purpose of using mixed methods is to create “a dialogue between different ways of seeing, interpreting, and knowing” (p. 478) in order to enrich one’s understanding about that which they are investigating. A particular strength of this study is its use of triangulation in data analysis to bring together both qualitative and quantitative data to explore authenticity in the viewing process. While quantitative data are useful in recognizing broader patterns and are

¹⁰ Twitter is becoming the dominant mode of discussing reality television but proves difficult to study over time without archival records.

important in understanding how respondents consume reality television, qualitative data can provide detailed explanations of the general patterns of consumption. Further, without examining narrative accounts of the viewing process, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand how audience members define authenticity as well as how they construct and verify the concept through the process of consuming reality media. To summarize, using mixed methods strengthens the quality of this study because the phenomena of reality television and authenticity are looked at through different lenses that ultimately come together to provide a rich and full description to further our understanding.

Similarly, Dressler et. al. (2005) argue that combining qualitative and quantitative data in a standardized format is perhaps the best way to understand cultural interpretations of concepts or phenomena. The employment of cultural consonance, part of the larger method of cultural consensus, is beneficial in understanding how audience members define authenticity. Further, drawing responses from participants and forging patterns has brought a complex perspective to a taken-for-granted concept. In short, the mixed methods approach has afforded a basis for serious reflection on the process of verifying authenticity and it has yielded directions for future work to pursue.

The survey portion of data collection, while not generalizable or representative, holds the capacity to summarize larger patterns of use for the audience members upon whom I drew. Further, the data allows for a starting point to understand the complexity of perceptions of reality on reality television, of

conceptual definitions based on cultural perception of the main terms of the study, reality television and authenticity, and organizes trends important in the data for elaboration of qualitative data.

Interviewing, particularly in a group session, is a preferred method for engaging the audience (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998) in a way that emulates the more natural environment of processing television consumption (Jones 2003). For this reason, it is a preferred method for sociologists who are studying reality television (Allen and Mendick, forthcoming; Skeggs 2009; Skeggs and Wood 2008; Montemurro 2008). In other words, individuals are not isolated in their viewing processes but often spend time discussing their thoughts about what they view with others. This is particularly the case with RTV (Jones 2003). The semi-structured format of the process allowed for discussion of topics not thought of during the conceptualization of the study (Charmaz 2006; Morgan 2004). Employing grounded coding proved to be useful in identifying patterns in the data, tweaking future interview sessions to incorporate findings and issues in questions, and also providing a sense of saturation of the data and fruitful future directions through theoretical sampling (Charmaz 2006).

The openness of this research study to utilizing other forms of useful data, specifically that of extant data, allows for a fuller, richer description of the phenomenon of authenticity construction in the viewing process (Charmaz 2006). Posts from audience members on these Internet forums provide a source of pre-existing, easily accessible information that is also more indicative of immediate

responses to the deviant case (Miles 2008). Further, these data have the potential to be more representative of the fan base of *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, described as predominately women from 18 to 49 (O'Connell 2011) even if they are the extreme versions of these fans.

Unfortunately, not a lot is known about interactivity in the form of participation on Internet forums for reality television and the few studies that have looked at this practice have determined that the overwhelming majority of audience members do not engage in this practice (Stefanone and Lackaff 2009). Further, forums and boards are now seemingly dated due to the newer social networking site, Twitter. Twitter feeds are now featured as part of many reality television programs where audience members can “live tweet” during shows for a chance to have their tweet broadcast on a ticker at the top or bottom of the screen during the airing of the episode. Further, many reality television participants are linking their twitter accounts to their status as a reality television star, allowing audience members to potentially interact socially with them. Recent Nielsen (2012b) reports on social media indicate that 33% of Twitter users are tweeting about television and 38% of smart phone owners (41% of tablet owners) are using their devices while watching television. While Twitter has the capacity to be even more capable of capturing instant reactions (Miles 2008), using the media site as a source of data is relatively understudied at this point and rife with problems, particularly in that you must be collecting data up to the minute that an event occurs. Archival data on twitter is problematic in that there is no sure way of going back through tweets that were posted even days before (Dong et.

al. 2010). Further, a new Pew Study has found that Twitter is an unreliable source for understanding current sentiments surrounding phenomena. Instead, the Pew Research Center finds that opinions on the site are often “at odds” with actual public sentiment, on both sides liberal and conservative (Pew 2013). This is also indicative of forums and other board posts surrounding topics such as reality television. It is unclear who is participating in these conversations and why, but they are likely to be different than the “average” viewer. In essence, the data from message boards and forums is used sparingly and only to further elaborate a pattern found in other data sources to show consistency in more immediate and long-term reactions.

In general, the methods employed do not allow for generalizability or representativeness of the data. Convenience sampling does not allow an equal chance for every member of the population to be selected and while demographics from the survey indicate that the students chosen are representative of the makeup of students at Western Michigan University based on racial and gender characteristics, the survey respondents were still heavily based in the social sciences and overwhelmingly first- and second-year students. I potentially missed a portion of the population of students at WMU and of the student population as a whole through my sampling technique. However, very few students declined participation in the survey and missing responses were less than five percent, indicating that there are no problems with missing data. The survey and interview did not contain topics that are particularly sensitive that would lead to questions of a pattern of missing responses.

Interviewees were recruited through the surveys and through flyers posted in academic buildings on campus. This leads to potential bias in my qualitative sample to those who are particularly interested in the phenomenon and are more enthusiastic to speak about it. I tried to counteract this by recruiting students who did not watch reality television and by providing incentives for participation. Regardless, those who participated in the qualitative portion of the study do not represent the college student body and are potentially more invested in reality television than the population of audience members, even at the college age. It is potentially concerning that many students failed to respond after expressing initial interest in participating in the qualitative study or failed to show for their scheduled session, but there does not seem to be a reason related to the study for this occurrence. The hour-long time commitment during weeks while school was in session coupled with midterm and final testing and a particularly devastating flu season, are all viable reasons for failures to show.

While the groups were not robust by focus group standards and the data came more from directed questions than conversations between interviewees, I believe that the smaller numbers within the groups eliminated issues with focus groups of having some participants who shy away from participating and others who dominate the conversation (Krueger and Casey 2009; Morgan 2004). Rich data came out of the conversations held in the groups and in the individual interview and I was able to conclude salient patterns from the data that emerged.

Conclusion

This study employed several different methods of data collection to understand the consumption practices of audience members with regards to reality television and, more specifically, the role of authenticity in the viewing process of the genre. As we enter into the second decade of the new millennium, we must continuously monitor the popularity of the reality genre and whether or not this “fad” is finally waning. It is also important to understand better the nature of interactivity, a relatively new and little understood phenomenon. Therefore, survey questions are geared toward understanding how often participants watch reality television programs and how often they engage in interactive behavior. The group and individual interview discussions also briefly cover aspects of general use of reality television.

Regarding authenticity in the genre of reality, there are three major lines of inquiry. First, it is important to understand how audience members define authenticity. A vague term, this study sought to understand the definition on the part of the audience members. Housed within a larger survey, I performed cultural consonance to come up with a generally agreed upon definition of the term. Further, part of the group interviews discussion was dedicated to understanding how authenticity is defined.

Second, this study also attempts to understand how authenticity is determined and verified over time. Through survey questions, group and individual interviews, and content analyses of online discussions, it is hoped that a clear picture has emerged of how authenticity determinations are made as well as continuously

checked over time. Last, these same methods are used to examine more closely the process of authenticity construction and how this process is potentially applied to everyday life. Overall, the goal of this study was to identify whether or not a connection exists between reality programming and everyday life on the basis of authenticity and, further, whether this relationship is reciprocal in nature.

The limitations of this study are common to many academic endeavors and while legitimate criticisms of the validity and reliability of data may be lodged, the strengths of the study and justifications for the methods and sampling techniques employed make a case for the legitimacy of the data collected and the conclusions drawn from each method. In the following chapters I turn to a discussion of these conclusions and conclude with directions for future research.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY DATA

Over the course of this chapter, I will discuss the results of the first round of data collection, the quantitative survey tool. The main goal of this method of data collection was to employ cultural consonance to understand how audience members define the term “authenticity.” I took the liberty of also including basic questions about television, including how respondents received their television, how many hours per day they watched television, and how much of that time was spent watching reality television. I asked participants to define reality television and to discuss their perceptions of the Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries split. The information that resulted from these questions proved far more complex and valuable than I would have ever imagined.

Because of this, I followed up much of what I found in the surveys in the qualitative interviews and supplemental data from forum and message board posts regarding the show, *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*. While I attempted to maintain boundaries between chapters, presenting the quantitative survey data in one, the qualitative in another, and the case of Kim and Kris in the final methods chapter, there will be some overlapping of these three sources of data where necessary and where the data would not be reported otherwise.

Overall, the survey data revealed basic information about television habits of respondents, mainly that they are still largely viewing television through the traditional means of cable but that they are also getting quite a bit of their television through streaming technology. Further, they perceive reality television to be a mixture of real and fictional elements, supporting the claim by Murray and Oullette (2004) that reality television is described best by the characteristic, the “entertaining real.” The data here also suggests that the more realistic the program was thought to be, the more desirable it was and the more respondents were likely to watch it. Finally, authenticity was defined or understood as “being real,” “not fake,” and “trustworthy.” Additionally, authenticity is also thought to be a process of verification and legitimation, and is considered to be a trait that is “rare,” “unique,” and “original.”

Demographics of Participants

All participants were solicited through the introductory sociology course at Western Michigan University. From the classes I visited, I collected 314 completed surveys. Table 1 on the next page lists the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. The slight majority of participants identified as women (57.1%), with 41.7% of the sample men, and 0.6% two-spirited. 69.2% of the participants were white, 15.7% black or African American, 6.4% indicated being bi- or multi-racial, and the rest were dispersed among the racial categories of Asian American (1.0%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (1.3%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.3%), and other (1.9%). As expected from introductory classes, the majority of the sample

Table 2. Survey Demographics

Survey Demographics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender (N=312)		
Man	130	41.7
Woman	178	57.1
Two-Spirited	2	0.6
Prefer to Not Answer	1	0.3
Blank Line (Filled In)	1	0.3
Race (N=312)		
White	216	69.2
Black/African American	49	15.7
Bi- or Multi-Racial	20	6.4
Asian American	3	1.0
American Indian or Alaskan Native	4	1.3
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.3
Other	6	1.9
Prefer to Not Answer	3	1.0
Age (N=309)		
18-20	208	67.3
21-23	76	24.6
24 and older	25	7.9
Class Standing (N=309)		
First-Year	133	43.0
Sophomore	74	23.9
Junior	64	20.7
Senior	38	12.3

was between 18 and 20 years old (67.3%) with 91.9% of the sample 23 years and younger. Also, most are first-year students (43%) with 23.9% sophomores, 20.7% juniors, and 12% seniors.

Demographics of the undergraduate student population at Western Michigan University for the 2011-2012 school year are available through the Office of Institutional Research. The Undergraduate population during the specified academic year consisted of 50.1% men and 49.9% women. 74.7% of the student body was white, 10.68% black, 1.44% Asian American, 2.8% bi- or multi-racial, 0.37% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.16% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. 87% of the undergraduate population is under the age of 25 and there is a relatively even distribution across class standing: 21.7% were first-year, 21.6% sophomores, 23.83% juniors, and 30.67% seniors (WMU Factbook, Retrieved March 22, 2013). Table 2 includes a more detailed list of the demographics of the undergraduate student body at WMU for the 2012 school year. Based on a simple comparison of the statistics, the sample from the introductory classes were nearly representative of the student body as a whole in terms of demographics with an over-representation of first-year students and a slightly younger population as well as an overrepresentation of women and black/African American students.

Table 3. Western Michigan University Undergraduate Demographics for 2012

WMU Undergraduate Demographics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex		
Male	9,759	50.1
Female	9,719	49.9
Race		
White	14,556	74.7
Black/African American	2,061	10.7
Bi- or Multi-Racial	549	2.8
Asian American	281	1.44
American Indian or Alaskan Native	72	0.37
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	32	0.16
Age		
Under 20	5,941	30.5
20-24	10,886	55.9
25-34	1,899	9.75
35-up	752	3.86
Class Standing*		
Freshmen	3,212	16.5
Sophomores	3,749	19.2
Juniors	4,557	23.4
Seniors	6,653	34.2

**These numbers do not include the category "Undergraduate Non-Degree"*

Television Viewing Habits

As the genre of reality television continues to grow and expand, so too, does the method through which we receive our televised shows and events. The process of “binge viewing” described by Nielsen (2012a) illustrates that viewers can access shows through more than just a television and cable subscriptions. Mobile devices and companies such as Netflix and Hulu (Hulu Plus) have introduced instant streaming capabilities. The integration of the Internet and constant accessibility has increased the interactivity of audience members and media, particularly for RTV, and has also changed the way we watch television; at least potentially. While not central to the study here, I thought it pertinent to understand a bit about the television viewing habits of the participants of my study.

It appears that despite the accessibility of streaming shows on alternative devices, almost everyone in the sample owned a television (96.2%) and watched programming on television (94.3%). In understanding better how television is received, respondents were asked to pick all of the ways that they were able to access television shows. Here much variation was reported (See Table 3). While cable was the more frequently listed single medium through which television was watched, it only encompassed a third of the sample (30.3%). A majority, 59.9% indicated using a combination of mediums to access television programs, including 23.2% that reported using a combination of cable, the Internet, and Netflix to access programming. Further, a small percentage accessed content solely through the Internet (3.4%) or

Netflix (2.7%), while only 10.2% did not access programming through cable, instead using a combination of the Internet and Netflix or other.

Table 4. Mediums Through Which Respondents Access Television Programming

TV Medium (<i>N</i> =314)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Cable	90	28.7
Internet	10	3.2
Netflix	8	2.5
No Answer	17	5.4
Combination	188	59.9
Combination (With Cable)		
Cable, Internet, Netflix, and other	11	3.5
Cable, Internet, and Netflix	73	23.2
Cable and Internet	46	14.6
Cable and Netflix	45	14.3
Combination (Without Cable)		
Internet, Netflix, Other	0	0
Internet and Netflix	12	3.8
Internet and Other	1	0.3

It is likely that individuals will underestimate the number of hours they watch television, at least partially due to the stigma that it is undesirable to watch an extensive amount of television (Livingstone 2004; Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998; Converse and Presser 1986). This appears to hold true for the self-reports of number

of hours of television watched per day by my participants. While Nielsen (2012) reports that on average, U.S. Americans watch five hours and 11 minutes per day, survey results indicated that 84.4% of the sample was under the national average with four hours or less viewing per day. As Figure 1 illustrates, the majority of respondents reported watching one to two hours of television per day (39.7%).¹¹

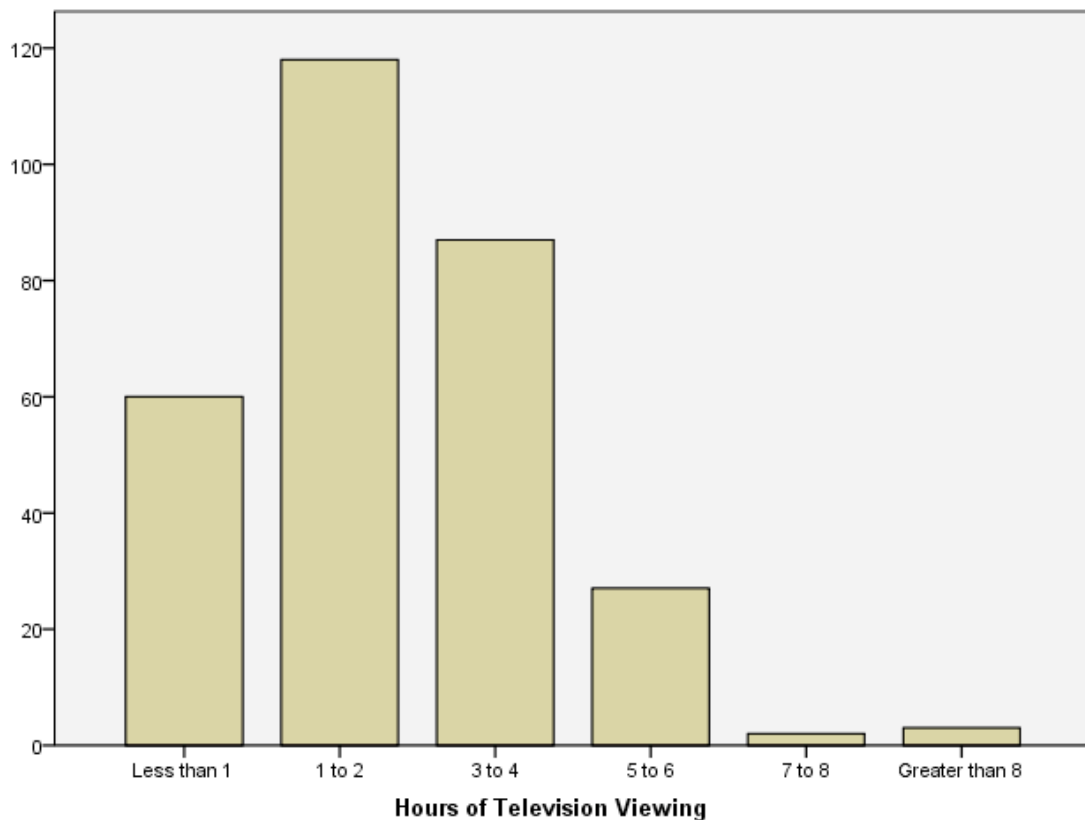


Figure 1. Number of Hours of Television Viewing per Day

¹¹ Converse and Presser (1986) have suggested that these questions are best posed as open-ended as respondents may look at the comparison between higher ranges and lower ranges and feel better lying to stay in the lower ranges. In this case my survey potentially falls short of being able to provide more accurate data regarding viewing habits.

Many respondents (40.7%) regularly watched three to four programs per week in addition to more sporadic viewing of television shows.

Reality Television Viewing Habits

In terms of reality television, a majority reported that they do watch RTV (65%) and that about 25% of their overall television viewing is dedicated to the genre. While there were no significant differences along racial classifications, I found through a cross-tabulation that women were much more likely to report watching the genre than not and also more likely than men (see Tables 6 and 7).

Categories for gender were collapsed to “men” and “women” as there were very few responses that fell outside of this category. Table 5 shows that only two

Table 5. Self-Report Gender Frequencies

		GENDER			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MAN	130	41.4	41.4	41.4
	WOMAN	178	56.7	56.7	98.1
	TWO-SPIRITED	2	.6	.6	98.7
	PREFER NOT TO ANSWER	1	.3	.3	99.0
	BLANK LINE	1	.3	.3	99.4
	NO ANSWER	2	.6	.6	100.0
	Total	314	100.0	100.0	

respondents reported being “two-spirited,” three did not or preferred not to respond to the question, and one filled out the blank line with “traits of both male and female.”

The rest of the 314 responses reported being a man or a woman.

Table 6. Viewing Habits by Gender

			WATCHRTV		Total
			Yes	No	
NEWGENDER	Man	Count	66	64	130
		% within NEWGENDER	50.8%	49.2%	100.0%
	Woman	Count	133	45	178
		% within NEWGENDER	74.7%	25.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	199	109	308	
	% within NEWGENDER	64.6%	35.4%	100.0%	

Table 7. Chi-Square Tests, Viewing Habits by Gender

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.847 ^a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction ^b	17.814	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	18.822	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.786	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	308				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 46.01.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Thus, respondents, particularly men, do not feel that reality television is a major part of their viewing practices despite the perception of the genre being wildly popular for younger, college age adults (Nielsen 2011a; Pozner 2010; Andrejevic 2003; Nabi et. al. 2003; Oliver and Armstrong 1995). While women are more likely to report viewing than not and are more likely to view than men, both reported a small percentage of their viewing was devoted to RTV with the majority of both men and women, reporting that 25% of their television viewing was devoted to RTV.

Table 8. Portion of Viewing Dedicated to RTV by Gender

Portion of Viewing Dedicated to RTV

Count

		RTVPERCENT				Total
		25%	50%	75%	100%	
NEWGENDER	Man	57	6	2	3	68
	Woman	69	35	19	5	128
Total		126	41	21	8	196

Perceptions of the Popularity and Future of the Genre

However, survey responses and discussions in the qualitative interviews are seemingly contradictory on this score. In answering a question that asked them to “define or describe reality television,” many did so by claiming the immense popularity of the genre. For example, one respondent claimed that, “reality television seems to be the most popular style of TV entertainment.” Another speaking to the future of reality television states: “I think it has become a big phenomena [sic] now-a-

days. It keeps becoming more popular and everyone wants a chance at it because it brings in a lot of money.”

Additionally, others discussed the genre in terms of how it has progressed and where they predict it will go in the future. For most, the genre will continue to get more extreme. Some believe this direction to be simply inappropriate or more dramatic but for others, the genre is becoming more fake. For example, one respondent in describing reality television stated that, “at the beginning of the reality television era I think most of it was pretty realistic. But now I feel like its [sic] very scripted and fake. Its [sic] more about business.” Another elaborates on this idea of being “more about business” in claiming that RTV is “scripted, getting too fake to watch. Obvious that they are trying to attract viewers through things like alcohol, sex, and violence.” In a generic statement about the inclusion of more dramatic elements, one respondent believes that the genre is “becoming more inappropriate” with a particular concern that “children can view it.”

The future of reality television was also discussed in the qualitative interviews. Similar to the survey respondents, interviewees believe that the genre is still popular, will continue to be popular, and will continue evolving to include more extreme and dramatic elements to draw viewers. What is particularly interesting is that while survey respondents believed that the genre was becoming more “fake,” interviewees more believed that the genre would be getting more realistic. Elliot, for example, believes that we are heading in a “dark direction” and that RTV will soon televise very extreme events:

To be honest, I'm probably not overexaggerating when I say we are going to see violence really soon. Like string violence, televised for people to watch and it's probably going to be on a 24-hour type show like that. [It] strikes me as kind of unfortunate that we're, I hate to say it, heading to snuff pornography on reality TV and I think it's going to end badly. Fox will put a murderer on or something.

Elliot went on to discuss this as a return to more “raw” and “real” elements of the genre. While perhaps an extreme example, many other interviewees discussed the persistent popularity and evolution of the genre. Francie and Charles believe that the genre of reality television is still on its way up in popularity:

Charles: I think it is going to blow up even more.

Francie: I think if they come up with new shows, yeah. But I mean it's WAY more popular now than it even was two or three years ago.

This idea of coming up with “new shows” and “ideas” was discussed in terms of becoming more realistic, dramatic, and extreme. It is clear that there is a perception that the genre is still wildly popular, at least for others.

Perceptions of Popularity and Discrepancies in Self-Reporting

It strikes me as inconsistent with perceptions of its popularity that only 65% of respondents reported viewing RTV and that only a quarter of their viewing involved the genre. There could be a couple of explanations for this discrepancy. First, similar to reporting number of hours viewed, participants could be underestimating the amount of reality television they watch in that they may not be paying attention to how much reality television they are watching (Livingstone 2004). Research further suggests that individuals view the genre as “trash television” and a

“guilty pleasure” (Cloud 2010) and this is backed up in much of the quantitative and qualitative data collected for this study. In other words, individuals may not be willing to admit how much reality television they do watch because of the negative perception (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998).

Several survey respondents, in describing reality television, spoke very negatively of the genre including calling it “trashy” and “trash television,” “a joke,” “dumb television,” “mindless entertainment,” “junk,” and that it is “awful” and “ridiculous.” One particularly spirited response portrayed outright distaste for the genre, stating, “I hate it. If I have to see another *Jersey Shore* episode or any child pageants [sic] I may make an angry phone call.” Interviewees were also negative in their descriptions of the genre. Many qualified their “favorite reality shows” with the claim that they were “embarrassed” that they liked the show and also that it was their “guilty pleasure.” For example, Maya in discussing her love of *Laguna Beach* said, “My very first favorite, um reality TV show was *Laguna Beach* which is a guilty pleasure. I really uh, liked it but I’m embarrassed to admit that!” Jane, in another interview session qualifies her favorite show: “*Teen Mom*, of course is kind of one of my ‘trash TV,’ ‘guilty pleasure’ shows.” Some even indicated that they were somewhat concerned to admit how much they loved the genre. For example, Katy admits that the genre is her favorite: “It’s embarrassing but I feel like there’s not a reality show that I don’t find at least somewhat entertaining.”

Defining Reality Television

It may also be that individuals are unclear how to define reality television. As discussed in the second chapter, a consistent and clear definition of the genre is lacking in the literature. It stands to reason then that individuals would also have trouble defining the genre. This was most clear in discussions within the qualitative portion of data collection. As the examples in Table 9 attest, interviewees often had to ask if certain shows qualified as reality television before answering that they were their favorite shows.

Table 9. “What is Your Favorite Reality Show?” Confusion in Identifying RTV

Identifying RTV Shows
<i>Are you classifying stuff like X Factor and American Idol as reality TV? [James]</i>
<i>I really like shows like Intervention and I Survived. Are those both considered reality? [Maya]</i>
<i>I would say True Life. Would that count as Reality TV? [Trevor]</i>
<i>I really like Amazing Race. I don't know if that counts? [Jane]</i>

While these individual responses are certainly indicative, perhaps the best evidence for the confusion surrounding the genre is the lack of distinction between group interviews. I had originally structured the qualitative study to have groups that were formed on the basis of level of involvement in viewing the genre. I had identified three different groups: those that reported watching “little to no reality

television;” those that watched a “moderate to extensive amount;” and a group that watched RTV and were aware of the split between Kris Humphries and Kim. Groups were then formed on the basis of level of involvement in viewing the genre. It became clear very early on that there was little difference between the groups in terms of knowledge of the genre, familiarity with RTV participants, and amount of viewing. Groups that had indicated little to no television involvement often had much more to say about the genre in terms of types of programs watched and the participants they followed and liked. It became clear as we talked that they simply had not realized that certain programs were considered reality television or had not paid attention to the fact that they watched these programs.

Given the confusion surrounding the phenomenon of reality television, I sought to understand better how my participants identified the genre. The survey instrument included an open-ended question asking participants to “define or describe reality television.” The question generated a surprising amount of data regarding respondents’ feelings toward the genre. Overall, the responses supported Murray and Oullette’s (2004) assertion outlined in Chapter Two that reality television’s defining characteristic is the “entertaining real,” or that the genre is characterized by presenting real moments interspersed with fantastic, scripted elements (Rose and Wood 2005). Beyond this, many respondents were candid in describing the genre in terms of its influence on others, its accessibility for “real” or “everyday people” and in gaining access to others lives, and finally, in terms of the motivations for viewing.

Defining RTV: The Entertaining Real is Full of Drama

The notion that reality television is made up of real and fantastic elements proved to be the most salient pattern in the data. Many responses were very straightforward about this characteristic in their description, claiming that reality television portrayed daily life mixed in with some exaggerations or scripted elements. In other responses, this was clear with the use of specific language such as “supposed to be true” or the use of quotations marks around the words reality or real. There were also indications that some believe it to be a mix of more real and others to be more fake than real. In other words, some responses hint that they believe the genre to be mostly real and others that indicate that it is mostly fake. There seems to be no consensus to how real or how fake the genre is. Table 10 provides examples of each of these patterns.

What was particularly interesting about the survey responses to this question were that several other patterns emerged regarding the paradox of the real and fictional that also proved to be a paradoxical in nature. The idea that reality television is characteristic of drama came up multiple times in responses and in relation to the characteristic of the “entertaining real.” For many respondents, drama was the fictional element that made the genre entertaining. Real life is not entertaining to watch. The dramatic flair is what draws people in and this drama is determined through comparisons to real life. In other words, survey respondents indicated that drama encompassed those moments that were the least likely to be something that

Table 10. Defining/Describing RTV: The Paradox of Reality and Fiction

The Entertaining Real	Indirect Claims of the Paradox	Real vs. Fake Elements
<i>I would describe reality programming [as] daily life...with some exaggerating parts...</i>	<i>Reality TV is supposed to show realities of life such as lifestyles and the things people do and the way they act. TV shows often seem scripted so these depictions may or may not be accurate</i>	<i>[Reality TV is] TV based off of people's lives either 100% true or partly true.</i>
<i>I believe that reality tv [sic] is mostly real life scenarios being taped but sometimes there is acting involved</i>	<i>TV programming that is supposed to show real-life situations or put people in positions to compete</i>	<i>A program that follows the life of individuals and then edit their life [sic] for entertainment. Some things are staged...</i>
<i>Scripted or semi-scripted programming that focuses on people behaving, ostensibly, as they would if there were no cameras on them.</i>	<i>Shows that depict 'real' life behaviors and relationships. They aren't supposed to be scripted or pretend.</i>	<i>A program that follows the life of individuals and then edit their life [sic] for entertainment. Some things are staged...</i>
<i>A type of television that is created out of some real life events. Not completely real but over-exaggerated for the purpose of selling and advertising</i>	<i>'real' setting and are monitored to see how things play out</i>	<i>A look into individuals' lives. It is made to look like their normal every day life, but is mainly scripted.</i>

would happen in real life. For example, one respondent reported that reality television involves “dramatic, overhyped situations between individuals” full of “people who create situations to draw in an audience not necessarily showcasing what their life is really like.” Another respondent wrote that RTV encompasses “shows full of drama. The sole purpose is to entertain but most of the time there is nothing real about it.”

While some respondents completely write off the genre as fake, overrun by the need for extreme drama and ratings, others discuss drama ambiguously and as the main element of the show. It is unclear whether these individuals believe drama to be real or scripted. These responses discuss dramatic elements in terms of the “social-psychological experiment” aspect of the genre, or the process whereby individuals are “thrown” together to see what happens. One survey respondent reported that reality television is about “putting crazy people together to increase their ratings” while another discussed them as “TV shows that put similar people, or complete opposites in the same living area for an extended period of time and usually a lot of drama unfolds.” It is plausible that these respondents view the structuring of the show (i.e. bringing together a cast) as fictional while the drama that “unfolds” around them and between them is a real response.

The Entertaining and the Real is Necessary for Enjoyment

Discussions about drama in response to a question about describing and defining reality television indicate that it is a major part of reality television. There were also indications that drama is a primary reason that audience members enjoy the

show. One respondent, in describing reality television, expressed this idea that drama is a central element to the genre: “I love reality television. Cameras are televising people. Most reality television is based on drama.” Another reports that drama is enjoyable; “I would say they [RTV Shows] are generally very dramatic. They tend to focus on very unimportant issues but can be entertaining to watch.” While neither of these statements or the many that discussed drama in relation to RTV made direct connections between drama and the show’s enjoyment or whether they believed that the drama was real, many discussions in the qualitative interviews suggested that drama is what makes a show enjoyable and is often considered to be the more realistic aspects of the show. These conclusions will be discussed in chapters six and seven.

Many respondents were clear that the real elements of the show were important for enjoyment. For example, one survey respondent believes that “Its [sic] scripted TV that adds a little of real life to make it more realistic and entertaining.” Several others also indicated that the real moments or elements of the show is what makes it appealing:

Any show that does not need to rehearse dialogues, etc. but happens as it really is. Appeals to the general public.

Programs that follow around a certain type of person for a given period of time so that viewers can be entertained.

TV that is supposed to show or entertain through real life

These comments all suggest that the reality of reality television is an important consideration in deciding to watch. While many invoke their “savvy viewership”

criticizing the genre for being fake, they watch because they believe at least part of it is real. Perhaps this is better illustrated with survey responses where individuals reported hating the genre because it was “all fake.” There were many who reported that they did not watch RTV or they disliked it primarily because they believe the genre to be totally scripted. In other words, they qualified their distaste for the genre through statements of its false nature. For example, one respondent stated that they “really dislike reality television, especially when one can tell that it is scripted.” Another believes that “reality TV is awful, it is so fake!” In these responses and others like them, it is clear that the primary reason for not liking the genre is that they believe that it portrays inaccurate representations of reality.

Defining RTV: Influencing Others

I think a lot of people are fooled into thinking that it is 100% real. [James]

There were also several respondents who discussed RTV in terms of its influence on others. Many of the responses within this thread suggest that we perceive others as more influenced by the “supposed reality” of the genre and thus, more likely to watch it. This is related to the idea that we believe ourselves to be “savvy viewers” who intelligently watch RTV knowing that there are many scripted elements to the show (Cloud 2010). We like to think that we are not duped by the genre into believing that it is completely real. However, we feel that many others are (Leone et. al. 2006). Responses in this pattern discuss reality television in very negative terms

indicating that the genre negatively influences others (Table 11) and “ruins” society (Table 12).

These responses are consistent with third-party perception theorists who argue that we believe others to be more influenced than we are when it comes to media, particularly those who we feel are less savvy (typically the younger and much older). Further, that reality television is purported to be real, there is speculation that we consider the programming to be that much more influential. Finally, because

Table 11. RTV Negatively Influences Others

Negative Perceptions of RTV: Influencing Others
<i>Sometimes scripted to make people think that’s how the world really is.</i>
<i>Pointless, waste of time, implements the wrong idea into people’s minds about what is right, wrong, legal, moral, and normal</i>
<i>A joke. I feel that too many people think ‘reality’ TV is actually real</i>
<i>They are scams to get idiotic people to watch these dumb shows</i>

individuals see the genre as “trashy,” audience members are more likely to see the influence as “socially undesirable” (Leone et. al. 2006).

Defining RTV: RTV and Accessibility

Two other notable patterns related to this survey question deals with the idea of reality television as accessible. In one way, respondents reported that reality

Table 12. RTV Ruins Society

Negative Perceptions of RTV: Influencing Society
<i>TV shows that just ruin America</i>
<i>It is ruining our nation and is, in general, shit</i>
<i>It's dumbing down society</i>
<i>I hate it. It puts a fake view that this how everyone should act</i>

television is best described as television that is accessible to real people. While few actually discussed accessibility solely (4 respondents), many others discussed the fact that reality television is about showcasing everyday people, or selected people with the basic premise that it is television that is accessible to the masses. In other words, reality television is a new avenue into potential “stardom,” or wealth. For those who discussed this specifically, it is “television that could really happen in each on of our own lives,” “something you can personally participate in,” “a group of nobodies being filmed,” and perhaps most candidly: “programs that don’t have (or aren’t supposed to have) a set plot for the show. Everyday people like you or me could be participants on it, and in some, people compete for money.” Another described it as a chance for “real people to become celebrities.” A common trait for the genre then is accessibility for normal, everyday people.

But further, it is also a voyeuristic look into the everyday lives of everyday people (and celebrities). Many discussed the voyeuristic aspects of the show in describing the genre through the use of cameras. In documenting the private lives of

people, individuals can access very personal aspects of individuals' lives. Many of the comments suggested that this trait was a particularly desirable one. Additionally, there is tension here regarding the presence of cameras. Some report that the cameras are able to document real life as it would play out without their presence (Table 13), while others are rather forceful in their suggestions that the camera changes the dynamic, often to a more exaggerated and dramatic showing of real life than what would occur more naturally (Table 14). Overall, the majority of respondents who discuss the presence of the camera believe that it is documenting real life events.

The trend in discussing the camera as an aspect of reality television was frequent enough to show a pattern yet too sparse to conclude anything definitively. As I will discuss in the concluding chapter, future studies into the genre, particularly as a surveillance practice, should focus on participants' understanding of the camera as an aspect and trait of reality television and how this trait delivers a "look into people's everyday lives." A useful examination would be to understand better how some believe that the camera distorts events while others believe it to be delivering unscripted reality to their viewing practices.

Defining RTV: Motivations for Viewing

Finally, a significant discussion within this survey question revolved around the motivations for viewing that was discussed at length in Chapter Two. Voyeurism as a defining feature has already been mentioned but individuals also discussed the genre in terms of social learning and connecting with others. In terms of social

Table 13. Cameras Portray Real Life

Voyeuristic Elements of RTV: Portraying Real Life
<i>Reality TV is programming that is unscripted. In reality shows, aside from one-on-one interviews with contestants/participants, it should be as if the camera crew does not exist.</i>
<i>[Reality TV is described as] cameras who follow people’s everyday life [and] that is unscripted.</i>
<i>Scripted or semi-scripted programming that focuses on people behaving, ostensibly, as they would if there were no cameras on them.</i>
<i>A show that is based on true life events or a camera that follows a certain person’s life.</i>

Table 14. Camera Changes Ability to See Real Life

Voyeuristic Elements of RTV: Camera Influences Portrayals of Real Life
<i>Nonexistent. Reality TV isn’t really reality. The second the cameras turn on people stop behaving as they normally would.</i>
<i>It’s basically shoving a camera into someone’s everyday life. Nothing is supposed to be staged but obviously it is. Everything the person says or does is or seems to be exaggerated</i>

learning, individuals discussed “reality television [as] a type of television [used] to gain insight on someone’s everyday lifestyle.” Another similar response discussed the social psychological aspect of the show helpful in this regard: “Reality television is putting a group of people in a certain situation or common dwelling and viewers

watch just to see the people react based on the circumstances.” Finally, some respondents discussed the genre in terms of presenting individuals we should strive to emulate: “Programming that tries to depict the lives of people whom we should idolize or try to be like. Trys [sic] to show us how ‘real’ people live, just with cameras present.”

Others discussed the genre as a way to relate to show participants as a point of connection. Some were generic in their statements about this indicating that reality television is preferable “because it can be more relatable than shows about perfect families or people that in reality do not exist” and because “human reactions are relatable, normal and seemingly raw.” Others discussed the genre as desirable because it forged a connection to celebrities. One respondent defined reality television as “people’s personal lives being filmed. I feel as if it is celebrities (in most cases) airing their dirty laundry. I think it intrigues people because it makes for room to relate to celebrities by either making themselves feel better about their personal life, or aiming for a certain lifestyle.”

The draw of programming along the lines of the findings from previous audience studies was a predominant theme within the qualitative data and will be discussed at length in the next chapter. I thought it notable however, that many also discussed these motivations extensively within a question asking for a definition. Obviously the motivations for viewing strike audience members as unique to the genre.

Defining RTV: Differences in Race and Gender

The open-ended question was also examined along lines of race and gender to determine if there were differences in how the genre was conceptualized. The recoded gender variable used in the cross-tabulations for viewing was used here as well. Comparisons of race were also informed by frequency of reporting. There were relatively low numbers reporting for categories outside of “White” and “Black/African American.” For qualitative comparisons of definitions of reality television, I looked at three racial categories: White, Black/African American, and Hispanic or Latino. The category, “bi- or multi-racial” was not included because this categorization was created from taking all respondents who circled more than one racial classification.

In coding the qualitative data for the question “define or describe reality television” along lines of race and gender, I found no significant differences for either variable. In every category of race and gender, respondents varied from discussing the genre as real to mostly real, as fake, and also in terms of its influence, accessibility, and draw to viewing.

Overall, respondents have come to define and describe reality television as a mixture of real moments and scripted moments, or the entertaining real. Some other key features of RTV is its accessibility; that real people can participate or access the private lives of celebrities. Also, it is dramatic. The dramatic elements of the genre are described as both the fictional elements as well as the realistic moments. The key is whether the drama is comparable to real life events. Further, respondents described

Table 15. Self-Report Racial Classification

		RACE			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE	4	1.3	1.3	1.3
	ASIAN AMERICAN	3	1.0	1.0	2.2
	BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	49	15.6	15.6	17.8
	HISPANIC OR LATINO	10	3.2	3.2	21.0
	NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	1	.3	.3	21.3
	WHITE	216	68.8	68.8	90.1
	OTHER	6	1.9	1.9	92.0
	PREFER NOT TO ANSWER	3	1.0	1.0	93.0
	MULTIRACIAL	20	6.4	6.4	99.4
	NO ANSWER	2	.6	.6	100.0
	Total	314	100.0	100.0	

reality television in terms of its influence of others and the draw to the genre suggesting that in terms of television, reality television is unique in motivations for viewing and also in terms of its impact on others.

Perceptions of the ‘Reality’ of Reality Television

Understanding respondents’ perceptions of the reality of reality television proved to be a confusing process. Within both the quantitative and qualitative data, respondents seem to contradict themselves on their perceptions of how real they believe the genre to be, indicating that when it comes down to it, they believe or perceive the genre to be more real than they wish to admit. Or possibly, they are not

totally conscious of how real they believe it to be. Similar to having trouble defining parameters around the genre, they believe many shows to be realistic, or totally real, without really thinking about them in terms of being an RTV show (in the same categorization as those that are more scripted).

Of all who answered the question about defining and describing, 60 respondents used the question to proclaim how fake they thought it to be or on the flip side, how real it was. Most of the statements are blatant proclamations such as “Fake as hell” and “not real” or “a program that is real” and “a TV show that is unscripted.” When categorized into those that believe the genre to be fictional and those that think it is real, the result is an almost even match with 32 respondents claiming that the genre is real and 28 that it is almost entirely or all scripted.

To complicate matters, I matched up these answers to their responses to another question on the survey that asked them to pick, from a scale of 1 to 10, how real they believed reality television programming to be. The results were mixed. Some were true to their statements selecting an 8, 9, or 10 to match their understanding of RTV as unscripted, real television, or a 1 or 2 to line up with angry proclamations of the fictional nature of the genre. However, many fell right in the middle, between 5 and 7 or at least half real. This suggests to me that respondents understand television to be the paradoxical mix of fictional and real moments. Those who believe the genre to be real and state that it is unscripted are doing so with the unstated disclaimer that portions are scripted. It is seemingly more interesting that someone who believes the genre to be “FAKE!” would also rate the genre a 5 on a

scale of 1 to 10 for how real it is. Similarly, someone who defines the genre as “a type of ‘documentary’ or tv [sic] programming that is illustrated with normal people-not ‘actors’” indicating that RTV is a 6, just slightly above “half real.”

In adding up all of the scores, those that indicated that the genre was fake ranked it on a scale from 1 to 10 at 2.86. For those who believed the genre to be real ranked the genre a 5.72 on the scale. Those who believed the genre to be fake believe it to be mostly fake with a few realistic moments. Those that stated the genre was real and unscripted actually believe RTV to be half fake.

In the scaled question itself, most respondents fell between one and five (one being not real at all; 10 being completely real). 77.4% of respondents believe that reality television is at best half real with a mean of 5 and a median of 4 (the distribution is slightly positively skewed). Figure 2 illustrates the distribution.

However, when respondents were asked a similar question, only worded as how much reality television gave them a “glimpse into the real lives of others,” most responded favorable to this question—that reality television to a certain extent was able to provide viewers with a portrayal of real events (49.2%). Another 6.1% believe that it “absolutely gives you a glimpse into real life.” A slightly fewer number of respondents believed that there might be moments of reality (32.8%) and 11.9% believe that it was impossible to glimpse the real lives of participants while watching the genre.

While the idea of a “glimpse” can take on various meanings for participants, the complexity of the responses for these several questions indicate that audience

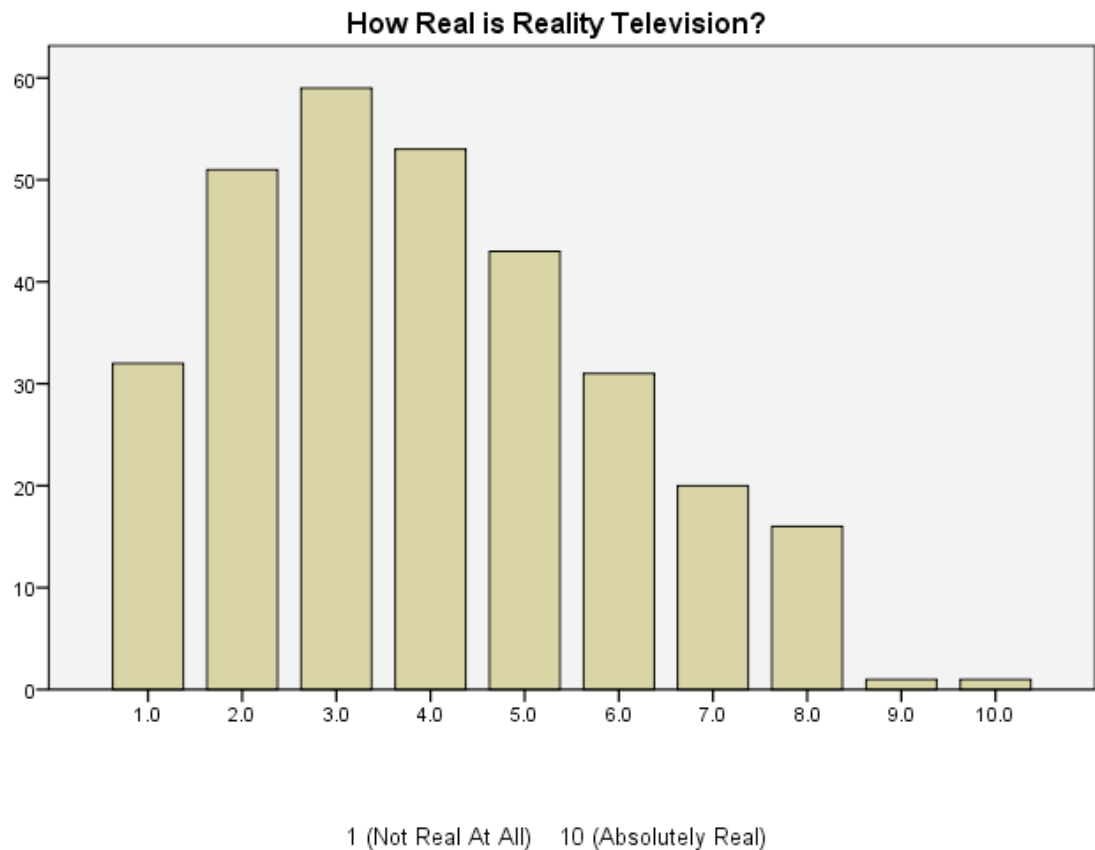


Figure 2. How Real is Reality Television?

members believe some parts of the show to be absolutely real. The variation is essentially in how much of the genre the respondents believe to be real. Except for a select few on the extreme ends of the spectrum, the majority of the respondents in this study, for both the quantitative and qualitative portions, believed that the genre was a mixture of reality and fiction with some believing that the genre portrayed more real events than fictional ones and vice versa.

The picture that begins to emerge is that those who believe the genre to be more real are more likely to watch it. To test this idea, I recoded the scaled variable

looking at the perception of reality in reality television to represent three categories: “Not Real” (1 to 3), “Somewhat Real” (4 to 6), and “Real” (7 to 10). I ran this recoded variable in a cross tabulation with the variable that measured whether or not respondents watched reality television. The chi-square test was statistically significant at the 0.05 level (see Tables 16 and 17) indicating that there is a relationship between the perception of the reality of reality television and whether or not the respondent viewed the program.

As you can see from Table 16, those who believe the genre is mostly fake, are split evenly between those that watch and those that do not watch. Further, the largest concentration of those that do not watch reality television fall in this category. For those who believe the genre to be somewhat real (around half or so) and those who believe the genre to be mostly real to absolutely real are more likely to watch reality

Table 16. Cross-Tabulation on Viewing Habits based on Perception of Reality

			WATCHRTV		Total
			Yes	No	
REALRTV	Not Real	Count	73	71	144
		% within REALRTV	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%
	Somewhat Real	Count	97	31	128
		% within REALRTV	75.8%	24.2%	100.0%
	Real	Count	33	5	38
		% within REALRTV	86.8%	13.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	203	107	310	
	% within REALRTV	65.5%	34.5%	100.0%	

Table17. Chi-Square Test, Viewing Habits based on Perception of Viewing

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27.609 ^a	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	28.618	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	26.175	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	310		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.12.

television than not. Thus, as the discussion about the definition of reality television alluded to, the reality of reality television is a major draw to the genre. Those who believed it to be more fake indicated that they did not watch the genre as much and also indicated that they believed that those who did watch it were more likely to believe that it was real. Thus, even those who thought the genre to be fictional understood the draw that reality television has for viewers.

Further, the qualitative data on motivations for viewing suggest that the more real the genre is perceived to be, the more viewers are prone to watch it. For example, James discusses perceptions of RTV and the likelihood of viewing in a group interview session:

I don't know if as many people would watch it if they knew it was scripted though. I think there are definitely people that would still watch it, but I don't know that as many people would watch it.

In addition to James' comment about other people and his perception that others are duped into thinking the genre is completely real, others discussed their favorite shows in terms of their perceptions of how real it was. When I asked Trevor why his favorite

show was *True Life*, he answered: “Just because it was accurate. It’s not like, I feel like most shows like *Jersey Shore*, I feel the script is not real.”

Perception of the ‘Reality’ of RTV by Race and Gender

I also examined perceptions of the reality of RTV along lines of race and gender. There were no significant differences in terms of either variable on the perception of the reality of the genre. In other words, no particular race or gender group believed the genre to be more real. For comparisons of this perception, I used the scaled variable of how real the genre is (1 to 10) and ran the appropriate tests. For race, I performed a one-way ANOVA. The F statistic was not statistically significant and I failed to reject the null hypothesis of more variation between racial categories than within.

Table 18. Comparisons of Means for Perception of RTV as Real, by Race

ANOVA					
HOWREAL					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	89.678	2	44.839	.626	.535
Within Groups	22131.302	309	71.622		
Total	22220.980	311			

For gender, I ran an Independent T-Test grouping the variable by men and women. Men and women did not vary significantly in how real they believed the programming to be and I failed to reject the null hypothesis of statistical significance (See Table 19).

Table 19. Independent T-Tests for Perceptions of RTV as Real, by Gender

Group Statistics					
	NEWGENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
HOWREAL	Man	130	4.350	7.6500	.6709
	Woman	178	5.084	9.0807	.6806

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
HOWREAL	Equal variances assumed	.162	.687	-.748	306	.455	-.7343	.9814	-2.6655	1.1970
	Equal variances not assumed			-.768	299.756	.443	-.7343	.9557	-2.6151	1.1465

Perceptions of Authenticity: Cultural Consonance

The main purpose of the survey was to perform cultural consonance, a process that first asks respondents to describe or define a term or phenomenon, here authenticity. Once patterns emerge, these are listed out in the group interviews to determine which pattern best describes the term or phenomenon. Not surprisingly, respondents felt that authenticity referred to being real, not fake, and also trustworthy. This broad, general pattern was most strongly posited when associated with the genre of reality television.

But beyond this, respondents also discussed the term authenticity as more of a process of verification. Authenticity does not exist unless it can be “verified” or “proven.” These two words were present in many of the responses to the survey question. Table 20 presents several examples of this pattern.

Table 20. Authenticity as a Process of Verification

“Authenticity is...”
<i>Showing if something is real or fake</i>
<i>The knowing that something is real</i>
<i>Obtained in a method that we believe to be real</i>
<i>If it can be proven to be true of false. Knowing you can trust the claim</i>
<i>Something that is believed to be true</i>

Other terminology used to discuss this process were “certified/certifiable” and “credible” with the result that the object or person who is being verified can be certified as “legitimate” and “trustworthy.” Many discussed authenticity in terms of these two descriptors as the desired outcome of the verification process. In other words, the quest for the authentic involves a process of determining or proving something to be real which in turn certifies the person as relatable, reliable, and trustworthy. As one respondent put it, “I consider something to be authentic if it seems honest, true, and reliable.”

So something or some person that is authentic is considered to be reliable. While not synonymous with being true or real, being reliable is consistent with ideas regarding trustworthiness. Someone who is thought to be reliable is thought to be trustworthy. We can predict their behavior and how they will respond. Further, this idea of reliability and trustworthiness is reminiscent of claims by Dubrofsky (2007) that authenticity is a process of verifying consistency over time. A person or thing is authentic if it remains and acts the same. That person is predictable and consistent. As they remain so over time, this behavior is thought to be authentic to their self.

Beyond this though, respondents discussed the idea of authenticity in terms of being original, unique, and not influenced by others. Related to the idea of an antique, an authentic person or thing is one that is “original,” “not duplicated,” and ultimately, “rare” and “valuable.” It comes at no surprise that we place high value on authenticity. However, it is seemingly contradictory that someone who is authentic is

also unique and uninfluenced by others when it appears that we are also looking for consistency with what we view real life to be like.

Authenticity, Race, and Gender

In addition to looking for patterns across all respondents, I separated the responses that described authenticity by gender and race to examine whether distinct differences on perceptions of authenticity emerged by lines of race and gender. There did not appear to be any significant differences along lines of gender or race for conceptions on the definition of authenticity. It is likely that the generic notion of authenticity is consistent but specific examples, particularly if authenticity is verified by comparisons to real life, may be vastly different.

The sole exception here is with the smaller, but distinct pattern of authenticity as defined or described by “roots,” “culture,” and “ethnicity.” These responses indicated that authenticity was a part of a person’s history, “where they came from, and their cultural heritage. In every response to authenticity along these lines, the respondent was a woman and all were white except for one African American woman. While only eight responses discussed authenticity in terms of culture and heritage, their responses were similar enough to peak interest. While nothing definitive could be discussed here, it would be useful to further examine this connection in the future, particularly as it relates to women and how this is explained by racial classification. In general, it is important to examine verification of

authenticity by race, gender, and class in future studies of authenticity and reality television. This will be discussed further in the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

Conclusion

Overall, respondents discussed the definition of authenticity as one of a process of verification, or a quest, to determine how real or trustworthy a person is based on reliable and predictable behaviors over time. In other words, authenticity can only exist if it is capable of being proven. Authenticity is also highly valued in that many respondents considered the term synonymous with being “unique,” “rare,” or “original.” In a similar vein, many believed that to be authentic, one must be “uninfluenced by others.”

Results from the survey were presented to the group interview sessions. Participants in the interviews overwhelmingly concluded that authenticity was characterized best by the synonyms real, not fake, and trustworthy. Further, many discussed authenticity in terms of the process of verification, or the quest to find real moments within the fictional so characteristic of reality television. In terms of determining the authenticity of RTV show participants, interviewees concluded that this is a process of verification over time, a process that is similar to Janet Jones’ “personalized reality contract.”

I turn now to Chapter six which is largely an examination of the role of authenticity in reality television viewing. Discussions from the qualitative group interviews shed much light on the process of verification and its importance in the draw of the programming. Overall, much of what was concluded regarding

authenticity and the definition of RTV from the surveys is supported and strengthened through in the narrative data from the group interview sessions.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA

The second round of data collection involved group interviews with undergraduate college students to expand upon the findings from the survey data and also to understand better viewing motivations and the “quest for authenticity.” I conducted group and individual interviews in a semi-structured fashion, posing certain questions to all the groups but allowing the conversation to flow somewhat freely into other directions. The notable questions asked of each participant were an icebreaker question, “what is your favorite reality television show and why,” one asking interviewees to define reality television, to pick the description that best supported their understanding of authenticity, and questions regarding the quest for authenticity. There were also discussions regarding perceptions of the reality of RTV and what they thought about the “quest for authenticity” in relation to the genre of programming. I concluded by asking respondents to select the “worst reality program of all time” and explain why they had chosen the show they did.

The narrative data show that respondents are motivated to view the genre in ways that are similar to what previous audience studies have found (see Chapter Two) but further, that these motivations are interrelated. Importantly, the “quest for authenticity” proves to be a significant draw to the genre and a prerequisite for other motivations, unique to the genre of reality television. In other words, in order to

satisfy desires of trait voyeurism, self-importance and vengeance, and use the genre to learn and connect with others, audience members must first make determinations of whether or not the show and its participants are authentic. Audience members must engage in a quest for authenticity in their viewing practices by employing practices of surveillance to truly enjoy the genre and its benefits. This quest for authenticity involves two interrelated levels of verification: the authenticity of the show must be verified as well as the authenticity of the individuals appearing within the show. While these are two different types of authenticity verification, the authenticity of the show impacts the determinations of authenticity of the cast members and vice versa.

Demographics

I interviewed 20 undergraduate students at Western Michigan University for the qualitative portion of the dissertation. These interviews were conducted within a group setting, save for the final interview in which only one person showed up to the scheduled session. Of the 20, 12 were women (60%), seven were men (35.0%), and one person identified as intergender or gender queer (5.0%). The majority of the group, 12, identified as white (60%), four as black or African American (20%), two as Hispanic or Latino/a (10%), one as multiracial (5%) and other (5%). The mean age for the group was 21.95 years of age and 55% (11) of the sample were seniors, 35% were juniors (5), and the remaining 20% were split evenly between first-year students (2) and sophomores (2).

Table 21. Group Interview Demographics

Group Interview Demographics (N=20)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Man	7	35.0
Woman	12	60.0
Intergender/Gender Queer	1	5.0
Race		
White	12	60.0
Black/African American	4	20.0
Bi- or Multi-Racial	1	5.0
Hispanic/Latino(a)	2	10.0
Other	1	5.0
Age		
18-20	8	40.0
21-23	8	40.0
24 and older	4	20.0
Class Standing*		
First-Year	2	10.0
Sophomores	2	10.0
Juniors	5	25.0
Seniors	11	55.0

Motivations for Viewing

The strongest patterns out of the qualitative data came from the icebreaker question and questions regarding the quest for authenticity. From these questions, interviewees were candid about their motivations for viewing and these motivations were consistent with previous literature, outlined in chapter two, on draw of the programming for audience members. In other words, the four main motivations were supported in the data I collected: claims by U&G theorists that viewers watch as part of ritual but also to satisfy voyeuristic desires and to feel better about themselves, the desire to socially learn, to connect with others, and to seek out and verify authenticity.

What is particularly striking about the patterns related to motivations for viewing is that they seem to connect each motivation. In other words, the four main motivations outlined in chapter two appeared to be interrelated. Further, what appears to be emerging from the data I collected in the qualitative interviews is that the quest for the authentic is a precursor to these other motivations. The motivations described by U&G, and the desires to learn and connect with others through the genre of reality programming are dependent on the quest for authenticity and the verification of the presence of authenticity (among show participants or the show itself).

In what follows, I will outline the data that supports the first three motivations before moving into a discussion about the fourth, the “quest for authenticity.” It will become clear that separating the data into these various motivations was difficult and many of the narratives that are presented speak to other motivations as well. In concluding the chapter, I will tie together these various patterns to argue that audience

members quest for authenticity in order to verify that they can trust these shows and cast members enough to socially learn, connect with them and others in their lives through viewing practices, and satisfy desires of self-importance, notably “living vicariously” and “feeling better about our lives.” We verify authenticity through the practice of surveillance, evident in the desire of trait voyeurism and practices of verification that include monitoring behavior over long periods of time, collecting information among various sources (surveillance and the surveillant assemblage), and peeking into the more private lives of others in the “fly on the wall” structure of modern reality television.

Uses and Gratifications

Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory posits that individuals are motivated by desires and media is an outlet through which desires can be satisfied. The type of media they choose to consume is based on the prioritization of desires. In other words, individuals who watch reality television are motivated to do so to satisfy desires related to status, vengeance (Reiss and Wiltz 2004), and trait voyeurism (Baruh 2010; 2009). Generically speaking, RTV is also useful (like much media) in satisfying ritualistic patterns of viewing (Papacharissi and Mendelson 2007; Reiss and Wiltz 2004; Rubin 1993), the notion that having television on even if simply as background noise is enjoyable. Further, most of these desires are satisfied through vicarious experience (Reiss and Wiltz 2004).

While U&G argues that these desires are a product of “basic human desires,” I argue that these desires are socially constructed and thus, a product of our social

world. However, I also argue that the desires identified by U&G theorists are present as motivations for viewing reality television as many of the responses by interviewees spoke to satisfying these desires. The most prominent pattern across the data was that RTV was useful in making people “feel better about their own lives” (status). Reiss and Wiltz (2004) discuss status as the “desire for prestige, including the desire to get even” with the resulting experience being the joy of self-importance. Reiss and Wiltz argue that the joy of self-importance through the prioritization of status can be gratified in two ways:

One possibility is that viewers feel they are more important (have higher status) than the ordinary people portrayed on reality television shows...Further, the message of reality television—that millions of people are interested in watching real life experiences of ordinary people—implies that ordinary people are important. Ordinary people can watch the shows, see people like themselves, and fantasize that they could gain celebrity status by being on television (2004: 373-4).

Many discussed elements of self-importance or status in making claims that they liked to live vicariously through watching, both in terms of fantasizing about living their life or simply because they were jealous. Others spoke extensively about how much they enjoyed the voyeuristic elements of reality television and how they enjoyed living vicariously through viewing individuals on television.

Many comments also suggest that individuals watched reality television because it was a source of “enjoyment” or that it was on in the background, indicative of ritualistic desires. For example, Josh consistently discussed his love of reality television in terms of truly enjoying television shows, both sitcoms and reality television: “I just like it, I just feel bad because I keep saying this but I just like it

because, cause it's TV." Elliot, in discussing motivations for viewing believes that they are subjective and vary from person to person (i.e. different priorities and desires) but that "some people seem to be genuinely entertained by them." However, many who discussed RTV in this manner went on to explain, much as Reiss and Wiltz (2004), that this simple enjoyment turned into more long-term and in-depth viewing practices and the satisfying of other desires as well. Charles begins to discuss his love of reality television in terms of ritualism, or that "It's entertaining and I feel like it takes up a lot, a huge chunk of television programming." While he discusses this draw in terms of not having much of an option but enjoying the programming, as will be demonstrated by his comments throughout the rest of this chapter, he enjoys several other more in-depth aspects of the genre indicating that he may have started viewing ritualistically but later formed attachments and became invested in many of the shows within the genre.

Status and Vengeance through Vicarious Living

Although many seemed a bit embarrassed to admit it, there was an overwhelming amount of discussion surrounding practices of viewing geared toward feeling better about one's own life. Reiss and Wiltz (2004) discuss this as the desire of status, or the desire to feel better about one's own "lot in life." Sarah and James' comments below illustrates the common responses regarding status:

I think they [audience members] just like to look at something ridiculous that's not their own life and in a way, kind of like make you feel better about yourself. Like, this is going on in my life but on TV look at what they're doing. I'm so much better off! [Sarah]

I always recommended to my friends if you're ever feeling really bad about your life to watch it [reality television] and your instantly feeling better about who you are. [James]

While many talked about the genre in general terms, others pointed out that they watched particular shows for this reason. Other reality-based shows were viewed for other reasons. Francie happened to discuss this simultaneously:

I think, well at least with Jersey Shore and the Kardashians, I feel like it makes me feel better about my life a little bit. Like watching them get in trouble or I mean it's like, 'Oh, well my life kind of sucks but at least it's not that!' But other reality shows...and I don't know, I just, it's entertaining. It makes me happy.

Many respondents discussed *Jersey Shore* in relation to the desire of status and self-importance. In general, discussions about status had a negative and somewhat depressing tone to them. As Francie distinguishes in the quote above, the shows that make her feel better about herself do not necessarily make her feel happier, at least not over the long term. Shows that served this purpose (status) were not discussed in relation to happiness for Francie and many others discussed watching shows that made them feel better about their life as also “hard to watch” and “very sad.” At best, these shows tended to provide a sense of relief. Sarah discusses this in terms of forgetting about one’s own life: “I just think that people just like to distract themselves from their own lives.”

However, some discussions about vicariously living through reality television took on tones of jealousy and outrage. These comparisons to others’ lives is seemingly more indicative of vengeance, another basic desire individuals’ satisfy through reality television (Reiss and Wiltz 2004). With vengeance, audience members

have a “desire to get even,” to satisfy the joy of “vindication” (P. 365). Many discussed wanting certain shows off the air because they deemed it “unfair” that people should get rewarded or paid for such behavior. As discussed in the last chapter, these responses had tones of jealousy and demands for meritocracy. In terms of living vicariously, many were upset that others should be so lucky, questioning “why they should get paid so much money to get drunk and party all day” (anonymous survey response), with undertones that they would like to be getting paid for that very thing (status and self-importance). In fact, some of the interviewees discussed how they wanted to go on *The Real World* to experience the constant partying and traveling. For example, Sarah discussed her desires to go on *The Real World* when she turns 21 so that she “could drink” because there is “a lot of alcohol influence and partying” and she would love to be a part of that. In addition, she discusses (like others) several motivations including the experience of bonding with others and potentially achieving fame. That many saw reality television as a potential avenue toward fame and success could be why they were so upset to see others reaping the benefit of being on the genre if they felt they did not deserve it. It appears that there is much overlap and interaction between the desires of status and vengeance. Audience members seem to satisfy desires of feeling important by seeing other “normal people” get attention, fame, and wealth yet compete because it is not fair that they too are not rewarded.

In an interview with Nicole, she voiced her displeasure at all the attention the Kardashian family received as a result of having a reality show. She did not believe it

to be fair that they had become rich and famous, living an “alternative reality” just because Kim had done a sex tape and their father happened to be wealthy.

Nicole: I'm in reality, you're [Kardashians] not. Okay? It's like a reality that does not exist to just common people and that's probably why everybody just loves it.

Natalie: It's luck

Nicole: Yeah, it's more of like luck. Like, they were rich because of their father mainly.

Natalie: It's chance

Nicole: It's like you were born into money...they were born into money and it's like, you know, you're lucky! If I was born into money, I'd be just like you. Don't worry. But, I feel like we live in reality and they don't cause that's not reality. You're like a small portion of the world. Sorry.

Natalie: I think it's just more interesting cause they know famous people. I would just love to know one famous person. I would just love to date someone famous. Like, 'hello Ryan Gossling! I'm Here' I'm like, 'Eva Menendez, I'm Mexican too!'

The conversation continues later on when both, Nicole and Natalie, argue that they should not have reality shows anymore because they do not deserve to have the attention. Because my research partly focused on the Kardashian-Humphries marriage, the family came up quite a bit in discussions here and in other group sessions, mainly with the same sentiment. I wanted to use this particular line of discussion because it really illustrates how living vicariously borders between negative emotions and needing to feel superior, to using the genre to fantasize about this “pseudo-reality.” Both Natalie and Nicole dream of the idea of being as “lucky” as the Kardashians and thinking about what it would be like if they had their lives. I found that many interviewees discussed watching the genre to live vicariously in the

more positive, fantasizing way. In terms of the Kardashians, Natalie later discusses how she wishes that she could live their life:

Natalie: I wish I could live a fabulous life like that, honestly.

Lisa: Okay

Natalie: Well, I wish I could just afford all the things they can afford. Like I would love to go out and go on a 1500-dollar shopping spree for pants and shirt. I would just love that!

Nicole: If I didn't have to pay my bills...

Natalie: They're just like, live so much more extravagantly and I would just love to do that.

Lisa: So living vicariously?

Natalie: Vicariously through them, yeah!

In another group interview, Tressa admits that she also dreams of living the Kardashian lifestyle, relinquishing herself to the fantasy while she is viewing:

Q: What is your favorite reality show?

Tressa: Mine's still the Kardashians. Like, anything with them, basically I watched them all since the beginning. So yeah, that's my favorite. I like them because I think they're fun. I'm never, well odds are that I'm not going to be out in California with like more money than I could every dream of doing whatever I want so I get to kind of live vicariously through what I get to watch them do. Like, I won't ever probably do half of those or three quarters of those things, but I get to watch them do it and it's funny, it's entertaining.

Francie also discussed fantasizing while watching shows like *The Bachelor*, likening the show to a “chick flick:”

Francie: I feel like that's the same thing as like watching a chick flick though

Charles: That's...yeah? I agree with that too

Francie: I mean it makes me feel the same way, it's like 'Man, I wish my life was like that!'

These sentiments are similar to what Cloud (2010) found in her audience study on *The Bachelor*; that while those who watched it understood and were vocal about the fictional elements of the show, they were also drawn in by the fantasy of romance that the show portrayed such as over-the-top, ideological romantic dates. By making claims that they understood that the show was partly staged, audience members were able to fully enjoy the fantasy of romance and bought into the hegemonic ideals of heterosexual love and romance portrayed by the show.

Wealth and love were not the only draws to living vicariously. Others discussed reminiscing about earlier college years when watching *The Jersey Shore* or at least fantasizing about being able to “party and hang out all the time.” Charles discusses *Jersey Shore* as one of his newer favorite shows,

because you just don't know what is going to happen. It's just, it's very crazy and it's, for a college student..I'm a senior so I'm pretty much all partied out, you know? But to see that party lifestyle kinda thing on TV, you're like you know 'I remember when I used to party and all that kind of stuff!'

Lisa: Okay, so kind of like reminiscing?

Charles: Yeah! Reminiscing a little bit.

While for some, *Jersey Shore* and the Kardashian shows are their “go to” for feeling better about themselves, for others they are the shows for living vicariously through fantasy. A discussion between Maya, Michael, and me sums this up nicely:

Maya: I really like shows like Intervention and I Survived...I'm just obsessed with them because after watching an episode of somebody's worst hell that they've gone through, I feel better about my life

Michael: yeah [laughing]

Maya: Like, it's true, like oh wow! Watching I Survived, this girl got abducted and like raped by a train track, 'like man, my life is pretty good!' you know? It just gives me perspective you know, whereas watching trash is kind of like mindless, like Jersey Shore or The Real World I would say is different.. Like the more serious reality television shows cause they make me have a different perspective of my life.

Lisa: So would you say that both would make you feel better about your life?

Maya: oh yeah!

Lisa: But in different ways?

Maya: Oh yeah, I would say.. Like watching Jersey Shore, 'Wow! I'm glad I don't have that lifestyle!' but then some people might look at it and say, 'I wish I had that lifestyle!' I think it comes down to the individual.

Michael: True, True!

Reality television appears to offer up whatever fantasy scenario the audience member is looking to vicariously live out. In general though, these comments suggest that these audience members are using reality television as an emotional outlet. This is perhaps more obvious for those who expressed jealousy or displeasure at the “luck” of some people or those who exercise what Elliot, another interviewee, discussed as “twisted elitism,” looking down on or feeling better about one’s life after viewing the misfortune of another on RTV. Although less clear, those who expressed living vicariously through fantasy, are “distracting themselves” from their own realities. They often also discussed displeasure that others should be so rewarded for what little they did to make it big. Ultimately, in viewing reality television, we are making

comparisons to our own lives from viewing these “real people” on television hoping that we can justify our own actions or believe that we too, can make it:

Francie: I think, I just want to know if they're really similar to us. I mean you just kind of search for how they're similar I guess to try to compare yourself to them...I pretty much compare them to my life.

Notions of self-importance and narcissism appear to be on the rise (Twenge and Campbell 2009). It may be in the age of “entitlement” and an overemphasis on individualism, that we feel that we too deserve to be recognized and rewarded for who we are. The notion that we view reality television to satisfy desires of status to feel important as well as to gain vengeance on those who have succeeded in “our place” perhaps speaks to this trend. Further, that much of this discussion has centered on celebrities and that Reiss and Wiltz (2004) discuss our desires in terms of achieving celebrity status, speaks to the idea that reality television is delivering the possibility of achieving celebrity status. Seeing these individuals as “real, ordinary people” and seeing shows that deliver celebrity status is desirable in that we, too believe that we deserve the chance to achieve celebrity status.

Elizabeth Johnson (2006) understands these desires to be related to ideas presented in reality television that meritocracy exists and that within these spaces, the playing fields are leveled so that everyone has a chance to succeed. In the neoliberal world where everyone is given the responsibility to succeed, it is thought that hard work deserves success. “Americans think their success is largely determined by factors within their control” and “several critics have suggested that the appeal of today’s reality television speaks to a desire to control an economy that has become

increasingly out of control; ironically, the fantastic reality offered by these shows works to keep economic control in the hands of the elite” (p. 121). Reality television gives the appearance of opportunity, for others to make it big, an outlet for frustration when hard work does not pay off, and the message that reinforces ideas of meritocracy and self-responsibility.

Voyeuristic Tendencies

In comparing ourselves to others and making assessments between who we are to who they are, it is necessary to have more than a casual look into the lives we are using as a point to compare. The voyeuristic elements of reality television are key to satisfying desires of status and self-importance, as well as vicarious living. Many of the discussions about voyeurism were in response to the question asking individuals to define or describe reality television. Interviewees were quick to point out the “fly on the wall” voyeuristic and surveillance elements of reality television as useful and desirable. For example, Amber, in her group interview defined reality television by indicating that, “It’s a look into someone else’s life. It’s not like, it’s not scripted, you know like when you take a candid picture of someone and it’s just them doing what they do everyday.” In another group interview, Trevor described reality television in surveillance terms: “I would say 24 hour surveillance of a group of people that are not told what to do. I guess you could cut out the boring parts unless something good happens.”

In addition to being a defining trait of reality programming, surveillance and voyeuristic elements are also draws to the genre. Evey discusses the show, *The Girls' Next Door*, as one of her favorites. When asked why she liked the show, she indicated that it was because of the chance to get an inside view to the inner working of the magazine, *Playboy*, and Hugh Hefner's girlfriends.

Evey: I mean, I think some of the girls weren't you know, they get a rep for being stupid too but I mean, they had, they definitely had moments where they seemed well put together and intelligent so, I don't know, I just thought it was entertaining seeing all this backworking behind such a huge industry. It's kind of interesting the way things function.

She goes on to describe how she felt that she got to know the girls, Holly, Bridget, and Kendra better and that the show more accurately portrayed the reality of who they were than the stereotype of a "playboy bunny" or girlfriend of Hugh Hefner.

While Evey discussed the traits as a means to an end, Charles was vocal about his love of *Big Brother* because of the surveillance and voyeuristic aspects of the show.

I used to be REALLY into Big Brother when it first started because it was kind of a cool concept. You're in a house, the cameras are on you EVERYWHERE, when you go to the bathroom, when you take a shower, just cameras on you and they have no contact with the outside world. I thought that was pretty cool.

While specific to *Big Brother*, Charles goes on to discuss RTV in general as this basic voyeuristic and surveillance-esque concept:

How I see it is, that reality is being followed, having a camera in your face all day, everyday is how I see it as kind of just see it from an outside view. It is always having a camera ON you and following YOU in EVERYTHING you do. I mean from going shopping to cooking dinner, just everything

As the discussion concludes, Charles and Francie determine that the voyeuristic elements of the show, notably the opportunity to engage in “legal” voyeurism makes the genre much preferable over sitcoms.

Q: Is reality television preferable over sitcoms?

Francie: I think so but I don't really know how to explain why

Lisa: Okay

Francie: Just because you know what is real, I don't know

Charles: See, I don't know either, I just don't know how to cause it's like...

Francie: Cause it's like you're peeping into their lives but it's a legal way to do it

Charles: [laughing] YEAH!

This “legal voyeurism” is akin to a discussion in the work by Lemi Baruh (2010; 2009) where he argues that the link to voyeurism and RTV has not been made in quantitative audience studies because individuals are hesitant to admit that they engage in behavior typically associated with a psychological disorder that is associated with deviant sexual behaviors. He proposes that audience members engage in “trait voyeurism,” a less risky and deviant alternative. In discussing this “peek” into others lives as a “legal” way to do it, I believe Francie and Charles are discussing the idea of “trait voyeurism” and the conception that voyeuristic tendencies are traditionally deviant.

Francie’s and Charles’ exchange above also illustrates that voyeurism is dependent on the reality characteristic of the genre as well. Individuals do not feel as

though they can engage in voyeurism, if they do not feel as though the behavior that they are witnessing is authentic. In other words, it is not surveillance or being followed around by a camera if you are actively engaging with the camera to showcase certain behaviors. Voyeurism and the surveillance piece of reality television is about following people around to see what they would really do. Watching these shows and the events unfold is getting a glimpse into the real and private lives of others. A thrilling and useful experience for viewers:

Michael: It's like reality television shows bring in like, all types of angles and aspects like for example, um the teen mom thing like, there is like a big case in teen moms that is a problem in the country but you like watch the TV shows and it kind of like provides so much and it's like this is real life, this everywhere like this is how it is all the time

Maya: Yeah because you're not just seeing, 'oh, there's a pregnant girl. I don't really know her,' you are seeing the pregnant girl, the mom's perspective, the baby daddy's perspective, like how everything comes together.

Katy: Her friends...

Maya: You get to have like an outside view or a fly on the wall

Michael: Right

This line of discussion seems to suggest that reality television gives audiences the inside scoop on very real human experiences, where one can learn and connect by watching. As Michael describes, this is a solution to a cultural phenomenon of privacy:

Going back to Teen Mom, these are regular people...well they were regular people until like you know, they got on TV...like now you know everything about them. Like um, Kate Plus 8, or whatever...it was before. Like um, before they were just a family, they were not the daughter of whoever, they weren't the hiphop super star, they were just like a regular person and now that the

cameras are on them, we get a chance to see. And uh, this is going back to the American image like we're supposed to be flawless to the stranger. Like if I'm walking down the street I shouldn't really assume anything about you but like we get to see like all their kinks, like with all the cameras on them you can see every bit or aspect like you can see...like the one family [Kardashians] it's glamorizing, like her family is well off. Most cases are not like that so the ones where you can see the family struggling, the tears, the hardships, and all that type of stuff like really we don't get to see that for everybody. Like I know you as a person, like you are my instructor, like we've emailed about some other stuff before but I don't know you as far as what's behind your home door but the cameras are all in their house, they are everywhere they go and so we know every aspect of them.

Maya: Yeah, that's so crazy how you can know someone better that we've never met than someone we've had class with for an entire year!

While they concluded that peeking into everyone's lives was not ideal and that they certainly did not want to know everything about people like their professors, having an inside view into other's people's lives was useful to gain perspective and a comparison to one's own life. As long as there was a certain distance. Interviewees, including Michael, discussed reality television as particularly enjoyable because there were no strings attached. Audience members can engage in the drama without being intimately involved and without expectations of reciprocity. A quote used later in this chapter by Tori about getting to know someone without them knowing you is illustrative of this idea. She basically says that it is possible to develop a relationship with individuals on reality television without reciprocating. You can still get the feeling that you know them.

This is similar to a conclusion made by Niedwiecki in the book, *The Peep Diaries* (2009). Niedwiecki argues that in an age of hyper-individualism, where social ties are disintegrating and societal messages emphasize taking care of yourself, being

efficient, and staying inside (where it is safe), we no longer have the means or the desires to connect in traditional ways. Instead, we connect through media. At the end of the book the author discusses a “Facebook Party” that he hosted where he invited every one of his thousands of friends on the social networking site to meet him at a bar for an evening of face-to-face interaction and socializing. When one other person showed up to the event, he concluded: “Why didn’t people come to my facebook party? Because they didn’t have to. They felt they already knew me. So why waste an evening getting to know someone you already know?” (P. 278). If these conclusions prove true then it would make sense that audience members like Michael have no desire to get to know “real life others” intimately. To do so would mean some sort of personal reciprocation and perhaps some involvement in drama. Reality television provides a more efficient (less responsibility) means of getting to know others, intimately.

Social Learning

As discussed in chapters two and three, Haggerty and Ericson (2000) argue that the presence of privacy has not necessarily been an accepted addition to the social world. Instead, the advent of privacy has situated the responsibility of identity formation and social learning to the individual. The walls of privacy prevent us from witnessing some of the more important, but less desirable behaviors in others that help us to compare and gauge appropriate behaviors and reactions to situations and events, as well as to other people. Surveillance is seen as a useful way to overcoming the restrictions that privacy has put into place allowing for a more voyeuristic view

into others' lives. We are now engaging in practices of surveillance in the everyday (Staples 2000) world that allow us to gather useful information on others around us (Niedwiecki 2009).

New research in the field is connecting social media to surveillance practices (Trottier 2012) but focusing on interactive mediums such as Facebook and Twitter. I argue alongside a few others that reality television is also included in this realm of social media and serves as a practice of surveillance (Dubrofsky 2011; Andrejevic 2004). Through viewing reality television, not only are we watching for enjoyment but we are also surveilling others to socially learn (Lair 2011; Godlewski and Perse 2010; Stefanone and Lackaff 2009; Everett 2004; van Zoonen 2001). Further, in participating as an audience member, we potentially give over information about ourselves to others, either through interaction in RTV or through other means of surveillance that no longer appear threatening to us thanks to the promotion of surveillance practices embedded within reality television (Andrejevic 2004).

As the list of references above can attest to, various audience studies over the years have found that reality television is useful in teaching others how to build or transform identity through the process of learning socially from watching others. The idea that television, thought of as a source of entertainment, is a source for learning is somewhat boggling, particularly in relation to contemporary reality television shows. However, many attested to their desires for the medium to provide aspects that educate or prove useful. While much of this section will be devoted to responses that have affirmed television's and reality shows' abilities to do this, there were two

particular responses negating this trait among RTV that I thought were particularly astute in showing this desire. First, Amber argues that people are drawn to reality television because it is mindless:

[People tune in] just to turn your brain off, you know? Enjoy. I don't think like most reality TV is there to educate people like you know, people watch like Pawn Stars or Ice [Road] Truckers, they're not watching it to be educated about you know, Pawn Stars!"

Jane discusses *Teen Mom* as her guilty pleasure because she believes there is no educational value to the program. She states, "I mean what am I learning from that? Nothing! I have kids, I have you know, a busy life," yet she takes time out of her day to watch the show. For Jane then, *Teen Mom* was truly a guilty pleasure.

While some were decidedly negative about the genre's ability to provide opportunities for learning, others were convinced that the genre was uniquely suited, through this "social psychological experiment" set up at the very least, to provide information that would help others understand the world around them. Because *Teen Mom* is popular among college age students and campuses in the area had recently had visits from two of the cast members, Kaitlyn and Tyler, there was much talk about both the show and the couple who had visited. Quite a few interviewees had reported that they believed *Teen Mom* to be helpful in educating others about the realities of teen pregnancy.

Jane: I think the show [Teen Mom], even though they don't have jobs, which is a big part...

Evey: Some of them do have jobs but I mean, you're right, like either they don't show them working...

Jane: That part could be hiding

Evey: or they're like yeah, wishy washy jobs

Jane: But even without them having that it still does show I think a good portrayal of some of the other issues like, you know they all went into thinking 'Oh, the boyfriend is going to stay with me and he's going to get a job and I'm going to be a stay at home mom.' So they give a good portrayal of stuff.

Similar to the comment that Maya gave about voyeuristic elements of the show giving the perspective of all those involved, Jane also believes that this is helpful in showing young girls that their perception of what teen pregnancy is going to be about is off from the reality of the situation. Even with the criticism that the lack of focus on jobs or the lack of jobs held by those on the show is unrealistic, there are several elements that have the capacity for teaching others about the situation of teen pregnancy.

With regard to Kaitlyn and Tyler, many of the respondents discussed their story as “inspirational” and that they were glad that they were touring around the country to tell their story. As Tori explains,

Tori: They gave [the kid] up for adoption but they are still speaking about their child and if you have these problems here's what you can do about it and I feel like it's inspirational and it's kind of a way, they are strong for what they had to do and other people just see that as kind of...

Melanie: Something bad

Tori: they definitely see it as something bad but also something to learn from

Lisa: the adoption process?

Tori: Yes, and just getting pregnant at a young age.

Lisa: So you think part of the draw was that...

Tori: This could happen to you.

Katy, who discussed Kaitlyn and Tyler extensively in her interview also echoed these sentiments:

Maya: So they wanted to share their story?

Katy: Yeah! That was her motivation, she you know, not everybody understands adoption or...the correct terms for adoption so sharing her story because she was the only one who originally placed her daughter up for adoption [on the show]...she wanted to give an outlook on something and that type of reality.

Michael discussed how he believed that some of the motivations of cast members to give up their privacy was to help others: “I’m sure they didn’t mind sacrificing their privacy for the moment so maybe someone could learn from their troubles.” Charles also spoke in generalities about the genre stating that he enjoyed the genre because “It’s just another aspect of somebody else’s life that you did not know about” and that you get to see “how people do things differently.”

A few studies of the genre of reality television looked at specific shows that portrayed a certain identity or way of life as proof of the socially learning aspect of things.

While this was not clear in the data, it is worth noting that Katy discussed *Teen Mom* and the story of Kaitlyn and Tyler as “life changing.”

Their story has influenced my career goals so it’s really interesting. That’s why I’m so interested in them.

She discusses their influence over the course of the interview, indicating that their decision to give their child up for adoption made her reevaluate her morals in life as well as her goals.

While certainly not the strongest pattern in the data, at least overtly, I think that several discussions within the groups indicated that the genre is useful to seeing “behind the curtain” in order to understand and compare to their own lives to shape and transform their social identity. Specific examples of individuals’ stories are thought to provide perspective about life events so that individuals can behave more appropriately or make useful decisions about predicaments should they happen to find themselves in similar circumstances.

Connecting With Others

We are more alienated...as a society. [Elliot]

Many reality television scholars have also found that the genre serves as a way of connecting to others. For example, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) found that reality television viewing, applying Uses and Gratifications, serves as an alternative to interpersonal communication. Further, Biltereyst (2004) concludes that RTV serves as a replacement for the “social deficit” we are experiencing as a result of the breakdown of social solidarity. That the media is so prominent in society (Castells 1996) and because reality television values intimacy and close interaction, it makes sense that it would become a suitable replacement (Biltereyst 2004). van Zoonen (2001) also suggests that we are turning to shows like *Big Brother* to counteract the unraveling of social ties. van Zoonen’s argument falls in line with that of Haggerty and Ericson (2000) in believing that the advent and expansion of privacy has led to this breakdown. van Zoonen ties together these various motivations for viewing reality television by arguing that we have the desire to breakdown these privacy

barriers, engaging in voyeuristic activities in order to learn how to behave socially but also to forge connections with others.

Elliot's quote at the start of this section was a response to the discussion about why nobody cares about anybody else, why nobody wants to get together in person, and why we are addicted to social media. He believes that we are more comfortable interacting online but we are incapable of connecting. We are instead, desperately trying to find an alternative way to connect with one another and media proves to be one of the potential answers for this reconnection. Elliot is perhaps more spirited than other interviewees but there were many discussions regarding connecting with others through media, both in connecting with those on the shows and with people in their "real lives."

The idea that connections and intimacy is valued on reality television and is appreciated and desired by audience members is evident in Sarah's discussion about her love of *The Real World*.

My favorite would be like The Real World or when they do the spinoff like, The Real World Challenge, the challenge shows. Those are my favorites. I think I like The Real World so much because like, I just like the idea of strangers coming together and then walking away with an experience, a good experience for most, if it like brings you closer together like a family of sorts. Like, you and six or seven other people are the only people who are sharing this experience so it brings a bond with you that you won't find anywhere else. I've always wanted to go on the show.

Sarah had come into her interview with a bag that had sewn sorority letters on the front. When I asked her about the potential for this experience with her sorority sisters in a house, she remarked that it was not as exciting or desirable. In fact, she had even declined to live in the house. Of course, she cited the additional motivations

of achieving potential fame, being on television and getting attention, and the excitement of being somewhere more exotic (with free booze and travel) but her main motivation for watching the show and much of her desire to be on the show stemmed from valuing the central feature of connecting with others and being intimately tied with a group of strangers. That she could experience this with her “real life” sorority sisters but declined to do so perhaps speaks to the draw of the fantasy that is coupled with the reality. Nevertheless, the connection with others is an element of her desire to be involved with and view the programming.

Others also discussed *The Real World* and *The Real World Challenge* as enjoyable shows because of the connection made. However, for Amber and Josh, the show is desirable because they feel connected to the cast members.

Josh: They used to have some of those older people that you always saw on challenges aren't on them anymore. Like I miss coral...

Amber: Oh yeah, “Hi” and “Bev”

Josh: and now it's all these new people, rookies and stuff and they're all, I don't know it's just not the same

Lisa: So what's the difference between the rookies?

Amber: The rookies are people who have only done one, haven't done a challenge yet or like one or two

Lisa: Like a season?

Amber: No

Josh: Like the newer seas—well, like the newer seasons. People who were just on [The] Real World, what is it, St. Thomas, is just like finished airing and they are already on the challenge so they've never done a challenge before. So they're rookies and then even some of the people from San Diego is still pretty recent, so they're considered the younger rookies and then there are the

ones who've done multiple, the veterans, who have done multiple challenges who their seasons were like years ago.

Lisa: Okay, so what makes the veterans more likeable than the rookies?

...

Tressa: Like I don't watch that show but I like it when I know who the people are. [Amber and Josh agree]

In this discussion it became clear that the “veterans” on *The Real World Challenge* were more likeable because Josh and Amber knew them better than the rookies. They were also likely to be more likeable if they were asked to come back for more seasons. This sense of connection is discussed in these interviews as something that develops over time. It is the process of the “personalized reality contract” discussed by Jones (2003) and the process of verification over time of someone’s authentic characters. Tori illustrates this best:

I feel like you kind of get to know your characters more when you watch them like, over a long period of time, like it is kind of like getting to know someone, like being in a relationship, you get to know their next move before they know it. But if you just watch a show, they don't know you. The people on the show don't know you but you can get closer to them and form a relationship with them over watching. I feel like you get to know them better just watching how they act even when you can't say anything.

Tori believed that through watching people on reality television that one could get to know who they are. Additionally, audiences can come to know how they are going to act before they do so (reminiscent of the definition of authenticity in terms of being trustworthy and predictable). Further, it is not necessary to have a reciprocal relationship in order to form a connection. This can be made without having to interact with the other person, without needing them to know who you are. As

discussed in the previous section, this could be desirable as it is “efficient” in terms of not having to reciprocate while also reaping some of the benefits of getting to know someone more intimately.

Many also discussed the genre in general terms as far as connectivity goes, rather than specific shows however, it became clear that individuals connected with shows that they felt related to them. Many discussed relating and connecting to shows like *The Real World* because these cast members are at the same phase of life as many of the college students that I talked to. For Nicole, she connected with *Intervention* because, like the central characters on the show, her mother suffered from alcoholism, an addiction that had taken her life the year before.

I just feel like I connect more with like The Real World and stuff like that but like.. Intervention, I feel like it's more like for me, it's kind of like a hope. You just think of things how it could have been and things like that. That's more of the things I connect with.

While she connects with shows that portray the stage of life that she is currently experiencing, she finds more connection in shows that can relate to specific experiences she has dealt with. The idea of connecting on the point of emotion or pain was illustrated in other group discussions as well. Tori discusses her experience connecting with someone on *Intervention* and wanting to continue following up with his story.

It's [Intervention] so sad! There was this one, it was this old man. It was like, he used to be a big boxer and he used to be so successful and then he got addicted to heroin and could not function and he just, he gave the saddest speech. I want to cry just talking about it. Just the look in his eye of fear, sadness, pain. It was just, the lowest rock bottom he could get. It's so sad, it made me feel like I've never seen that before. And he wanted to change so bad but it would take everything he's ever had to turn around. And I think he

successfully did it or at least they showed him taking the first steps to rehab and detox but they didn't finish it. SO I want to see what he's up to.

Perhaps though, Maya best illustrates the connecting via pain and emotion in discussing one of her favorite shows, *Jon and Kate Plus 8*.

Just because near the end when Jon and Kate were getting the divorce and all the crazy stuff was going on with the family, I was really attached to the drama and what was going on and like this real, I felt that it was real pain that you could see like from the family and like, stuff you can't really make up.

Connecting with pain can be a product of relating to that experience because one has personally experienced it. But, as Maya's quote illustrates (a never married, college student), pain and emotion is considered by those I interviewed to be a point of reality, or where those you are viewing are acting authentically. As I will later demonstrate, Maya believes that emotion and pain is the point of connection and also the way of satisfying the quest for authenticity. She believes that audiences can relate to emotion and pain even if they have not experienced it.

This is where the quest for authenticity and connection with others via reality television start to overlap. For many, the discussion of connection with others via media was intimately tied with perceptions of authenticity and reality. It is not just certain shows that they can relate to but also those shows that are most relatable and most authentic. If a show is perceived to be inauthentic, there is no connection to be made. For many, these connections come from the emotional parts of the show because these are the points of behavior that seem the most authentic.

Nicole: Like, oh Damn! They might be like us. Like it's just kind of like, ...'maybe you are normal!' I don't think [some of] these people are normal. Why? Cause [they] don't have issues. The majority of the people in the world, 80% of the people that I'm saying are in reality, we have issues. You know

what I mean? Like that's what I'm saying like, when they actually open up like that I think that's more real because it...makes me feel like wow, you're actually kind of normal.

Lisa: So do you think that's when you can connect with a character?

Nicole: Yes.

Later, she elaborates on this idea of a connection through authenticity:

Nicole: I think it's more...some of them are to connect but on other ones, you're just intrigued to know what [happens]. Like, to connect, it's like, I feel like the shows with real...the show that's been going on for like 15 years?

Lisa: The Real World?

Nicole: Real World! That show. That's one that people connect with cause those are actually like real people...that's what I'm saying...that's what we will connect to...because it's more like my age category you know?

Not only does she connect because these people on *The Real World* are her age but also because the show is more realistic and features “real people.”

The need for authenticity in programming not only covers connecting with those on shows but also in connecting with people in “real life.” Many talked about reality television as a connecting point for others in their lives. Nicole and Natalie had bonded as roommates because of their love of reality television and had also brought their other two roommates into the fold. They spend much time together watching certain reality shows, discussing the shows with one another and getting involved in “active viewing” in the form of yelling at the television and debating cast members.

Nicole: I'm not the big reality television watcher

Lisa: No?

Natalie: But you join in!

Nicole: I join in because I get hooked...and then all of a sudden we [her and Natalie] get excited and we start standing up and we start yelling at the TV

Lisa: You do?

Nicole: It get's really intense at our house

Natalie: We get really into it!

Nicole: We have another girl that gets involved with it...we have a boy now too...but he's just like, 'what the hell is going on?' Like, he gets involved with it now too.

Natalie: He's like, 'she just hit that bitch!' and we're like yeah!

Nicole: Stuff like that...he's reacting to what is happening on the TV so it's really funny...cause then you'll hear us yelling upstairs and we'll like hype, you know what I mean? And then next thing you know, he's like 'what is going on? Is there a fight?'

Others discussed how they started watching the programming because everyone else around them was watching and they wanted to know what the fuss was about but also to converse with others about the show.

Lisa: What is your favorite reality TV show?

Mitch: It really is, it's probably Jersey Shore for me. When it came on it was such a big thing in my school. Everyone was talking about it, that's how I got into it.

Francie discusses how she connects with others by discussing reality shows but that she only discusses those shows she considers real.

Lisa: So, do you talk to a lot of people about reality shows?

Francie: I think the only ones I talk about are the ones I think are real, like the singing shows because it's easy to talk about...

Charles: You talk to your mom about Long Island Medium a lot

Francie: Yeah, cause that's real

Michael further highlights connecting with others through reality shows they believe to be real in his discussion about not being able to connect to his father due to not liking his favorite show, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*.

I've seen him watch it a couple of times cause I tried to connect with him but it wasn't, it wasn't a bad TV show to where I was like 'remove it from the face of the earth.' It was just nothing to me, it just didn't do anything for me, it was just them living their awful lives the way they see fit.

In order to connect with others in “real life” via reality television, it seems as though one has to also connect with the show. In order to connect with the show, assessments of the authenticity of the show have to be made. This determination of authenticity is necessary to determine that the show is socially relatable. Thus, to connect with a show, one has to make determinations of authenticity. In other words, one has to quest for the authentic elements.

Before turning to the final motivation, the quest for authenticity, I would like to briefly discuss the idea of interaction in reality television and connecting with others. van Zoonen (2001) in discussing connectivity through reality television argues that *Big Brother* was unique in offering up interactivity. In other words, the Internet platform provided by the show where people could watch footage of cast members 24/7 allowed for a stronger connection than shows without interactive components. Interactivity is increasingly common in reality television viewing and audience members are increasingly active in their viewing process. The social media site, Twitter has increased interactivity both directly and indirectly. Many shows have incorporated Twitter feeds into the programming which allows viewers to “live

tweet” to the show. Indirectly, many reality stars, particularly celebrity stars have twitter accounts that viewers can follow. Sarah discusses the draw of interactivity in this fashion, particularly in connecting with the show and participants.

The people you follow on Twitter, like Kim Kardashian for example, she can say whatever she wants and it's not, I don't know, it's not on TV but I feel like in giving, having the opportunity there to be able to reply to her makes it more connected like, if she were to actually read this or, you get to, instead of talking to your TV screen, you get to talk to them.

While not required, the potential avenue of reciprocity leads to a stronger connection to the show and participants and a more authentic feeling. Not to mention the benefits of having audience members willingly offer up valuable personal information such as their phone number or pay fees to engage in interactive discussions. Further, Twitter is thought to be a more direct interaction between the reality star and the audience member in that there are no mediating influences. Nicole and Natalie explain their draw to using Twitter in this way:

Nicole: You actually get the feeling of what they're actually thinking other than the bullshit you see in magazines...You know what I mean? It feels more real. To me it does. It's actually coming out of their mouths.

Natalie: It's more personal cause it's actually them saying it. You can actually tell if it's an actual celebrity cause they have verified the accounts so it's actually their tweets.

The Twitter platform has become a crucial place of interaction because unlike Facebook, you cannot create a site based on a celebrity or reality star, or anyone for that matter, without verifying your identity. Further, Nicole and Natalie also discuss their process of verification in that using the platform, individuals post status updates and pictures of their life. It is difficult, though not impossible, to continue posting on

the site as an “imposter” without getting “outed” pretty quickly by others, and often the stars themselves. Twitter, in promising more authentic interactions with stars, has been an important element of interactivity in reality television and in the experience of the genre.

The Quest for Authenticity

[You are] looking for where you can connect with them because you can feel their pain or their love or you know, those real human reactions that we all have. We don't all go to huge auditions or battle 25 other people to date this one person but we all know when someone is laughing their butt off or crying because they are homesick...you can identify with them and that's the quest for the authentic. [Maya]

Chapter two also outlines literature that discusses the quest for authenticity as a significant motivation for viewing. The idea is that authenticity is a major motivation for viewing in that audience members seek to verify the authenticity of shows and show participants. This is achieved through a process of watching over time and identifying “authenticating acts” (Rose and Wood 2005). The purpose of verifying authenticity is to determine if a person or show is trustworthy and consistent in their behavior (Dubrofsky 2011; 2007; Andrejevic 2006). The purpose in outlining the other three major motivations besides finding significant patterns for each in the qualitative data, was to also show that interviewees discussed these motivations in relation to authenticity. In other words, these other motivations are not realized unless the show and/or participant is determined to be authentic. Therefore, while all the other motivations are interrelated, the quest for authenticity appears to be a precursor for satisfying the other three.

Because authenticity was a major focus of the study, discussions of authenticity were common in the group interviews. It became clear that individuals were active in authenticity determinations while viewing and that at least part of this process was conscious. What I mean by this is that everyone I talked to had something to say on the topic of authenticity verification such that I concluded that they had consciously thought about their determinations of authenticity relating to the genre. Beyond active determinations, I concluded that respondents discussed authenticity verification along three interrelated patterns: checking claims of authenticity with other media forms, assessing the reality based on the structure of the show or comparisons with time, and comparing the situation with “real life.” It also became clear that respondents cared about the authenticity of a show and making accurate determinations, becoming upset when “duped.” An important finding in this work then is that audience members are engaging in at least a somewhat conscious process of authenticity verification that takes on what I have identified as three primary and interrelated forms of verification using resources, personal experiences, and understandings of the social world. Further, this process is important in maintaining savvy viewership for the purposes of satisfying other motivations for viewing. Finally, authenticity verification occurs on two levels, the authenticity of the show and the authenticity of participants. These determinations, like the process of verification are interrelated.

The Active Process of Authenticity Verification

Many of the general comments about authenticity with respect to the viewing process suggested that viewers are actively thinking about what is and what is not real during the process of viewing. When discussing the “reality” of shows or participants, interviewees often had lengthy responses about the authenticity of the person or show and could often come up with specific reasons for why they felt the person or show was real. In a discussion about *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, Nicole and Natalie believed that Kris Humphries was a genuine person:

Nicole: I only watched like three episodes and the three episodes I watched I didn't think he was really fake.

Natalie: I don't think he was really at all...

Nicole: I don't think he was fake during the whole thing. I thought he was genuine the whole time, like even when he joked around.

Natalie: Cause he was willing to work afterwards too, for like their marriage and she was just done. He was willing to reconcile and stuff and she just wanted a divorce.

Nicole: He seemed like a genuine person though. You can cut bullshit out of any type of situation if you really look at it. You can tell she's fake in some situations. But like him, he was just a genuine person.

Further, there were several examples of individuals employing processes of verification as discussed by Dubrofsky (2011; 2007) and Andrejevic (2006). For example, Rosalia discusses reality television as inauthentic because there is a lack of consistency of character when it comes to the presence of the camera.

Rosalia: Yeah, there's a phenomena [sic] it's like the Murphy phenomena, or some last name that starts with an "M" and the premise is that the act of observing changes it and you know, I know if like my dad was video taping us like a family video like, I manage myself a little differently because I'm on

camera. I make sure my hair looks good and I don't have anything in my teeth and stuff like that cause I don't want that recorded image of me to be inappropriate but yeah. Or even if you know how you might read aloud to yourself alone changes if you are in a classroom and you're asked to read. You know, there is more pressure, you have an audience, you have to be on your toes a little bit.

Lisa: Do you think that it changes behavior or that it makes it unreal?

Rosalia: I mean, if I'm managing myself more carefully than I would otherwise, I guess that it is technically like, less real

James also discusses the idea that the camera changes the consistency in our behavior and that this lack of consistency is a marker for a lack of authenticity.

James: There's just certain jokes I'm not going to say in front of my mom and there's certain jokes I'm not going to say in front of my friends that would make my mom laugh hysterically...it's the same concept. The second that camera flips on, the second someone turns on a recorder of any kind, you're...a different person, you're edited in some way, shape or form. Even if it's just a matter of you don't swear as much or you swear more.

Lisa: Could you say that acting differently around your mom or your friends is still part of who you really are?

James: I suppose you could say that but, person who I am acts the way I do in front of my mother and acts the way that I do in front of my friends but when I'm walking down the street in public in front of a bunch of strangers, I don't act either way. I keep my mouth shut and look ahead and do what I have to do and I don't behave that way.

What is interesting about this exchange is that James' definition of authentic is being consistent across different situations, something discussed by Dubrofsky (2007) as what we are striving for in authenticity verification. We are increasingly looking to prove consistency in our behavior across multiple spheres (roles) of our life. James believes that like switching roles, the presence of the camera influences how one will behave. In other words, the "presentation of self" should appear consistent with who

we authentically are. Unfortunately, when participants know they are being watched, they try to perform in a way that will prevent others from seeing things that would call their authenticity into question. As Dubrofsky (2011) argues, “a good RTV participant (one who gives off the impression of being authentic) behaves on RTV as he or she is imagined to behave in an un surveilled space” (p. 117), i.e. the back stage. For some respondents then, the only way to truly see authentic behavior was to see footage where those on camera were not aware of being watched.

Michael: I feel like that's the best way to get reality, you have to break the ethics...

Lisa: What do you mean 'break the ethics?'

Michael: like, not letting someone know that they're being monitored...that's how you get the most authentic...To get their true response, like the cameras will be randomly somewhere and then people, you can watch their reactions

The influence of the camera is just one of the ways that individuals are thinking about authenticity. Before discussing the major ways that authenticity is determined in reality television I want to briefly discuss the concept of influence in terms of defining authenticity. I think it is interesting that in defining the concept, many indicated that authenticity is being “uninfluenced” by others. In addition to the camera, authenticity verification was made on the basis of influences of money or fame, particularly in the case of the Kardashian-Humphries marriage discussed in the next chapter. What seems apparent from the interviews is that those moments that are determined authentic are those moments where the influence of other things, money, fame, the camera, are not present. However, individuals also engage in authenticity

verification through comparisons to real life, the structure of a show or time constraints, and they also utilize other media sources.

The Importance of Authenticity Verification

As I will continue stating throughout this section, authenticity is important in satisfying the other motivations for viewing. But authenticity is important because audience members want to appear to be “savvy viewers.” Because they connect with the show and its participants, engage in socially learning and voyeuristic pleasures, finding out that the show or the participant they believed was real is not acting authentically is a blow, both emotionally and to their ego. The response to the split of Kris Humphries and Kim Kardashian certainly lends credit to this. Individuals were still watching the wedding special on television, crying alongside the bride when they learned that the two were splitting. Discussions about the influence of money and fame sparked outrage in the form of lashing out via media and in boycotting “all things Kardashian.” In terms of my interviewees, several discussed instances where they had been “duped” by reality stars and were upset that they had turned out to be something or someone other than what they portrayed.

For example, Katy discusses her dismay upon finding out that her favorite reality couple on *Teen Mom* were really heavy partiers, an inconsistency from what was portrayed on the show. Because Kaitlyn and Tyler had influence who she was and were reality stars she felt connected to, she was particularly upset to find out that she had been duped.

One of my best friends from high school, one of her coworkers went to high school with one of the teen moms and she says, 'Oh they are bad kids. They're into drugs, they party.' I was like devastated...I felt like emotionally attached and I was like, I connected with her and that's not at all like how I am so then I'm like it was a false connection, like she's not like me at all!

Similarly, Michael discusses his favorite reality star, 'Hoops' from *Flavor of Love*, and how he was really into her until he found out that she had starred in a pornographic film.

One of the girls from Flavor of Love, Hoops, she was like so cool, cause she like played basketball and she was like a 'guy's girl' and then I found out she was a porn star and I was like, well...

The action of starring in an adult movie was inconsistent with how Michael understood her authentic self. When both Katy and Michael learned of these inconsistencies, they lost much of their fondness and connection and could no longer trust the representation the reality stars put forth. It seems then that audience members take care in making determinations of authenticity. This quest for authenticity encompasses multiple sources of information and types of assessment. It is a process that occurs over a period of time, reminiscent of Jones' (2003) "personalized reality contract."

The Quest for Authenticity: Alternative Media

*Oh my god! I couldn't believe it was true until I went online and looked it up.
[Mitch]*

As individuals interviewed discussed the process of authenticating reality television, they discussed a process of verification that encompassed multiple strategies. The first one that I want to discuss is the process where individuals looked

to other media sources to verify or refute a reality show participant's authenticity. It appears that reality television viewing is inextricably linked to news media. Many celebrity magazines and other news media spend much of their time reporting on reality stars and reality television shows giving viewers even more information about shows and their participants as well as a way to verify the authenticity of these individuals.

A few respondents discussed turning to alternative media once they became suspicious of the authenticity of an individual. Once Katy had heard that her favorite couple on *Teen Mom*, Tyler and Kaitlyn, were hiding the fact that they spent a lot of time partying from their viewers, she started checking around.

It was so strange and she was like, 'yeah, they're really not as nice as they seem and they're actually kind of jerks' and I was just like shocked and I kept watching the seasons and I just don't get it and then they came to Western and I was just like, 'They're just too friendly!' but as I was researching into a little more, she was like 'no they really were' [partying]. I looked up some information on one of the social media sites and there were pictures of her kind of like the Michael Phelps thing with like a bong. So she does fit that profile too. So it's very interesting. It's like, almost not real what you do know about them because they control what you are seeing.

While Katy, had used alternative media sources, notably social media, to verify authenticity after she had heard information that was inconsistent with her conceived notion of the authenticity of Kaitlyn and Tyler, others discussed using social media to come up with an assessment of authenticity. Tori would check other media to verify the identity of reality show participants after seeing them on the show. Here, she discusses the shortcomings of *True Life* in showing authentic individuals, despite the group's conclusions that the show served as the most real of reality shows.

Tori: I don't know what it is but they would just make it like a little guy who would seem like a workout, fitness renowned guy and you would look him up and he would be a nobody. But other times, it would be somebody who was like a big star that everybody would know so, it depends I would say.

Lisa: Do you ever fact check?

Tori: no.

Lisa: Like looking up the person?

Tori: Oh! Sometimes

Lisa: To see if they are actually real?

...

Tori: Yeah, if that's their fake names or real names, I look that up. I look up their background and everything!

As in much of this discussion about authenticity verification, the discussion in chapter seven around the break-up of Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries will expand on this notion of using alternative media as a quest for authenticity. As is clear from these responses, we have many means to seek out information to refute or verify what we see on television.

The Quest for Authenticity: Time and Structure Assessments

What was somewhat surprising or unexpected about this process was that many respondents discussed authenticity in terms of how the show was structured and the amount of time dedicated to a person or situation. Many considered documentary forms of shows to be the most realistic. Those that were more informational (National Geographic shows) or those that followed an individual for a single show instead of a

season (such as *Intervention*) were determined to be “more real.” For example, Jane when asked “what would be a more real reality show?” answered, “informational, like the *Drugs Inc.*, like the National Geographic type....” Further, Trevor links the “more real” reality television shows in his group discussion:

Lisa: So what about True Life?

Melanie: That's more like 90 or 100 [percent real]

Mitch: I would say that's pretty much real

Trevor: I think that's leaning more toward documentary

Those that followed individuals for a single episode were thought to be more real because there was “less influence” in terms of money and fame but more so that the show’s structure made more sense in the editing. A single episode featuring an individual is thought to portray reality just condensed whereas a series is thought to include those fantastic elements to make it exciting.

Katy: I think Intervention would be one of them that would be more real and then like, the Real Housewives series. I feel like that's more staged. They're getting endorsements, they don't always have all these fancy things, um, they get you know? So I think that's a little more false.

Many discussed the structure of the show as good indicators of whether or not it was real. Generally speaking, Tori uses the fact that there are moments where viewing is difficult to judge the authenticity of a show.

There's no stunt doubles or double takes. Like, 'can we shoot that one again?' That's why there's subtitles on the bottom if you don't see or hear what they say, then they're going to type it up.

If the show was more scripted then it would seem likely that producers would have the participants shoot the scene again so that the viewers had an easier time

understanding what was going on. Many did speculate that reality shows did just that. For example, James discusses the time that *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* came into town and the rumors circulated that the producers had the family “redo the reveal” because they were not satisfied with how the family reacted.

James: In my town there was a house that they actually got on Extreme Makeover, I was told, I didn't actually witness this but I was told that they did the reveal and someone did not like the family's reaction so they redid the reveal.

Lisa: Oh, really?

James: Small town, could have been tons of rumors. Maybe they started the bus and stopped and it was totally real, I don't really know but this is what I was told and it's, it just kind of loses its magic after that. Once you hear something like that. Like I thought that Home Extreme Makeover [sic] was a great show cause it was actually helping people, it wasn't something you were making people look foolish for.

Others discussed how they thought that shows portrayed things that were “too perfectly” set up because it was too enjoyable or suspect because the show was too well organized around a major plot. Tressa believes that the Kardashians are largely authentic but there are moments when she questions the authenticity of the show because they seem to document things so perfectly.

I really think that they are still a good family [Kardashians] and things like that, people say whatever they want to say but I think that you can tell that some stuff is staged and things like that cause how is it possible to catch everything on you know, camera...and have it all be hilarious and great so I think they kind of have to either stage things or redo something that happened to catch it and I think sometimes you can tell cause they don't seem as comfortable on the show.

Tori also examines the structure of the show to question authenticity.

Tori: Scripted, because like it a show's a genre of reality it's like there's a big main idea that the producers and the director give the cast and then whatever they say about that main idea...

Lisa: So if it was more real it wouldn't have a script?

Tori: There wouldn't be a big plot.

Most surprising to me were discussions about the mismatch of timing on these shows.

While respondents were eloquent and savvy in their discussions about reality television, one area they seemed to lack critical analysis was in how time was portrayed on the genre. Many reported skepticism about the authenticity of the show because the timing did not match up with real life. In a discussion with Rosalia, she indicates that she does not believe that the Kardashians are behaving authentically because many of their issues are brought up and resolved within the span of a single episode.

Rosalia: Another thing that really bothers me about the Kardashian show is that there will be like family, ah, like circumstances that will be resolved by the end of the episode that if it happened in real life that's a much bigger conversation than like a thirty minute drama about it.

Later she brings up an example:

They had an episode about the death of the original father. And they were like, 'oh boo hoo' and then they were like 'oh but we love you guys' and it was just all neatly wrapped up, the climax and the resolution in thirty minutes. I never like lost a father, I've never had paternity questions but I imagine if I did, it wouldn't take me a half hour to get over it.

Evey believes that *Teen Mom* is scripted for the same reason:

I think a lot of the times you know, the girls or like the parents or something will like bring up a situation that probably would have taken like months to draw out, you know? They'll be like, 'I'm tired of you living here, mooching off this person' and it's like typically, like you know I know people who have lived or mooched off others and typically it takes a couple of months before

like, they're like 'I'm done!' Whereas, it seems more like they are encouraged like, I don't know if maybe they are all just really outgoing people but it seems you know, a little more eager I guess to bring things up.

Not everyone lacked the savvy to see through the structure of the show in terms of time. A discussion with Maya and Katy illustrates that for many, it is not necessarily that they lack savvy viewership but rather in terms of the element of time, have not thought about it critically yet.

Katy: When you're watching you're not focusing on like, 'okay they've you know recorded 30 hours of footage and they're condensing it into 20 minute segments' so yeah, they are on vacation this week and they're going somewhere next week and that is reality because they did go there but they didn't do it all in one week or one episode but I'm not focusing on that. I'm like, 'wow their life is so awesome!'

Maya: And how many people notice that?

Katy: Yeah! I feel like before studying sociology I didn't focus on that and now I'm like I know this is condensed and I can realize that it is reality but also know that they pulled out the boring parts

Maya: Like some people can watch themselves watch reality TV shows where other people just watch reality TV. Does that make sense? Like we can be mindful of the way we're viewing it and say, 'okay' like you said, there probably was hours and hours and hours of footage condensed into this little bit.

The two seem to indicate that they are specially tuned into the illusion of time on the programming. Also, they allude to the idea that RTV is not particularly up front or explicit with how time is warped, condensed, or otherwise changed to fit the format of the show. What I find intriguing is that while those who were uncritical about time were critical about authenticity while Katy and Maya, critical of the manipulation of time, believed the content to be authentic.

The Quest for Authenticity: Comparisons with Real Life

Although I have discussed these ways of verification as separate entities, all verification seems to be rooted in comparisons to real life. How individuals understand the world influences what they believe to be authentic on reality television. In discussions about the quest for authenticity, this pattern was the most prominent. Many inferred that their determinations of authenticity were first triggered by their assessments of real life. In other words, they followed up with alternative media or questioned the structure of the show because their assessment of the event did not match up to real life. Francie, however, makes a more explicit connection between the different types of verification.

Francie: My favorite [RTV show] is Long Island Medium and it's probably not a popular one

Lisa: I've never heard of it

Francie: It's on TLC and I think I like it because it IS authentic. And I mean, she does, it's like about a medium obviously who...does group readings and individual readings and it's intense to watch and I cry every single episode but it makes them so happy

Lisa: So she talks to dead loved ones?

Francie: mmhmm. I believe in that stuff

Lisa: Okay.

Francie: and she goes on talk shows and she does real group readings in like, real life off camera so I feel like it's authentic and I love watching it.

Charles: I thought it was a pretty good show too. I don't watch it on as regular of a basis as she does but you know when you walk in the living room and you see that it's on you know...but, uh, I grew up in an old farm house in the farm country so I believe in that kind of stuff. Like, I woke up in the middle

of the night and heard a little girl laugh and you know, people walking up and down the stairs and just stuff like that.

For both Francie and Charles, *Long Island Medium* is an authentic show because they believe in ghosts and the afterlife. Francie however, also qualifies her claims by indicating that she's seen her on other talk shows and knows that she has a "real" practice outside of the show. Further, there is this element of having experienced the phenomenon portrayed that lend credit to its authenticity. In another interview, Katy talks about how she believes *Dance Moms* to be authentic because she was in dance as a child.

I guess the one [RTV show] I would get rid of is Dance Moms. I just can't stand when she's yelling constantly but I know, I can identify with that cause I was in dance when I was little and was pulled out because my mom didn't like the way the coach interacts with...

Experience was also used to question the authenticity of the show. Jane, a teen mom herself, questions the authenticity of the interaction between the pregnant teen and her friends because she had a much different experience during her pregnancy.

Jane: Well, I think it's funny when they're talking to their friends. I feel like those are kind of staged.

Evey: Oh, those are always kinda staged looking

Jane: Oh yeah, cause you don't ever see their friends until they have these heart-to-heart conversations with them and I feel like my friends...

Evey: Like how many heart-to-heart conversations do you have like, during a pregnancy or something?

Jane: If you were having heart-to-heart conversations with people that you don't hang around with

Evey: You know you would probably know anyways cause you were a teen mom. I mean I don't think someone has that many, like...

Jane: I was really, I wasn't very proud of it. To me, it was like, 'I can't believe this is happening' like I would have never gone on a show like that. I didn't really like to talk about—I actually had like no friends, bad time in my life—but, I don't know. But I do think that their friendship things are staged cause you just never see their friends until they're having these conversations.

Both Jane and Evey think that the structure of the show in only showing the friends during emotional conversations, makes the series seem scripted. Jane also brings in her personal experience while Evey compares to what she imagines would happen in that situation to question the authenticity. In a later example, Evey discusses another element of *Teen Mom* she believes to be scripted because she believes it to be inconsistent with real life.

I think with like, Macy and her baby daddy, that he and his family are filing for like co-dependency or whatever, like an equal agreement where it would be 50-50. In most cases, especially for a child that young, like that probably wouldn't be the situation but like, they kind of like staged those conversations where he's like talking to his parents like, getting more custody stuff or how he doesn't think that Macy's not doing something right, you know? It's just kind of like, whereas in like a lot of situations that probably wouldn't be the case. Or like, someone like a lot of guys probably wouldn't even push for that just because of the judicial system but I think that just because of the situation he's in that he's encouraged to do that.

Many also gauged authenticity similar to Evey's assessment in comparing elements of the show to their stated expectations of reality. Trevor, in discussing Mike D's behavior on a particular episode of *Jersey Shore* believes it to be scripted because he cannot imagine anyone ever doing that.

I kind of think it was fake. Who would head butt a wall? A Concrete wall?

Later, the group discusses a more realistic or authentic interaction on *Jersey Shore*.

Tori: What was the one with Snooki where they played a joke on her and they were all drinking and she had something on her face and no one told her?

Mitch: Oh yeah...

Tori: ...They were like playing a drinking game and like...

Mitch: You heat up the bottom of the can you put it like...

Tori: Oh yeah, you touch your forehead!

Mitch: Yeah, yeah you touch your forehead

Tori: You go around and you drink and you touch one person's part of their body and you like, you have a lighter underneath the can and you have like a black soot finger so like when the person next to Snooki touched her and rubbed it on her face like, no one told her and they just kept playing

Mitch: Cause I think that would happen to anyone of us. So that part is real.

In another discussion, Nicole discusses how *Teen Mom* is scripted because she believes that the reaction in real life to a pregnant teen would prevent the show from even existing.

I wouldn't have even gotten to the labor room. My mom would have ripped it out of me as soon as I told her like, 'I'm preg— ' nothing. My mom would kill me. That's reality. That is reality. The Teen Mom show, that's not reality. My mom would beat my ass. That's reality. Seriously, would your mom not freak out on you? Like these parents are like, 'Oh you're pregnant! Baby Shower!' No. My mom would be like, 'Get the hell out of my house.'

While it is unclear where these “real life” expectations or comparisons come from, at least one respondent discussed how his experience growing up Italian is inconsistent with the portrayal of Italians on reality television, particularly with *Jersey Shore*.

I remember one episode [of Jersey Shore] which was pretty much the last time I ever watched the show. They were at a bar and some guy at the bar punched one of the girls in the face.... I grew up in an Italian family. You are not going to survive that, if you do that in front of other people. And the guys just stood there and did nothing.

Many others discussed having ambiguous “knowledge” about societal expectations. Some hinted that it may be from doing past research or knowing someone who knows about such a thing and for others, they stated these expectations as “facts” from long-term observations about the world or as if it was common social knowledge, a product of socialization.

One final interesting pattern that emerged from discussions about authenticity related to celebrities. In several discussions issues surrounding reality dating shows arose and I found it interesting and confusing that individuals indicated being okay with celebrity dating reality shows but not with regular people reality dating shows. As the talk moved into determinations of authenticity, it became clearer that the tolerance for celebrity dating shows was higher because it was thought to be more normal for celebrities to engage in that type of behavior.

Evey: I don't know, just like those kind of shows in general, you know? They're put in this expectation of the role and that's what they're trying to fulfill and it's the same thing when you watch something like The Bachelorette or The Bachelor. Like, you know, The Bachelor the girls try to be as like, sweet and nice and likeable as possible, they're like putting themselves into a role to try and like appease both the guy and the audience you know? Compared to like, I think it's a little different if you are already famous and then you just get a show cause you're already famous.

Lisa: So you're saying that celebrities are more real on reality television?

Evey: I'm saying their situations are certainly more real...it seems more like applicable to me that like, a celebrity would go to this really big party and then like, act like a lunatic you know? I don't know that just seems like a more logical situation to me

She further illustrates that even the everyday interactions of the contestants on celebrity dating shows are more realistic because it makes more sense that these girls

(or guys) would be competing for the love of a celebrity than a regular person.

Similar to the idea that authenticity is defined by everyday expectations or normative expectations, the more fantastic elements of reality television are thought to be more consistent with celebrity lifestyles.

Another element to this line of discussion was that Evey points out that it is different for someone who is already famous to get a show than someone who is not famous to be on one. The influence of RTV and what one can achieve when going on the show is certainly taken into consideration when assessing the reality or authenticity of the genre and the participants of the shows. This has been a theme mentioned in much of the discussion thus far that will be elaborated upon as I turn to the next chapter on the case of Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries.

Conclusion

The quest for authenticity is a process of verification using multiple means including alternative media, an assessment of the structure of the show and understandings (or lack thereof) of time as it is portrayed, and most importantly, comparisons to real life. It appears that the assessments through other media and the structure of the show are dependent on our understanding of the social world. From responses it is clear that not only do we compare reality television events, participants, and whole shows to our personal experiences but also our second-hand knowledge of the world as well as our “imagination” of how the world is supposed to be. Thus, socialization processes and understandings of norms and mores play a predominant role in our understanding of what is authentic and inauthentic in terms of

reality television participants and shows. In the next chapter, I use the case of Kris Humphries and Kim Kardashian to further develop these themes of authenticity verification and the argument that we rely on surveillance practices to verify authenticity in order to satisfy other desires related to viewing RTV.

CHAPTER VII

THE DEVIANT CASE OF KIM AND KRIS

The demise of the marriage between reality television star, Kim Kardashian and her then husband and NBA player, Kris Humphries, occurred as I was writing up the proposal for the dissertation project. The news of the couple's split came only 72 days after their wedding, which was still being aired on television. Newsstands had recently released magazines with the couple's wedding and honeymoon photos now juxtaposed with breaking news headlines of the split. The reaction from fans was instant and fierce with many voicing their outrage at the Kardashian family and Kim in particular, and boycotting many of the family's shows and products. Further, news media was quick to start speculating about the authenticity of the couple's union and the legitimacy of the couple's union was quickly and fiercely called into question.

A case involving the verification of authenticity could not have been timelier and I sought to include audience members' reactions to the dissolution of the marriage to shed more light on the process of determining authenticity through a case where authenticity is called into question. One of the reasons this case proved to be so well suited to this study was that news of the split came only weeks prior to the premiere of the second season of *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, a spinoff of the reality show, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, where the main "characters" are Kim Kardashian and her older sister Kourtney. The taping of the show overlapped

with Kim and Kris' first and last days married and previews for the show promised a front row to the demise of the marriage. Viewers expressed excitement to tune in to watch it play out, partially for the drama but also to determine what they believed about the marriage and its failure, and the overall authenticity of the relationship itself.

Data Collection

The case involving Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries played a role in both methods of data collection. I asked several questions within the survey about the split that was predicated on a contingency question of whether they were following the news of the impending divorce. Those that were familiar with the events of the unraveling marriage were asked to answer several questions about the couple including their perception of how real the marriage was and who deserved the blame. Respondents were also asked about the reality show, *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, including whether they had watched the show and if the show had changed their perception of the authenticity of the marriage.

Although I had designed the qualitative interview sessions to include specific groups familiar with the Kardashian family, the reality shows related to the family, and the ending of the marriage between Kim and Kris, every group interview session included discussions about the marriage. It seemed as though everyone was at least somewhat aware or knew of the family, the divorce, and many of the shows. While the conversations within the interviews were unique to each session, every group was

asked about their perception of the reality of the couple's marriage and how they had come to these conclusions.

As discussed in chapter four, I also supplemented the data from the survey and interview portions with discussions on message boards and forums surrounding the show *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*. The Internet provides an excellent source of commentary about reality television, and is often the only place to get instant reactions to events. Announcements via media of the split between the couple aired on October 31, 2011. The survey was distributed in March of 2012, following the season finale of *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*. Qualitative Interviewing began in October of 2012 and concluded in December 2012, a full year following the announcement of the split. While the divorce proceedings were still making front-page headlines, at least in gossip and celebrity news magazines, the shock and outrage following the announcement had passed. Supplementing data from the Internet is meant to provide more timely reactions to the event.

In the coming pages, I will outline the findings from the quantitative portion of the survey that include perceptions of the authenticity of the union and the popularity of the show. The qualitative and supplemental data will be presented to show that the process of questing for and verifying authenticity as discussed in chapter six is consistent with how audience members were determining the authenticity or lack thereof, of the marriage between Kim and Kris. In other words, audiences use other media, timing and structure, and comparisons with real life to ultimately determine whether they believe the marriage was real or not.

Survey Data: Basic Viewing Practices and Perceptions of Authenticity

I asked several questions within the survey regarding the split between Kris and Kim. Slightly more than a quarter (28.8%) of the respondents taking the survey indicated that they were following the news and knew about the break-up (Table 22). Those who reported following the news were asked to answer several other questions including how real they perceived the marriage to be (on a scale between 1 and 10). Of those following the case, 67% reported that they believed the marriage to be less than half real (under 5). 16.1% believed the marriage was completely fake, and 2.7% believed that the marriage was absolutely real. Most believed that at least part of the

Table 22. “Have You Followed News of the Divorce between Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries?”

NEWSKARD					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	90	28.7	28.8	28.8
	NO	212	67.5	67.9	96.8
	I DON'T KNOW	10	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	312	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.6		
Total		314	100.0		

marriage was fake (97.3%). Table 23 outlines the frequencies for each answer and Figure 3 shows the distribution of the curve. As you can see, there is much dispersion across the categories for this particular question.

The mean of the responses is 4.13 and the median is 4 indicating a normal distribution. The mode for this question was 6 (17.0%) although 1 and 3 both garnered 16.1% of the responses. Responses along the lower half of the scale were more common and pretty evenly distributed (See Figure 3). It is clear that very few respondents believed the marriage to be completely real indicating that, similar to reality television, the marriage between Kim and Kris was a mixture of reality and fiction and if the mean is any indication, slightly more fake than real.

I also asked respondents who they believed was responsible for the dissolution

Table 23. “How Real Do You Think the Marriage Was?”

		Marriage Real?			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1	18	5.7	16.1	16.1
	2	16	5.1	14.3	30.4
	3	18	5.7	16.1	46.4
	4	11	3.5	9.8	56.3
	5	13	4.1	11.6	67.9
Valid	6	19	6.1	17.0	84.8
	7	9	2.9	8.0	92.9
	8	3	1.0	2.7	95.5
	9	2	.6	1.8	97.3
	10	3	1.0	2.7	100.0
	Total	112	35.7	100.0	
Missing	System	202	64.3		
Total		314	100.0		

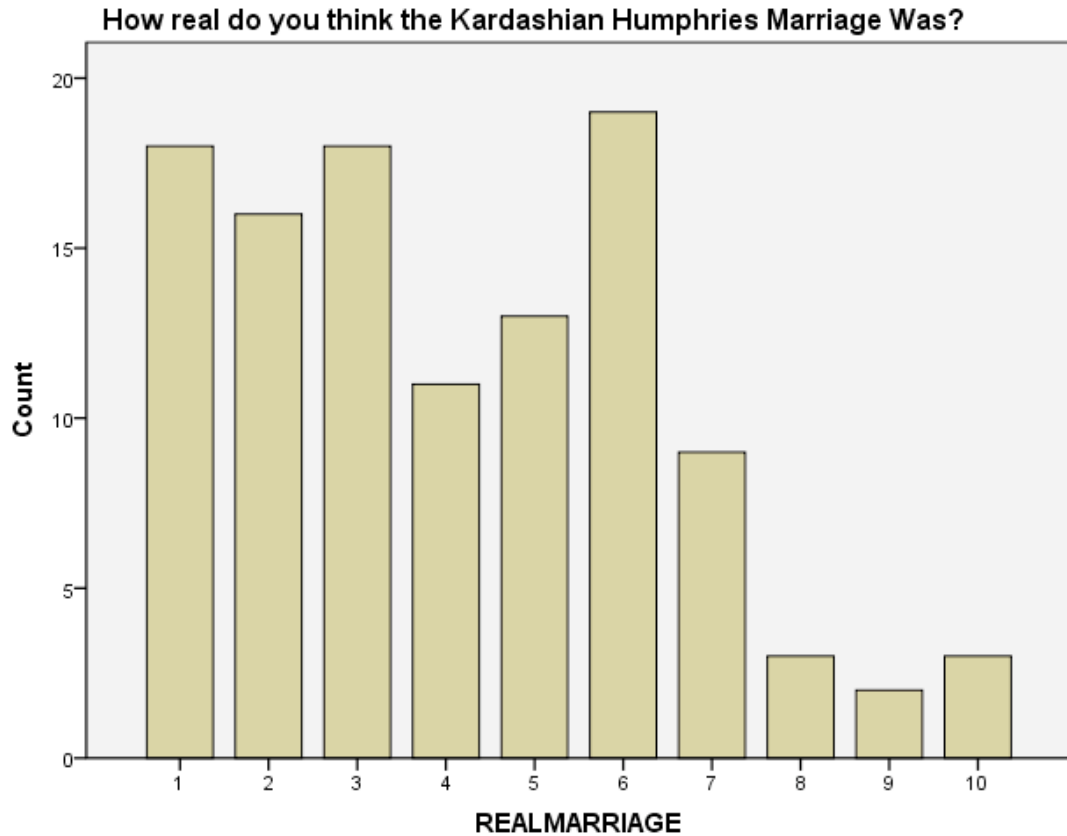


Figure 3. Perceptions of Authenticity Regarding the Kardashian-Humphries Marriage

of the relationship (Table 24). The majority of respondents, 59% believed that both deserved the blame. Of those who believed that the responsibility fell on a single individual, 27.4% believed that Kim Kardashian was to blame while only 2.6% believed that it was Kris Humphries' fault. A few responded that they believed the demise of the marriage was the fault of Kim's mom, Kris Jenner.

Table 24. “Who is to Blame for the Dissolution of the Marriage?”

		BLAME			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	KIM KARDASHIAN	32	10.2	27.4	27.4
	KRIS HUMPHRIES	3	1.0	2.6	29.9
	BOTH DESERVE BLAME	69	22.0	59.0	88.9
	NEITHER DESERVE BLAME	5	1.6	4.3	93.2
	OTHER	8	2.5	6.8	100.0
	Total	117	37.3	100.0	
Missing	System	197	62.7		
Total		314	100.0		

Tuning in for Authenticity: Kourtney and Kim Take New York

*The ratings are good because people are truly curious about what could be worthy of a divorce after 72 days. At least that’s why I’m watching.
[Anonymous Message Board Post—RealityTVWorld.com]*

Survey respondents were also asked about their viewing habits regarding the second season of *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*. As the forum post above alludes to, the season was advertised as a look into the demise of the marriage and many tuned in (highest rated season premiere in the family’s history) to get a glimpse into the marriage to determine what had gone wrong. Of those who took the survey, 27.1% had watched the show (the survey was distributed less than a month after the season finale). The majority believed that the show did not sway their preconceived

opinion about the marriage (69.9%). However, an equal percentage of respondents believed that it had swayed their opinion (15.1%) or that they were unsure whether they felt differently after watching (15.1%).

For those who did feel as though the show changed how they felt about the marriage, I asked them to describe, in an open-ended question, how their opinion had been changed. Interestingly, those who had changed their view about the authenticity of the marriage discussed their views in terms of feeling that the marriage was real. There was also the sense that the show was able to show them that personality differences between the two and some poor decisions on both their parts had caused the resulting split. For example, one respondent explained that “Kim just gave up, she did not really try and change for Kris while Kris was a dick and tried to be in charge of everything. They were just not meant to be. Both deserve the blame.” Others had switched to blaming just one of the two: “It showed how ridiculous Kim K. is” or “At first I thought it was Chris’s [sic] fault but after [seeing the two] together I can tell she’s annoying and they just don’t match.” Further, there were statements of sympathy: “I totally understand Kim’s reasons for the divorce and I almost feel bad for her.”

However, there were also those who had gone the other direction. One respondent indicated that after watching the show, they determined that the marriage was “more staged/fake.” Others were still in a process of determining the authenticity of the marriage, skeptical of what they had seen. One respondent discussed this in terms of the potential influence: “It seems like it was because Kim was unhappy but

there's still a part about money hidden.” In other words, this respondent saw the show and felt that Kim's unhappiness largely led to the split. However, these respondents also recognized that they had originally thought that money had influenced the two to stage a wedding and have not totally let go of this potential influence. Consistent with how respondents defined authenticity, this respondent and many others judged authenticity on the potential for outside influences.

There was a notable shift on the message boards/forums once the second season of *Kourtney and Kim Take New York* premiered. Prior to the start of the show many of the posts were negative statements about how “fake” and “staged” the marriage was, once the show got going, much of the discussion turned to assessments of the behavior of Kim and Kris and how it spoke to the end of their marriage. While there were some that still believed the marriage to be totally fake, others discussed how the show in portraying their interactions and personalities, provided some legitimate context for the demise of the marriage. For example, one entry discussed a particular instance where Kim got upset with Kris for being too rough with her:

I'm sooo not a fan of Kim's but I think Kris H. is just a big bully...and WAY, way too physical with the tiny Kim.... Kris H. needs to get himself under control and stop with the roughhousing...It speaks volumes to his passive-aggressive, control-freak personality...Regardless of the media-circus wedding, I'm glad Kim got out when she did.

Another response placed the blame on Kim, rather than Kris stating: “Kris seemed fine, if not immature. Kim and Kourtney are harpy shrews. I'd dump them if I were the men.” Other responses alluded to how they tuned into the show to make determinations: “I watched the stupid first show just to see what was up. Totally fake,

all the way around. Now I'm done for good." Further, over time forum posts took into account major developments in the show to continue negotiating how real or fake the marriage was and who or what was to blame for its demise. It was clear from reading through these forums that individuals were tuning in to get a better understanding of the marriage and whether it was real or fake despite many who claimed that the show was going to "edit in favor of Kim" or portray the unraveling of the relationship on Kris Humphries.

The Quest for Authenticity: The Case of Kim and Kris

As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, despite having selected certain participants into a "Kardashian Group" to serve as the primary discussants of the split, conversations of the marriage came up in all but the third group (out of eight). It became clear that most everyone had knowledge of the demise of the marriage, Kris Humphries, the Kardashian family, and had some significant things to say about their opinions of each. All but two of the groups believed the marriage to be fake, and one group was split. In all of the discussions, determinations of the reality of the marriage were made through the three types of authenticity verification outlined in chapter six including turning to alternative media, assessing the structure of the show and the timing of events, and comparisons to real life or what would really happen. Further, justifications for why the two had staged the marriage were blamed on influences of fame/publicity and money. Basically, those that thought the marriage fake indicated that they believed the union and its dissolution to be inconsistent with real life and largely motivated by the publicity, fame, and wealth

garnered from the “stunt.” Those that believed the marriage to be real, believed the union to be consistent with real life and that the two did not gain financially or in publicity.

A Note about Influence

The potential motivations, or influence, surrounding the supposed staging of the marriage was discussed quite extensively in the forums and interviews. This is likely due to the fact that the media was quite vocal in speculating about the influence of money and publicity in terms of the “fabricated marriage.” It appears from the conversations I had with participants that part of the determinations of authenticity were made through understanding the potential influence in being inauthentic. This makes sense given that many respondents defined authenticity as being “uninfluenced by others.” Thus, if there were ulterior motives to any particular action, that action could be labeled as suspect.

Francie and Charles talked about the influence in terms of the publicity. They believed that the marriage was staged because the Kardashian’s needed something to bring in viewers:

Charles: I think it’s a sham. I think it was just a publicity stunt to get.. more ratings because who wants to see them like sitting in their D-A-S-H all day, their new store, and watch them drive around and just kind of have like inter-family issues.

Francie: Well I think it was just for ratings.... I know people said that like what are the odds that her marriage starts to end at the end of one season. At the beginning of another season its why it ended and then the end of that season she started dating Kanye. So you’re gonna watch the next season to find out what happens with that.

The marriage was just part of an elaborate storyline for the purposes of garnering ratings for their show. In the same sense that interviewees felt that publicity was the key to the staged feature of the Kim and Kris marriage, Natalie and Nicole believed that Kim and Kanye's relationship was a publicity stunt to garner them both more attention in the media. Finally, the comparison of Kim and Kris' short-term marriage to other celebrities' similar situation yielded more evidence for the idea that the union was thought to be inauthentic because of the motivation for more fame. James perhaps illustrates it best when he says:

Wouldn't that be evidence pointed to that it was scripted because if these same short marriages are happening with other celebrities and they are keeping it hush hush and not letting the public know exactly what is going on and they are trying to hide as much, and these two just, all of it's out on the table. Nothing was censored with that...and so that would just point to...its being scripted.

Further, Elliot (within the same discussion) made a key distinction between Kim and Kris and celebrities in why the media attention from the marriage would be beneficial to Kim and Kris but perhaps not to other celebrities: "Reality TV stars make their money directly off sensationalism. And uh, publicity. Where Hollywood stars don't necessarily. They get paid by movie."

While publicity and fame were consistent themes through each of these conversations, the influence of money was a strong pattern throughout the discussions of the authenticity of the marriage. In general, interviewees were skeptical of any reality star's authenticity if money or fame was a significant draw to the programming. That the media also questioned the motives surrounding Kim and Kris'

marriage in that they received a large sum of money from selling the rights to their wedding and honeymoon videos and photos, many also questioned the legitimacy of their union based off the fact that they were paid so much as a result. In all of the conversations I had about the marriage, money was brought up as a sign that the marriage (or Kim's current relationship with Kanye) was fake. The following statement from Josh I feel best illustrates that money is thought to be the line where real behavior or authenticity ends:

I think they're all real people [the Kardashians] and I think a lot of the stuff they go through on the show is real but I think that they just all have a price...they all have a price and they all can be bought, everything. They know that it's not right [faking situations] but when he [Ryan Seacrest, producer] hikes up the price, I think that they do it.

The Quest for Authenticity: Turning to Alternative Media

Much of the speculation about the influence of money and publicity came from media reports. There was certainly no shortage of publicity following the announcement that the two had severed their relationship. This perhaps explains why groups that claimed to watch little to no reality television and to not have followed the Kardashian family knew about the break up and had a lot to say on the topic. In fact, James, a self-declared "abstainer" from reality television, discusses how he could not get away from the media surrounding the break-up between Kim and Kris:

Most consensus that I can hear is that it was all staged. It was staged from the quick marriage to the quick divorce and all the aftermath after. There was a, I typically skipped over these in my Yahoo! Searches but um, it was, they [news media] were cracking jokes about how short their marriage was.

James talked often in our discussion about how he would pull up the Internet and Yahoo! would bombard him with stories about reality television, particularly about Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries. It appears that the news media were particularly influential in molding judgments about the authenticity of the marriage in sensational headlines regarding the shortness of the marriage, the fact that the wedding special was still airing, and injecting speculation regarding motives of wealth and fame into reasons behind a “fake wedding.” Charles and Francie speak to this influence in their discussion of Kim and Kris.

Lisa: So, do you think that there are people who think that it's [the marriage] real?

Charles: There are probably some

Francie: People who don't read anything on the Internet

Their discussion indicates that many got their information from media sources outside of the reality shows the couples were associated with. Further, it was their understanding that the media had concluded that the relationship was fake. Later, they discuss more specifically, how the media influenced their opinions about the authenticity of the marriage:

France: Well I think that, I mean if it wasn't talked about so much in the media, I probably wouldn't have thought twice about it

Charles: And you actually, I've started to see like little...advertisements you know, on the side, like something for E! E! News, 'Kim does this or this' or 'The season premiere starts then' so it's just kind of you know,

Francie: In your face

Charles: Yeah, in your face a bit

While Charles and Francie discuss alternative media sources as more of a passive, receiving of information in determining authenticity, a process they are nearly forced to undertake, others discuss an active pursuit of verification from alternative media to make determinations of authenticity. In many discussions, the newer relationship between Kim and Kanye West was discussed in comparison to her marriage with Kris. Tori and Trevor believe the Kanye and Kim relationship to be true because unlike her relationship with Kris, Kim talks extensively about Kanye, and Kanye references Kim in many of his songs (as well as in other areas).

Lisa: So what makes that relationship [Kim and Kanye] real and Kris Humphries fake?

Tori: I see her more on social media about Kanye than ever Kris

Trevor: and he references her in every one of his songs

Tori: and every single instagram twit pic for her, same for him...like there's pictures of them on Halloween together. I didn't see one picture of her and Kris unless it was in the tabloids on any of her social media

On the other hand, Natalie and Nicole assert that they believe Kanye and Kim's relationship to be false because they have not seen any pictures of them in the media or social media.

Natalie: The only picture I saw was them, and she was a mermaid and he was a sailor for Halloween but they were displaced in the photo. They weren't together.

Nicole: There's a photo of them holding hands in a magazine but I've never seen a kiss, not one kiss. Even when they were doing the commercial for the MTV awards, she was laying down and he was sitting. They weren't like touching, they were like, 'Hey! Tune on in to the MTV Awards.'

In many of the posts within the forums for the show, *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, individuals referenced alternative media in making the case for the authenticity or inauthenticity of the marriage. For example, many brought attention to an article posted by TMZ that claimed that Kris Humphries was calling fraud.

According to TMZ, Kris H wants an annulment claiming fraud

Such a clear-cut opinion within the news media does not mean that the claim was free from speculation or argument. In a later post on the same thread another poster brought up the article:

I read that too but I still say Kris was in on this stunt wedding from the beginning. I also read he's claiming fraud as the reason. I think the fraud part comes from Kim telling Kris they would stay together for a year to make the marriage look legit and then divorce but she changed up without telling him and kicked him out after 72 days.

While still agreeing with the conclusion that the marriage was staged, this individual argues that the fraud is not so clear-cut and that there is much to determine surrounding claims of inauthenticity. There were several examples of using alternative media sources to argue against conclusions posited. For example, there was much discussion on the boards surrounding an incident where Kim had accused Kris of being “too rough” with her to the point of messing up her pedicure and hurting her toe. In response, she punched him in the chest. This particular interaction received a lot of speculation from audience members and much of the conversation brought in the news media’s take on the situation. For example, one respondent discusses a segment with Dr. Drew:

I was on cnn.com just a while ago, and Dr. Drew is saying that there was some kind of domestic violence incident on the show. They kept replaying this 2-second slow mo clip of Kim punching Kris H. in the chest, and then he grabs her arms to stop her from hitting him again and then lets go. I didn't watch the entire episode so I have no idea what context this 'incident' happened, but it looked to me like they were both laughing.

Alternative media as a tool for verifying authenticity is used in a complexity of ways.

For some, conclusions by other sources, notably news media, influences how they feel about a particular situation or person. Many felt that the marriage was fake because the news media had been candid in its assertions that the couple's union was staged for the purposes of making money and gaining publicity. For others, the media was used to determine consistency across multiple platforms. The conversation with Tori and Trevor illustrates that alternative media, particularly social media sites, are used to determine the authenticity. In this particular case, these two were looking to see that Kim and Kanye were engaging in "typical" couple behaviors, i.e. posting pictures of each other and talking about one another. For Natalie and Nicole, the two did not pass the test. For Tori and Trevor, they were convinced of the couple's authenticity. Finally, alternative media is seemingly used in authenticity verification to contend a particular viewpoint. Not everyone agreed with conclusions made about the couple within the news media and many used the examples from the media to discuss alternative or contradictory viewpoints.

The Quest for Authenticity: Assessing Time and Structure

As discussed in the last chapter, a pattern that emerged from the qualitative data with regard to authenticity verification was an assessment of time as it was

portrayed through reality television. Further, interviewees were critical of the structure of the show and used characteristics to refute or confirm authenticity. While this was not as prominent of a pattern, there were indications that audience members within the forums and in the qualitative interviews used these two aspects of RTV to make determinations of authenticity.

The most common discussion surrounding the authenticity of the marriage between Kim and Kris was the timing of the engagement, marriage, and break-up with regards to the structure of the show. The engagement occurred at the end of one season, the marriage led into another season, and the break-up occurred right before the season premiere of the New York spin-off show. Many, in discussing the reasons for faking the wedding, talked about how conveniently placed the break-up was in garnering more viewers for the show. For example, one forum participant writes: “This whole wedding and divorce are conveniently placed between the end of one show, and the season premiere of the other. KONspiracy [sic] theories, anyone?”

Further, many question the authenticity of the show because Kim and her mother have so much control over the editing and production. One forum post alludes to this and that they received this information from the news media:

The entertainment shows are saying Kim, who has a lot of editorial control over the show, is editing herself to look good and Kris bad.

Another post further down, discusses that they believe that the wedding was staged but that the timing of the divorce was not planned prior to scripting the second season of the New York show.

My take is that the divorce wasn't planned when this was scripted. They've been using Scott as the villain and Kourtney leaving him as a by now tired storyline forever. It's so super duper fake, but I guess they couldn't come up with any better ideas so in spite of Kourtney and Scott getting along great at the end of last season they brought it back again...so Kourtney kicking him to the curb and Kim settling in to her marriage seem to be the major plot this far. I'm sure they had planned to wrap it up with some cheesy 'now we've learned to get along' sentiment. I really think the divorce took them by surprise.

For this audience member then, the focus on the sister and brother in law, inconsistent with previous seasons where they were back to getting along, was put in to provide drama to the show. Had they known about the divorce when they started taping, the structure of the storyline would be much different, with a specific focus on Kim and Kris as the major dramatic storyline. As discussed in the last chapter, less structured shows were seen as more authentic and shows with neatly set up storylines were determined to be less authentic.

While there was little discussion about time in the forum posts, the concept of the portrayal of time did show up here and there. For example, one respondent believes that the time frame in one episode was actually edited down to appear as though Kris Humphries had overreacted to “antics” from Kim and Kourtney and decided to leave for Minnesota right away.

As abrasive as Kris H. can be..I actually felt bad for him the entire trainwreck of an episode. I have a feeling the time frame throughout this episode was over a few days and all the Kardashian antics actually made him jet off to Minnesota.

While much of the discussion around time in the qualitative interviews had to do with a lack of critically assessing editing in RTV, some do discuss the reality of time in contradiction to what is portrayed on the show. Interestingly, these discussions tend to

view the authenticity of the situation more favorably than those who do not critically assess the edited and unrealistic portrayal of time within the genre.

The Quest for Authenticity: Comparisons with Real Life

Of course, both of these sources for determining authenticity are related to how the audience member understands real life. Alternative sources of media and assessments of the structure and time portrayals of the show are pieces of the puzzle that are compared to what is determined to be feasible or realistic in “real life.” In other words, the authenticity of the marriage was judged primarily by whether the union and the actions leading up to the wedding and resulting split, were consistent with what respondents believed would happen in real life. Evey compared the timeline of the demise of the relationship to assess the reality of the marriage:

I think that's the problem too...I mean, really, a month? Two months? You didn't even try. I mean like most couples go through like a whole six months of therapy and then like, a two to like six-month separation period before they even get, it's like a full year-long process of getting divorced. You don't just like get divorced!

For Evey then, the relationship must have been staged because they gave up way too quickly. Her conception of reality is that people take time to decide to divorce. That Kim and Kris did not go through what she thought was a normal process of splitting up, she determined that the relationship was fake.

Rosalia, in responding to Evey's claim that a quick divorce was unrealistic, countered that she believed that the two were behaving authentically because she had experience with this happening in real life:

I mean, some people do. I know, I was like a director of staff at a house for runaway youth and like, this one client's parents like a week later [after marrying] were like, 'we made a huge mistake, we can't be married.' So like, I don't know, maybe [it's for real]. What were their reasons for or his reasons or whoever initiated it?

Rather than believe it was scripted because of the hasty split, Rosalia, because of her experience with this happening, was more interested in understanding the reasons behind the decision in order to make her determinations. Once she learned that they had had a short courtship prior to getting engaged, and then a whirlwind engagement period, she concluded that it only made sense that they split so soon:

I'm not surprised to hear that a couple who's only been dating for a month and they're like, 'let's get married!' It's not surprising that they're going to be like, 'I don't really know who you are and now that I'm seeing you, I don't really like who you are.'

Similar to Rosalia, Tessa who believed the marriage to be real despite other group members concluding that the relationship had been scripted, had determined the authenticity of the union through her own comparisons to real life. She claimed that the two had just made some poor decisions and rushed into a marriage. A self-proclaimed "long-term follower" of the family, she asserted that Kim's typical behavior was to fall in love quickly and rush into things, as people sometimes do. Further, the wedding special and some of the episodes of *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* and *Kourtney and Kim Take New York* showed, in her eyes true and relatable emotions that are typical on wedding days and difficult to stage:

I think that they just got into it too fast cause I watched the wedding part...and it was like, she had you know her three dresses...but she had like her dad who has died, she had like his shirt cut and put into each of her dresses and stuff like that...I would like to think that people are a little bit better than that and

just like I said, when I saw the emotional aspect of it, I think there's only so much you can fake.

The overlapping of determinations made from comparing to real life and also to what is seemingly consistent for a particular person, here Kim, was a common theme among discussions about authenticity in the interviews as well as posts on the forum. For example, one forum post discusses the inconsistency of Kris Humphries compared to other men Kim has dated as proof of the inauthenticity of their marriage:

Look at the prior men in Kim's life and look who she picked to get 'married' to. C'mon guys Kris is nothing like any of them. There is no way two people can be engaged for months and never talked about where they would live, children, etc. BEFORE walking down the aisle, especially with them both having active and high profile careers.

While Tessa saw behavior that was consistent with Kim's character, others in the forum posts believed that this behavior was inconsistent with what they had seen. Further, this post also illustrates the inconsistency they see with "real life" where people tend to talk about important aspects of life such as future career directions, whether or not to have children, and where they will live.

Later on, Tessa also discussed how she understood why Kim left the marriage and how she would have done the same thing. First, she believed that Kris was not considerate of Kim being a "modern woman" who is not on the same page with his life plan of moving to Minnesota and starting a family and also, that he verbally abused her and was all around unkind. She claims, "If my husband or anybody did that, no! Or if he said half the things he said to her, at least on the show, no!" For Tessa, Kris' constant remarks to Kim about "no one caring about her in 10 years" and flying off the handle at her for various things would have been a deal breaker in her

own life. She understood the marriage and the split to be real because she could see herself making the same decision.

While Tessa believed that Kris was in the wrong, Natalie believed that Kim was the reason for the demise of the marriage. She claimed that the marriage was real because Kris seemed to be a genuine person. Even if Kim had used the marriage for gain, Kris' authentic existence within the relationship led her to conclude that the marriage was real. When asked to provide an example of how she had determined Kris to be real, she brought up the situation with the naked yoga instructor from the second season of *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*. Kim had invited a yoga instructor, who performs in the nude, to the hotel room shared by Kris (Kim's sister, Kourtney, boyfriend Scott, and baby Mason). Several friends including sister Kourtney, joined in for the session. Kris came home during the event and became upset that there was a naked man in the house and that Kim had invited him there. For Natalie, his reaction was consistent with how she could imagine someone reacting to that and therefore, it was a sign that he was a genuine person:

She had the...yoga instructor, naked or whatever, [and Kris] was genuinely pissed off about that guy like being there...and dude, that's understandable. It's your husband. Like, if he doesn't want a naked dude in your house, he doesn't want a naked dude in your house. Like it's not that big of a deal.

The "naked yoga instructor" incident was discussed extensively in the forums in relation to assessments about the authenticity of Kim and Kris' relationship. In one post, the forum participant uses the example to make the argument that both are to blame in the demise of the relationship:

I was never Team Kris, but I do think they showed Kim and Kris as equal parts to blame in the failed relationship. Kris would say or do something oafish like have a party when the girls were away or tell Kim that "no one will care about her." Then Kim would do or say something equally "catty," like not tell Kris about visitors to the house (naked Yoga guy) or ignore Kris' sister when she came to visit.

Beyond this one incident however, Natalie, and others in the online forum discussion, indicated that she had made the determination that Kris was a genuine person over time by using several different incidents. It appears that emotions are an indicator of authenticity as well as consistency in actions over time (or a process of getting to know the reality star—Jones' (2003) personalized reality contract. For example, similar to Evey's statement, Natalie believes that the split happened too quickly. However, Natalie believes that the marriage was real and that Kim just gave up too quickly because she is too set in her ways: "I feel like she didn't try...I feel like she was so stubborn and that she was not willing to change." For Natalie, Kim is just that type of person and having watched her over time, like Tessa, she too indicated that "I didn't really think that it was fake, because, I mean if you watch the show Kim's always falling in and out of love with people like that." Both Natalie and Tessa, from following the show for a long period of time, had determined that this was consistent with Kim's personality. Further, Natalie had come to piece together that Kris was a genuine person. In addition to the yoga incident, Natalie also brought up the examples that he was constantly trying to work at the marriage rather than give up and that he "was more genuine too because he would call her out about stuff."

Another example of authenticity determinations through long-term consistency was in the assessment of Kim and Kanye's relationship. Beyond looking

to see how they behave through their social networking sites, many discussed that they believed the two were really in a relationship because they had been friends for a long period of time:

Francie: The only reason that I believe that [the relationship is real] is because I know that they've been friends for a long time. [Q: How did you know that they were friends?] Francie: From previous seasons

Charles: Yeah, he was hanging out with her in a couple episodes like, like in the past and stuff and she's like 'yeah, me and Kanye have been friends for before he even, you know launched off' and all that kind of stuff

The relationship between Kim and Kris seemed less real because they did not have a history together. Because Kanye had been around for a long time, it seemed more realistic that they would become romantically involved. Nicole and Natalie, on the other hand, believed that the relationship between Kanye and Kim was unrealistic because of this reason. They argued that it was inconsistent because feelings could not suddenly develop between long-term friends:

Natalie: They've been friends for so long and now you guys are together?

Nicole: All of a sudden you're sexually attracted to each other? Get the hell out of here!

Conclusion

It is clear from the qualitative interviews in relation to the Kardashian-Humphries split, that participants used the three interrelated quests for authenticity in determining what they believed to be real, not fake, and trustworthy. These three processes of authenticity verification include checking with other media sources, comparing the show to understandings of time and structure in “real life,” and

comparing to understandings of what could happen in real life. Further, forum board discussions also support this process of authenticity verification and that it occurs instantaneously and over time. These discussions also support the definition of authenticity posited by survey respondents and verified by interviewees. Not only was authenticity judged as being real and not fake, but verification was also made over time (being reliable and trustworthy) and also on the basis of whether or not there were external influences.

It is also clear that the process of authenticity verification and how these processes are used is complex. Ultimately, understandings of authenticity or the quest for authenticity, is one that looks for consistency with real life. That there was much disparity in how respondents, both in the qualitative interviews and in the forums, understood authenticity in terms of Kim, Kris, and their marriage indicates the subjective nature of the determination of authentic actions and events. Audience members appear to draw upon personal experiences, as well as second-hand knowledge, either from knowing someone who has experienced the event or situation, or in what they imagine to be the case, a knowledge base that derives from socialization. In the concluding chapter, I discuss the potential implications for this understanding of authenticity verification, particularly along lines of race, class, and gender.

CHAPTER VIII

COVETING THE BACKSTAGE

Television has become a main staple of leisurely activity in the United States (Putnam 2000) and the rate of television viewing continues to increase as individuals watch more hours per day due to advanced technology such as Digital Video Recorders (DVR) and streaming capacities (Nielsen 2012a). The genre of reality television has had a long history, but following the turn of the century, has “exploded” as a main type of programming, continuing to draw millions of viewers. As Nielsen (2011b) reports,

Reality first made an appearance in the top 10 rankings in 2000, and since the 2002-2003 season has consistently captured the largest percentage of the audience watching the top 10 broadcast programs. In the 2007-2008 season, reality programming captured 77 percent of the total audience viewing those top 10 programs.

Although the percentage of the audience “captured” by reality television has dipped, the 2010-2011 season still shows 56.4% of the audience tuning into the reality television shows within the top ten.

Further, the purported “reality” of reality television has been a focus of some scholars in terms of its potential influence on viewers (Cloud 2010; Sender and Sullivan 2008; Boylorn 2008; Orbe 1998). Many of the audience studies reviewed in this dissertation have looked at particular motivations for viewing and they have

suggested several unique attractions to the genre of reality programming. Particularly, and most pertinent to this dissertation research, the “quest for authenticity” has been deemed to be an important draw for viewers (Hall 2009; Andrejevic 2006; Rose and Wood 2005; Andrejevic 2003; Jones 2003; Hill 2002; Van Zoonen 2001). This “quest for authenticity” speaks to the unique motivations associated with the genre of RTV in that viewers attempt to find and verify authenticity in programming that is thought to be a mixture of the real and the spectacle (Rose and Wood 2005). Viewers are also thought to seek out a verification of authenticity (Dubrofsky 2011) by using the embedded surveillance practices of the genre (Pecora 2002).

However, authenticity is put forth in the literature as a motivation for viewing with little examination into how the term is understood by audience members, how it is determined or “verified” through the viewing process, and what implications the quest for, and verification of authenticity in reality television has for everyday life. Therefore, this study sought to answer three main research questions. First, how is authenticity defined by RTV audiences? If authenticity is an important consideration for those who view RTV, then it is crucial that a better sense is developed of what this actually means for audience members.

Having identified how audiences understand authenticity, the dissertation turns to a second key question: How do audience members identify and verify authenticity in the viewing practice? While studies have found the quest for authenticity to be a significant motivation for viewing, little is understood about how

authenticity works as a motivation and how audience members determine what is, and what is not, authentic.

Given the tendency uncovered in this dissertation research for audience members to assess authenticity in RTV programming, a final question has been entertained: What impacts does this quest for authenticity (and its verification) have in everyday life, if at all? In other words, does this process of determining and verifying authenticity overlap into our “real” lives?

In this final chapter, I outline the conclusions reached for each of these questions based on the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data. In short, respondents defined authenticity as being real and trustworthy but also as something that is verifiable and free of influence. In terms of the quest for authenticity, audience members are active in their assessments and use several means to verify the authenticity of the show and the cast members. The final question bearing on the implications of the quest for authenticity for everyday life yielded less definitive conclusions. In the rest of the chapter, I seek to rehearse the patterns in the data that emerged for each question. As so often happens with research, however, my project has raised seemingly more questions than it has answered. Therefore, I will consider some directions for future research that could extend what has been accomplished in this study.

What is Authenticity?

Responses from the survey and discussions in interview sessions led me to conclude that respondents understand authenticity as defined as “being real” and “not

fake.” Further, someone who is authentic is thought to be trustworthy in that they are determined to be predictable and reliable as well as certified or credible. Authenticity was also described in ways that suggest it is highly valued in that respondents to the survey defined and described the concept as “unique” and “rare” and that someone is authentic if they are “original” and not influenced by others. Ultimately, respondents described authenticity as something that does not exist unless it is capable of being proven.

These conclusions support literature that has used authenticity interchangeably with “being real” to understand how audience members perceive authenticity in the viewing process (Hall 2009; Dubrofsky and Hardy 2008; Dubrofsky 2007; Rose and Wood 2005; Griffin-Foley 2004; Andrejevic 2003; Biressi and Nunn 2003; Jones 2003; Andrejevic 2002; Hill 2002; Pecora 2002; van Zoonen 2001). However, these findings provide much needed elaboration in how authenticity is perceived by audience members. Beyond being real, audience members’ understandings of authenticity are wrapped into their experience in the social world. Authenticity is defined along lines that promote the idea of self-responsibility and individuality in that respondents discuss an authentic person as someone who is original, unique, and uninfluenced.

Authenticity was also defined in terms of the process of verification. In other words, authenticity does not exist unless it can be proven. Characteristics listed describing this process of verification discuss authenticity as “capable of being proven” but also in terms of someone being authentic if they are predictable or

reliable. This supports Dubrofsky's (2007) claims that audiences are engaging in a process of lateral surveillance, watching others and subjecting themselves to surveillance in order to prove a consistent, and therefore authentic self. In other words, authenticity is equated with someone who is consistent across multiple roles and situations. Therefore, audience members are looking to verify authenticity in spaces that are traditionally reserved to the back region in order to prove consistency. They covet the ability to see the backstage in reality television.

Concluding that respondents view authenticity as an active process of verification through determining consistency and predictability, and that further, individuals who are authentic are thought to be unique and rare, speaks to the notion of the social constructedness of authenticity. In other words, the unique and rare characteristics are consistent with ideas of a postmodern, neoliberal world and charges of self-responsibility. Predictability and reliability however, speak to individuals who conform to societal expectations in given situations and who show these behaviors across time and space. Further, authenticity is defined in terms of interpretations of behaviors rather than intentions of the actors suggesting that Holmes (2008) is correct in her assertion that the meaning is situated in the interpretation of the action. Authenticity is not grounded in reality but rather in signs (Baudrillard 1983). This more complex definition of authenticity grounds the term more explicitly to the processes of viewing, understandings of the social world, and the interpretations of the ideological messages within reality television shows.

What is the Quest for Authenticity?

Authenticity was also discussed among respondents as a process of proving its existence. As Goffman (1959) illustrates, the process of proving authenticity can be difficult in that individuals are engaged in a “presentation of self” where they attempt to prevent others from seeing aspects of their selves that prove inconsistent with their ideal self or could lead to stigmatization. Behaviors on the front stage are thought to be somewhat inconsistent with those in the back stage. Proving authenticity, then, requires a look into an individual’s life that includes the back stage behavior.

Surveillance is thought to provide that process of verification in allowing viewers and the viewed to prove consistency in behavior over time (Dubrofsky 2007). Reality television, in light of its “fly on the wall” structure, promises a backstage look into the behaviors of others, allowing one to piece together information on those others as a way to prove consistency and, therefore, authenticity (Morris-Reich 2003; Haggerty and Ericson 2000). Through the viewing process audience members are engaging in surveillance¹² looking for discreditable stigmas and inconsistencies based on their understanding of the social world in order to determine the authenticity of those being watched.

Data from the qualitative interviews suggests that in verifying authenticity audience members are piecing together bits of information (Morris-Reich 2003) in a

¹² Recall that surveillance is defined as the process of collecting information “by specific means for particular purposes” and is dependent on mechanisms through which to record observations (TV), a purpose (determining authenticity), data processing (personalized reality contract), as well as encompassing of responses on the parts of those watching and being watched.

process reminiscent of the “surveillant assemblage” (Haggerty and Ericson 2000). Further, authenticity is being determined on the basis of consistency, predictability, and judgments of “reality” based on subjective understandings of the social world. To accomplish this quest for authenticity, three particular techniques are deployed.

First, respondents described judging authenticity through checking with alternative media sources. In the case of the Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries split, respondents made determinations about the reality of their marriage through media stories about the breakup, through viewing *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, and in looking for consistency in how the two behaved on their twitter accounts. Other respondents discussed using media to verify the identity of participants of RTV shows, including social networking sites and personal/professional websites. Information was pieced together to either prove or refute consistency in the behavior of these others and to determine the influence of other factors (wealth and attention in the case of Kim and Kris).

Second, interviewees discussed the structure of RTV shows and the timing of events in the process of determining authenticity. In the case of Kim and Kris, interviewees discussed the short period of time that passed between dating and the engagement and the engagement and the wedding. Further, many in the forums discussed the timing of their major relationship events (engagement, marriage, and split) in relation to the structure of the RTV shows of which the Kardashians are a part. In other words, many found it suspicious that the two should get engaged at the end of one season, married at the end of another, and break up prior to the airing of

yet another season. In general, interviewees discussed their conceptions of the inconsistency in the timing of events portrayed on reality shows in that many of the major issues that arose for the participants occurred and were resolved very quickly.

Third, these determinations were all judged against a backdrop of interviewees' and survey respondents' conceptions of their everyday life. That is, the timing and structure of shows was only determined inauthentic if individuals felt that it was inconsistent to their understandings of the social world. Many respondents, interviewees, and participants on the forums discussed their conclusions of authenticity on the basis of what they believed to be realistic. Although one interviewee believed that the marriage between Kim and Kris was "totally fake" because the engagement and marriage happened too quickly for what would occur in real life, another respondent, who had had personal experience with a short engagement, marriage, and split, believed the union to be authentic. Thus, audience members judge the authenticity of RTV cast members based on their own understanding of the social world (Rae 2010; Weinstein and Weinstein 1978).

Additionally, the quest for authenticity was determined to be important in the viewing process because audience members are looking to connect, socially learn, and engage in psychological desires (voyeurism, status, and vengeance) while viewing. These motivations have been shown to be unique to reality television viewing and RTV is shown to be uniquely suited through its purported portrayal of "reality" to satisfy these desires (Papacharissi and Mendelson 2007; Reiss and Wiltz 2004). In order to connect and learn through RTV, to feel better and dream of the

opportunity to make it big, and to find pleasure in seeing things that are typically private, there must be some determination of authenticity made. In that the genre is thought to be a mixture of reality and fiction (the entertaining real), it is important to engage in a process of determining what is and is not real, or the quest for authenticity.

This is because audience members do not feel the same connection with characters that have been “made up” nor do they feel that they necessarily represent scenarios in real life that would afford learning from or be deemed private enough to be exciting (Johnston 2006). Further, “real life” or authentic scenarios give off the appeal of “it could happen to you” allowing audience members to fantasize about the possibilities. On the other hand, these scenarios can also show “real life” examples of how audience members’ lives are superior to the ones shown on television. Thus, the authenticity of the moment is important in these motivations for viewing.

The verification of authenticity through the reality television viewing process confirms Livingstone’s (2004) and others assertions that audiences are active. Further, the collection of information to verify authenticity means that audience members are engaging in surveillance practices to scrutinize RTV cast members’ presentations of the self. Many discuss the idea that reality television is a surveillance practice (Dubrofsky 2007; Andrejevic 2004; Pecora 2002) or that it promotes the proliferation of surveillance (Andrejevic 2004) and this study provides evidence from audience members that this is the case. Reality television is a two-tiered system of surveillance; the show is a practice of surveillance and the viewing process is a

practice of surveillance. Both seemingly have the same goal to expose the backstage of people as they present themselves to others.

This study also adds to previous literature in categorizing the quest for authenticity as three interrelated processes of authenticity verification: audiences look to alternative media sources, make determinations of the structure and timing of events on the show, and make comparisons to their subjective understandings of the social world based on personal experiences and processes of socialization. Hall (2009), in a quantitative audience study concluded four dimensions of how authenticity is determined by viewers. First, that cast members cannot appear eccentric to be thought of as authentic and second, that they must appear representative of people who are thought to occupy space in real life. Third, cast members need to be viewed as behaving “candidly,” or in ways that appear honest. Finally, manipulation of the show by producers, while found to increase the cognitive involvement, was ultimately declared to be antithetical to authenticity. My findings confirm all of these dimensions however, I argue that the first three fall within my categorization of comparisons with everyday life. The fourth dimension is reminiscent of my categorization of making assessments of time and structure within the show. In addition to Hall’s conclusions, I also add authenticity verification in terms of confirming with alternative media sources.

Further, the broader categories within my study allow for authenticity verification of both cast members and the show itself. The data collected in this study suggests that individuals are making determinations of the authenticity of the show as

well as participants on the show and that determinations of one necessarily impact determinations of the other. In other words, there are also two-tiers of authenticity verification occurring in that audiences make determinations about the show as well as the cast. If a show is thought to be inauthentic, audience members are less likely to feel as though the cast is authentic and vice versa.

Reality television studies that seek to understand the viewing process in terms of audience desires for authenticity should go beyond asserting that this involves viewing real people engaged in real behaviors. While it is certainly the case that individuals are interested in being savvy viewers who are not duped by the fictional elements of the programming (Jones 2003), it is also a process of comparing shows and participants to understandings of the social world and a prerequisite for satisfying other motivations for tuning in. While Hall (2009) posited that authenticity is likely a general motivation for viewing, this study goes a step further in asserting that authenticity is central to the other motivations for viewing.

Additionally, understanding authenticity verification as a process of surveillance and concluding that the verification of authenticity is complex complicates notions of surveillance as stated in the literature. While some scholars have described surveillance as perceived as providing a clear view into the behaviors of others (Dubrosfky 2007; Pecora 2002; Kilborn 1994), responses from audience members in this study refute this idea. Instead, there seems to be contradictory views toward the presence of the camera. In one sense, some respondents believed that the camera influenced behavior and there was no clear view into the behaviors of others

while others believed that the camera was providing such a view. That the process of authenticity verification is a complex one suggests that audience members do not take actions and behaviors as they appear through the lens of the camera but rather engage in Jones' (2003) personalized reality contract to make determinations of what is and is not real. In other words, they believe that some of what they see through the lens is real but engage in other processes, notably talking with others, and verifying through the three interrelated processes identified in this study. This view requires interpretation.

What are the Implications for Everyday Life?

In addition to understanding authenticity and the quest for authenticity by audience members in the viewing process, I also sought to understand how the quest for authenticity and its verification spilled over into everyday life. In other words, looking at how the understanding of authenticity and the process influenced how audience members viewed authenticity in everyday life. This connection between the quest for authenticity and everyday life among my participants was less clear. In the following section, I provide conclusions from the data interspersed with suggestions for future research to better understand how authenticity through RTV influences authenticity in "real life."

The Inauthenticity of Authenticity: Ideology in Reality Television

Existential sociologists also argue that the subjective understanding of authenticity is influenced by the inauthentic allocation of finite resources (Trujillo

2007). In other words, the subjective understanding of the social world is informed by social status and inequality. Charmé (1991) argues that defining authenticity along these lines is beneficial for those in power; thus, socialization leads individuals to judge authenticity inauthentically for the benefit of the elite. To elaborate on Charmé's case, those who are in positions of power are those who make determinations of how to identify those others. Thus, processes of authenticity construction based on socialization reinforce inauthentic lines that serve the interests of those in power at the expense of others (Mathiesen 1997).

Another issue, raised by Morris-Reich (2003) is that authenticity is determined by piecing together bits of information to form wholes. Thus, authenticity is judged on the basis of stereotypes in that individuals have to fill in the missing parts of data. Audience members are engaging in this process of piecing together because, as Morris-Reich argues, they only understand "wholes." To state this differently, individuals use social knowledge to fill in missing information in order to understand a person or situation. In the case of audience members, RTV participants are individuals who are typically unknown outside of the context of the show and situations these individuals are involved in are seen through an edited lens. Audience members must piece together and fill in many missing elements in order to form an assessment of authenticity.

Many reality television scholars have found that the genre of RTV reinforces dominant ideologies and stereotypes of "others" and that audience members often uncritically accept these messages (Cloud 2010; Boylorn 2008; Sender and Sullivan

2008; Orbe 1998). It is likely that audience members are making determinations of authenticity on inauthentic premises, or filling in bits and pieces of information (subjectively judged) with conceptions of the social world based on their status within the hierarchy. Therefore, stereotyped representations of cast members would appear authentic because they are consistent with preconceptions.

Further, the mechanism through which determinations of authenticity are made, surveillance, is about categorization and social sorting (Lyon 2007). Surveillance is incapable of providing the complete picture, despite perceptions of its capacity to do so. There are always blind spots. Instead bits and pieces are brought together to represent the totality of an individual (Haggerty and Ericson 2000). That RTV is a practice of surveillances means that the techniques for authenticity verification likely rely on superficial information that is incomplete, distorted, and inaccurate.

Discussions about the quest for authenticity within interview sessions were anchored in individuals' subjective conceptualization of the world. In other words, interviewees judged authenticity along the backdrop of "being in the world" (Weinstein and Weinstein 1978). There were a few indications that these conceptions were based on preconceived stereotypes. For example, the RTV show *Honey Boo Boo* was mentioned in many of the interview sessions. The show features a girl who was originally in the popular show, *Toddlers and Tiaras*. "Honey Boo Boo" is young girl who participates in pageants and resides with a very "southern" family and the show features the family doing very "southern" things (e.g. mudding). A few respondents

remarked about this portrayal in saying that the show is realistic based on their conceptualization of how people behave in the south. For example, Elliot in discussing the fictional and real elements of the show states that he knows “for a fact that some people in the south give their kids caffeine at the age of 6 so that’s not a hidden mystery or anything.” While only “some people” do that, he specifically discusses the phenomenon of giving children caffeine as a “southern thing.” Tori discussed the show as her favorite, remarking that it showed her a different “kind of lifestyle” in that it is “very southern.” Later, she remarks about specific aspects of the show such as the “mud wrestling” using a southern accent. In another conversation, James discusses the inconsistency of *Jersey Shore* in its inaccurate portrayal of Italians. Discussing an episode where a woman cast member was punched in the face, James remarked that he “grew up in an Italian family. You are not going to survive that, if you do it in front of other people. And the guys just stood there and did nothing.” For James then, that none of the men on the show or featured on the episode intervened to help the woman who had been hit, showed an inconsistency in their Italian heritage.

Further, discussions surrounding the split of Kim and Kris played upon gender stereotypes in that many applied gendered terms to describe their individual contributions to the demise of the marriage. For example, Kim was described in the forums as a “catty bitch” who was constantly “nagging Kris” and was unsuitable because she was too focused on herself and her career. Kris, on the other hand, was

often called a “douche bag,” an “asshole,” and was accused of engaging in typical “man” behaviors of being inconsiderate, non-caring, and failing to listen to Kim.

This study was ill-equipped, however, to sort out differences in subjective understandings along race, class, and gender lines as focus groups were organized by amount of television viewing. Many reality television studies have found that ideological messages within shows reinforce a middle-class, white ideal (Taylor 2011; Skeggs 2009; Sender and Sullivan 2008; Johnson 2006) and a few audience studies have shown differences in the perceptions of members of different classes (Allen and Mendick, Forthcoming; Skeggs 2009) and races (Boylorn 2008), particularly in judging the authenticity of a show and the participants. It is important that future studies couple the complexity of authenticity and the verification process with differences along class, race, and gender as it is suggested from this study that individuals determine authenticity based on subjective understandings of the social world. Such a focus would further fulfill Montemurro’s (2008) call for sociologists to look at the implications of race, class, and gender within reality television.

Control, Power, and Surveillance

The idea that audience members use RTV as a practice of surveillance to determine authenticity is based on notions of power and control. That audience members believe they are able to see the “backstage” area to make determinations of another’s authenticity is an indication that RTV audience members believe they hold some capacity over their viewing practices. Although audiences are hesitant to

believe that they hold a “clear view” in engaging in viewing, many believe that they can ultimately make determinations of authenticity during the process of viewing. Further, the genre’s increasing use of interactivity promotes the idea that audience member’s are in control of their personal experiences in viewing and in making decisions that determine the outcome of the show (Holmes 2008). In the age of the “surveillance society” where practices of surveillance are commonplace, unremarkable, and accessible to those traditionally relegated to being watched, many have debated the distribution of power. For example, McGrath (2004) believes that the redistribution of surveillance has led to a decentralization of power where regular, everyday people are capable of engaging in practices of surveillance that make those who were traditionally “agents of control” vulnerable to the gaze. Examples of citizens catching police brutality on video abound.

On the other hand, Andrejevic (2004) argues that any perception of power from reality television and other practices of surveillance is simply an illusion to serve as propaganda. In other words, reality television and the promise of power serves the interests of the elite in that audience members do the work of submitting to the practices of surveillance. Rather than having more power, audiences are relinquishing more of it. Thomas Mathiesen (1997) similarly believes that while the many are also watching the few, the process of viewing is mediated by “institutional elites.” In other words, what is portrayed on television is a transferred message intended to benefit the few. Thus, engaging in practices of surveillance through

reality television serves to reinforce the dominant ideological arrangements (Charmé 1991).

It was clear that respondents believed they were “savvy viewers” of RTV and could determine the authenticity of those they were watching. I believe this is highlighted in the intense emotional response of audience members upon hearing that the marriage between Kim and Kris was dissolving at the same time that they were watching the wedding special on television. Interviewees were shocked and appalled to find out that they had been duped by RTV cast members or that they had been inaccurate in their assessment of the “reality” of the particular show or participants. In other words, audience members believe they are typically accurate in their assessment of portrayals on RTV.

Further, those that discussed their interactivity with the genre did so with an understanding that their participation meant something in the scheme of the program. Voting was thought to be a contribution to the show and tweeting participants/shows was thought to have the potential for impact. For example, Natalie often discussed tweeting participants when she was upset with them to “tell them off” for their behavior in that it made her feel better and empowered.

However, not all of the participants in my study believed this to be the case. James repeatedly discussed how he could not tell what was real and what was not real on RTV and that he believed that no one could really ever know. Further, Sarah indicated that she always viewed RTV believing that “everything was fake” so that she did not get her hopes up. While these two were pessimistic about their capacity to

detect the authenticity of the show, they were still candid about describing fake and realistic aspects of the show. In particular, Sarah discussed many RTV shows, such as *The Real World*, as completely real and in terms of connecting with characters. It could be that these two were aware of their lack of control or power in the viewing process and were self-conscious about their lack of ability or their willingness to submit to the potential reality of the programming.

It is less clear how audience members treat the underlying ideological messages of the show. While previous audience studies have found that viewers uncritically accept ideological messages of programming (Cloud 2010; Sender and Sullivan 2008), data from both the survey portion of the study and the qualitative interviews illustrate that the issues is a bit more complex. Many respondents were concerned about the influence such programming has on others. In other words, many reported that the programming “sent the wrong message to others on how to act.” Further, many responses on the survey and discussions in the interview sessions were harsh in their critique of *Jersey Shore* in that it created a terrible “culture” of heavy partying, drinking, and promiscuity as normative college behavior. However, few of the shows were discussed in terms of the ideological messages that were portrayed throughout the series. Other than a few ambiguous declarations or the emphasis on *Jersey Shore*, shows were not criticized with respect to the messages portrayed through the programming.

Power is a notable term in the surveillance literature and has been discussed in the few studies that have looked at RTV as a practice of surveillance (Andrejevic

2004; McGrath 2004; Pecora 2002). As surveillance practices are introduced into everyday life and “normal people” are capable of being the watchers as well as the watched (Lyon 2007), notions of power and how it is distributed becomes less clear. There is no consensus on how power is distributed. Further, it is unclear how audience members perceive the distribution of power and control. It is apparent that interactivity in RTV is being sold on the promise of having control and power in the viewing process but future studies should look into the relationship of power, interactivity, and reality television. Further, audience studies should continue looking at the influence of RTV programming in terms of the ideological messages portrayed.

The Narcissist and the Neoliberal Self: RTV as a Useful Practice

A major focus of the dissertation was the motivations for viewing the genre of reality television. It became clear that participants found the programming to be useful in satisfying desires of connecting with others, socially learning, and realizing the desires of trait voyeurism, and self-importance in terms of status and vengeance. Further, audience members have been described in the literature as motivated by a desire to “quest for authenticity.” Indeed, data from this study suggests that individuals enjoy the fact that reality television is a mixture of the real and the fictional as they actively seek out moments of reality from the more fictional elements.

Going forward, an interesting line of inquiry would be to look at the potential usefulness behind ferreting out moments of authenticity in the programming. In other

words, is there a reason why audience members are engaging in the detection of authenticity? If real moments are the primary motivation for audience members, why not watch documentaries?

Some literature within the field of reality television studies looks at macro-level reasons for tuning in to RTV. One line of thought argues that RTV and other social media sites satisfy narcissistic desires of viewing. In other words, RTV serves to satisfy desires to be viewed and get attention (Niedwiecki 2009; Pecora 2002). Psychologists Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell (2009) have declared that there is a “narcissism epidemic” sweeping the United States as newer generations are becoming more individualistic and feel unprecedented levels of entitlement. Getting attention and being viewed are thought to be things to which one is entitled, and this is all predicated on the idea that individuals are “unique,” “original,” and “rare” and therefore authentically special. Perhaps the attempt to determine authenticity is one of establishing meritocracy or the idea that only those who are authentic deserve to be viewed. This is similar to Reiss and Wiltz’s (2004) findings that desires of status and self-importance are significant motivations for viewing the programming in that audience members fantasize about being watched as well. This also suggests that Reiss and Wiltz (2004) while accurate in the desires that lead audience members to view reality television, are inaccurate in their statements that these desires are universal. Rather, desires of self-importance and trait voyeurism (Baruh 2009) are products of socialization within a neoliberal, postmodern world.

Recent literature has argued that it is more than a simple narcissistic desire to get attention. Instead, the quest for authenticity is a useful practice for the newer phenomenon of the “neoliberal self,” a product of the post-industrial, and individualistic world (Skeggs 2009) where individuals have an “immense responsibility” to develop identities in the social world and are “compelled to be free” (Haggerty and Ericson 2000). Torin Monahan (2010) calls this individual the “insecurity subject,” arguing that individuals today are taught there are many dangers in the world but that they are ultimately responsible for their own protection. This involves understanding the origins of threats. In principle, authenticity detection could play an important role in this individual-level protection.

Pecora (2002) makes an interesting argument using Christopher Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* that “Americans have not really become more sociable and cooperative...they have merely become more adept at exploiting the conventions of inter-personal relations for their own benefit” (p. 354). While Pecora believes that audience members are more narcissistic and enjoy the attention and that the “liberal democratic world demand [that] the socially hidden [is made] visible” (p. 355), the proliferation of surveillance has allowed for more efficient use of interpersonal relationships, particularly in an age of immense individual responsibility. These interpersonal relations are rendered more efficient by providing easy access to information about others precisely because there is an immense desire to watch. Pecora states that, “reality TV is, for me, the expression of a powerful, and increasingly unbridled,

tendency within democratic society...to reveal the norms and limits of individual responsibility and group identity” (2002: 356). Through exploiting narcissistic tendencies of wanting to be watched, viewers gain easy and efficient access to information that proves useful in getting along in society.

Beverly Skeggs (2009), as discussed earlier, elaborates on this idea using Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens’ (1991) individualization thesis, arguing that an individual within the post-industrial society,

Is pushed to make him/herself the center of her/his own life plan and conduct...Reality television which foregrounds the display of self-performance by ordinary people doing ordinary everydayness...offers the perfect site for exploring self-making, self-legitimation and the supposed demise of class (P. 628).

Audience members, in viewing, are given information for identity development and transformation. In a society that values individualism, the emphasis is on the individual to make it in the world. For Skeggs (2009) this is the formation or transformation of identity into certain class ideals, notably the middle class. What RTV packages and sells is the ability to transform and rise up the class ladder. Lower classes are deemed inadequate on RTV but also capable of transformation, should they want it. Similar to arguments posed by Everett (2004), the genre of reality television provides information on how to achieve status, if only in appearances. The result is “self-transformation television...[that] dramatically [visualizes] ‘problems’ in need of improvement and providing advice on how this can be achieved” mediated through a “condensation of moral value onto people types” (Skeggs 2009: 639).

Finally, Sender and Sullivan (2008) use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1993) "epidemics of the will" to explain viewer's fascination with reality television programming that feature individuals who are obese (*The Biggest Loser*), who are addicted to drugs (*Intervention*), or who have some sort of mental illness that leads them to over-consumption (*Hoarders*) because we are terrified of the freedom pushed upon us. They state,

The ideal neoliberal citizen, governed by free will and consumer choice, is constructed in relation to the figure of the addict, unable to cope with the endless freedom on offer. The neoliberal moment that demands self-disciplined, self-directed, willing citizens both produces and requires their nemesis: the undisciplined, food-addicted, lazy fatty" (P. 580)

Thus, the "obsession" with watching has little to do with simple narcissistic pleasures. Instead, viewers are attempting to deal with the increased responsibility of developing their own identity and dealing with free will. This seems to be related to U&G conclusions that audience members are watching to "feel better about themselves" (Reiss and Wiltz 2004) in that Sender and Sullivan (2008) argue that seeing others who have "failed" at self-responsibility makes viewers feel better about times where they were less than successful at maintaining their own self.

Data from the dissertation indicating that we tune in to RTV to feel better about ourselves but also to socially learn and connect with others speak to these ideas. The desire of status, or feeling better about one's own life, was the most prevalent pattern in the qualitative data. Additionally, many respondents indicated that they are looking to connect with others and to understand better how others live. While many also discussed a fascination with watching other people, they attributed this

disposition to curiosity. It is likely that audience members are not consciously aware of their desires for viewing based on neoliberal pressures of self-responsibility. Many who had discussed watching for the reasons of connecting with others and socially learning explained this practice as attributable to their curiosity of others with little elaboration. Further, many were embarrassed about watching to feel better about their own lives and therefore, it was difficult to follow up with potential reasons for why they needed to feel better about their own lives.

Future studies should focus on discussions that seek to delve further into the reasons behind these desires to view to understand if neoliberal ideals are behind some motivations for viewing. The newest literature examining audiences of RTV are examining viewing practices as related to the neoliberal self and have concluded that viewers are tuning in to construct identities from assessments of authenticity of reality show participants (Allen and Mendick, forthcoming; Schee and Kline, forthcoming).

It appears that in an age where privacy has prevented close connections and social learning and meaning is defined in how it is interpreted, it is important to use surveillance practices via reality television to understand authentic identity and perhaps to construct our own. Further, it is helpful to see how behavior is interpreted in order to make determinations of its meaning. Literature examining the “neoliberal self” suggests that this identity formation is a process of exploiting “self responsibility” to promote consumption practices and ideals of the middle class through the message that we are ultimately responsible and have the capacity to achieve a certain standard of life. Thus, we engage in “lateral surveillance,” or

watching one another (and ourselves), to take care ourselves because a “better self” is thought to be an individual responsibility towards taking care of the larger social world (Sender and Sullivan 2008; Andrejevic 2006). It appears that RTV is promoting surveillance practices for the good of the consumer world (Andrejevic 2004) in that audience members are encouraged to passively consume products and strive for middle class ideals through the programming. While this dissertation has not yielded data suitable to the task, future studies should continue exploring how authenticity is proving useful in the neoliberal world.

Study Limitations

This study fell short of coming to definitive conclusions about how authenticity as it is defined and searched for in RTV viewing impacts everyday life. I am hopeful that future studies will focus along the lines discussed here to better understand the use or misuse the process of viewing for authenticity has in everyday life.

Of course, one of the biggest limitations of the study is the lack of focus on how race, class, and gender factor into how authenticity is determined in the viewing process. While there was little difference along these lines in the conceptualization of authenticity, there is likely to be variations in the determinations of authenticity through the viewing process. Understanding that audiences use preconceptions of their social world, both in personal experiences, and through secondhand knowledge, lends evidence that viewers are making assumptions based on dominant ideology and

preconceived stereotypes. While my data yielded some preliminary data regarding this, I was not able to make definitive conclusions along these lines.

To overcome this limitation, future studies should organize group interview sessions along lines of gender, race, or class and focus on discussions of authenticity in the viewing process. Bev Skeggs, Nancy Thumin, and Helen Wood (2008) have an excellent article on how to organize methods around class in order to look at differences in audiences of RTV. In it they argue that different classes respond to different methods and that audience studies should employ multiple methods including surveys, interviews, and group sessions organized by class to maximize information gathered in the data collection process. Skeggs and Wood (2008), in a follow-up article, employ group interview sessions along the lines of class to show that there are class differences in how audience members view participation in RTV.

Generally speaking, this study is not generalizable or representative, even to the college population. While I attempted to get at a range of individuals for the survey portion, I employed a convenience sampling technique and only attended sociology courses to distribute the samples. Further, there are few RTV studies that look at general consumption practices, patterns for use, and motivations for viewing. In creating my own survey, there is no basis to check the validity of responses.

Finally, this study was unable to understand how the quest for authenticity may vary by type of reality television show. A few scholars have attempted to tease out concrete categories to represent the sub-genres of reality television (Orbe 2008; Nabi et. al. 2003) however, there are no definitive sub-genre categorizations. As

reality television continues to evolve, it is increasingly more difficult to differentiate between types of shows. That does not mean that there are not obvious differences between reality shows nor that there are no differences in how audience members consume these types within the genre. While this study does not posit a concrete answer to this dilemma here, it is hopeful that scholars in the future can identify ways of demarcating sub-genres in a way that is useful to the continued study of motivations for viewing.

Contributions and Conclusions

I believe that my study contributes to the literature in that it is a sociological study of reality television. It applies theories of surveillance, existentialist sociology, the self, and Goffman's dramaturgy to the study of viewing habits of RTV. Further, I applied sociological methods and engaged in a study of the audience. In particular, I looked at how audience members define and understand the concept of authenticity, a term used to discuss motivations for viewing but not examined for how it is applied and used in the practices of viewing. Specifically, conclusions about the meanings of authenticity confirmed the literature's use of the term as being synonymous with being real and trustworthy. Beyond authenticity being synonymous with "being real" and "trustworthy," this study adds to the literature examining authenticity in the viewing process in showing the complexity of the term in how it is defined and how authenticity is verified in the viewing process.

I also found evidence to further support assertions of previous audience studies of the main motivations for viewing the genre. Essentially, I concluded that

audience members view to satisfy motivations to socially learn, connect with others, and satisfy the psychological desires of status, vengeance, and voyeurism. In contrast to Reiss and Wiltz (2004), I argue that these desires of voyeurism and self-importance (status and vengeance) are socially constructed and related to the postmodern, neoliberal world characteristic of surveillance practices. Further, this study sheds much needed light on the problems of positing voyeuristic tendencies within reality television viewing without examining the socio-historical context of this behavior. In other words, voyeurism as related to RTV viewing (trait voyeurism), is a normal social process that is notable only through understanding the demands of neoliberalism and the availability of sophisticated surveillance practices.

Additionally, I found that audience members rely on the genre's authentic moments to satisfy these desires for viewing. Thus, the quest for authenticity is the precursor for other motivations for viewing. While studies discuss the quest for authenticity as a motivation for viewing (Hall 2009; Andrejevic 2006; Rose and Wood 2005; Andrejevic 2003; Jones 2003; Hill 2002; Van Zoonen 2001), even discussing it as the general motivation (Hall 2009), this study concludes that this motivation is primary and necessary for other motivations. The central feature of authenticity in the viewing process and the complexity of the term requires future studies that look into how authenticity is related to ideology and socialization processes.

In addition to expanding on the complexity of the definition of authenticity, this study also provides a more detailed understanding of how audience members may

define reality television. Participants in this study reinforced Murray and Oullette's (2004) defining characteristic of the "entertaining real," but data also suggests that audience members define reality television in terms of several other characteristics: the influence it has on others, its apparent accessibility to average people, the accessibility of seeing the private lives of others, notably celebrities, and in terms of the motivations for tuning in. Further, this study suggests that individuals have difficulty identifying reality television. While much of the literature discusses the issues with accurately defining the genre, few of the audience studies discuss the potential problems the audience has with identifying what is and is not part of the genre.

Finally, this study found initial evidence to suggest that women are heavier viewers of reality television. Few audience studies look for comparisons across gender to determine the differences in viewing and future studies are warranted in looking at differences in authenticity construction and reasons why women are seemingly more interested in viewing the genre than men.

To summarize, I answered Montemurro's (2008) call for the "sociology of reality television" in applying sociological methods and theories to an examination of the audience particularly in looking at the motivations for viewing as they relate to authenticity. I also determined that we verify authenticity in three interrelated ways and that this process is reminiscent of engaging in surveillance practices. More specifically, viewers determine authenticity through collecting information from other media, in assessing the structure of shows and the timing of events, and through

comparisons with real life. These findings could be useful in examining other surveillance practices to see if individuals who are engaging in the process of watching others (or collecting information) are employing any of these practices in determining the authenticity of what they are viewing. For example, how do surveillance practitioners cull the “suspected person” from the crowd? Are any of these applications of authenticity verification used in determining who is a potential threat and who is not?

Going forward, this dissertation has provided the groundwork for several important studies regarding the implications the viewing process has on everyday life. In exploring the concept of authenticity within the realm of RTV viewing practices, I found possible links to ideology and stereotypes, perceptions of power and control, and directions for examining at the macro-level the reasons for engaging in these practices. Future studies should also look into the role of emotions, or the micro-level, in the viewing practices. Many of the participants in my study had discussed connecting emotionally with others and making determinations of reality television through emotions, both their own and in witnessing the outpourings of others. Dubrofsky (2011) asserts that emotion may be the point of entry to determining authenticity of viewers.

Overall, the process of viewing RTV is an emotional one and viewers appear to be heavily invested in the genre. Being an audience member is an active engagement in the media and viewers are increasingly more interactive in the genre. While many have predicted the demise of the genre, many of my participants believed

that the programming would persist. If it continues to become more extreme, raw, and returns to a more “realistic” premise, the motivations for viewing could shift. For a genre that fails to stay the same long enough for a consistent definition, it is likely that the motivations for viewing will continue to evolve as well.

Appendix A

Email to Instructors for Permission to Administer Survey

Dear [Name of Instructor]:

I am conducting research for my dissertation on college students' use of reality media and their understandings of authenticity as it relates to reality television viewing. Part of the data collection for this project is a short survey (25 questions) that asks various closed- and open-ended questions regarding media use and authenticity. I am emailing you because I hope to visit your class to administer surveys to your students.

The survey should take no longer than 25 minutes of class time and I can come at the beginning, middle, or end of class. I need to briefly explain the purpose of the survey to the students, allow for a short question period and then pass out the surveys to them. The students should not feel pressure to participate in the survey and can either sit quietly if they choose not to participate. I'm also advising instructors that they can offer their class extra credit on the day the survey is distributed as an incentive; however, this extra credit should be based on their attendance for the day rather than the successful completion of the survey.

In addition to distributing the survey, I will also be soliciting participants for a second mode of data collection, focus groups. Students will be able to sign up on a focus group volunteer form while taking the survey. Once I pass out the surveys, I will leave and arrive back in 15 to 20 minutes to collect the surveys from you.

Please let me know if I can come by your class by responding to this email and indicating potential dates and times (specific time you'd like me to come to the class). Also, if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please let me know.

Thank you for your time!

Take care,

Lisa Kruse
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Sociology

Appendix B
Informed Consent for Survey

My name is Lisa Kruse and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at Western Michigan University. I am currently in the process of collecting data for my dissertation. You are invited to participate in this study, entitled “Authenticity Construction in the Reality Media Viewing Process: An Audience Study of College Students.” The topic of study and purpose of the questionnaire is to find out more about general television viewing habits and, more specifically, practices regarding reality television. Your answers will be very beneficial to advancing our understanding of reality programming and television viewing practices especially in that we are increasingly becoming interactive and diverse in our use of media. This study is being conducted by Dr. Gregory Howard and Lisa Kruse as part of the dissertation requirements for Lisa Kruse.

The survey should take around 15 minutes of your time. There are 25 questions that are both closed-ended and open-ended. For the closed-ended questions, please circle the answer that best fits your personal experiences. Unless otherwise indicated by a “circle all that apply,” please select only one response by circling the corresponding letter. For the open-ended questions, please answer to the best of your ability. There are no right or wrong answers and I am interested in how you understand the terms and activities I am asking about. Your responses are completely anonymous so do not put your name anywhere on the survey. You may choose not to answer any question and leave it blank. If you choose to not participate in this survey, you may either return the blank survey or discard it in the box provided. Returning the survey indicated consent for use of the answers you supply.

Finally, I’d like you all to detach the final page of the survey. I am also soliciting participants for the second part of data collection. As a follow up to the survey I will be collecting qualitative data in the form of focus groups. These groups will consist of four to ten people and will last around an hour. The purpose of the focus group is to elaborate on many of the questions asked within the survey. If you are interested in participating, please fill out the detached “Focus Group Volunteer Form” from the back of your survey and turn in the form in the separate box provided for the focus group volunteer forms.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

If you have any additional questions or concerns about this research, feel free to contact me, my dissertation supervisor, or the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board listed on the back side of this consent form.

Thank you for your participation!

Contact Information

Principal Investigator:

Gregory Howard, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Sociology
Western Michigan University
1903 W. Michigan Avenue
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

Email: gregory.howard@wmich.edu
Phone Number: 269-387-5280

Student Investigator:

Lisa Kruse
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Sociology
Western Michigan University
1903 W. Michigan Avenue
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

Email: lisa.m.kruse@wmich.edu
Phone Number: 269-387-5215

You may contact Dr. Howard with questions or if you feel you have been harmed as a result of your participation.

For questions about your rights as someone taking part in this study, you may contact The Office of the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8270 or 269-387-8298. You may call this number to discuss concerns or complaints about the study with someone who is not part of the research team.

Appendix C

Survey

Television and Reality Television Viewing Habits

Directions: Please answer each question to the best of your ability by either writing in the answer or by choosing the answer that best fits your experience. Please only choose one answer unless prompted to choose multiple responses by a “circle all that apply.”

1. To start I would like you to either define or describe by listing synonyms (similar words or characteristics) the following term as you understand it:

Authenticity:

Television Viewing Habits

2. Do you own a television or is there a television where you reside?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

3. Do you watch television programming?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If you answered “No” to question 3, please skip ahead to question 9.

4. How many hours per day do you estimate you watch television?
 - a. Less than 1 hour
 - b. 1 or 2 hours
 - c. 3 or 4 hours
 - d. 5 or 6 hours
 - e. 7 or 8 hours

- f. More than 8 Hours
5. Through what medium do you watch television? (Circle all that apply)
- a. Cable Television
 - b. Internet (i.e. Hulu)
 - c. Netflix
 - d. Other: _____
6. How many programs do you watch regularly (every week or nearly every week)?
- a. 1 or 2
 - b. 3 or 4
 - c. 5 or 6
 - d. 7 or 8
 - e. 9 or 10
 - f. 11 or more
7. Do you participate in any sort of interactivity with regards to television viewing (i.e. do you participate on forums or board postings about shows, vote for participants, tweet or text about the show to the network)
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
8. If so, in what ways are you interactive? (Please list all activities) _____

Reality Programming

9. How would you define or describe reality programming/reality television? -

10. Do you watch reality television?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't Know

If you answered "No" or "I don't know" to question 10, please skip ahead to question 14.

11. If so, how much of your television viewing consists of reality television

- a. About 25% of the programs I watch are reality programs
- b. About 50% of the programs I watch are reality programs
- c. About 75% of the programs I watch are reality programs
- d. I only watch reality programs when I watch television

12. What is your favorite reality program(s)? *(If you have more than one favorite, please list them all)*

13. If you could name one reality programming that you wish would have never been aired on television, what would it be and why?

14. In general, how real do you think reality programming is?
(On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being "Not Real At All" or "Completely Scripted" to 10 being "Completely Real" or "Not Scripted At All.")

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
10

Not real at all/
Completely scripted

Completely Real/
Not Scripted

15. Overall, do you believe that reality programming allows us to get a glimpse into the lives of others?
a. Yes, absolutely
b. To a certain extent
c. There may be moments where people are acting real
d. Not at all

16. Have you followed news on the divorce between Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries?
a. Yes
b. No
c. I don't know

If you answered "No" or "I Don't Know" to question 16, please skip ahead to question 19.

17. How real do you think their marriage was? (On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being "Not Real At All" to 10 being "Completely Real.")

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not real at all

Completely Real

18. Who do you think deserves the blame for the demise of the marriage?
a. Kim Kardashian

- b. Kris Humphries
- c. Both deserve the blame
- d. Neither deserve the blame
- e. Other: _____

19. Are you watching *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*?
- a. Yes, I watch it regularly (every week or nearly every week)
 - b. Yes, I watch it sporadically (every once in a while when its on or someone else is watching it)
 - c. No, I do not watch it
 - d. I don't know

If you answered "No" or "I Don't Know" to question 19, please skip ahead to question 23.

20. If you are watching, what were your motivations for watching? (Circle all that apply)
- a. I watched the first season and am now tuning in for the second
 - b. I like watching the Kardashian reality programs
 - c. I wanted to see for myself if the marriage was real or if it was all a set up
 - d. After all of the marriage hype, I wanted to see what the couple and the family was all about
 - e. My friends watch it
 - f. My significant other watches it
 - g. My coworkers watch it
 - h. I want to be able to participate in discussion about the show with others
 - i. Other: _____

21. If you are watching it, has it swayed your opinions on the divorce?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know

22. If so, how have your opinions been swayed?

Demographic Information

23. What is your gender?
- a. Man
 - b. Woman
 - c. M to F Transgender
 - d. F to M Transgender
 - e. Intergender/Genderqueer
 - f. Two-Spirited
 - g. Prefer not to answer
 - h. _____
24. What is your racial classification? Circle ALL that apply.
- a. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - b. Asian American
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Hispanic or Latino
 - e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - f. White
 - g. Other
 - h. Prefer not to answer
25. How old are you?
- a. 18-20
 - b. 21-23
 - c. 24-26
 - d. 27-29
 - e. 30-32
 - f. 33-35
 - g. 36-38
 - h. 39-41
 - i. 42-44
 - j. 45-47
 - k. 48-50
 - l. 51 or older
26. What is your class standing?
- a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Graduate Student: Select one
 - i. Master's
 - ii. Doctoral

Focus Group Volunteer Form

Please detach this sheet from the survey even if you are not signing up to participate in the focus groups!

Name: _____

Email: _____

I am interested in learning more about participating in the focus groups regarding reality television, authenticity, and the Kardashian-Humphries split. Signing up as a potential participant in no way means that I must participate in the focus groups.

Appendix D

Emails to Group Interview Participants From Survey Recruitment

Dear [Name of Student]:

Thank you for your interest in participating in a focus group discussion on reality television! The purpose of this study is to find out more about reality television viewing practices, general perceptions regarding the programming including its popularity and the authenticity of the genre of programming.

If you are interested in participating, you will be asked to participate in one focus group session lasting between 45 minutes and 1 hour where I will ask questions related to the study as described above. Please respond to this email by answering the following questions and listing your preferences for dates and times for this focus group meeting.

Do you consider yourself someone who watches little to no reality television or would you say that you are a regular viewer of the genre?

Have you watched any of the Kardashian reality shows including *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*?

What days and times of the week work best for you to meet up for a focus group (you can rank order):

[Day] [Period of Time]

[Day] [Period of Time]

[Day] [Period of Time]

[Day] [Period of Time]

Please know that your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to decline participation at any time. To compensate you for your time, you will be given a ten-dollar gift card at the focus group session and you will be given an entry form for a chance to win a one hundred dollar gift card.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you!

Lisa Kruse
Doctoral Candidate
Western Michigan University
Department of Sociology

Dear [Name of Student]:

Thank you for your interest in participating in a focus group discussion on reality television. Based on your availability, I have scheduled you for the following focus group:

Day:

Time:

Location:

Please prepare to arrive 5 minutes before the scheduled time.

If you are no longer interested in participating or are no longer available for this day/time, please contact me.

Thank you.

Lisa Kruse
Doctoral Candidate
Western Michigan University
Department of Sociology

Hello [Name of Student],

Just a reminder that you are scheduled for a focus group session today, [Date and Time]. We will be meeting in the Kercher Center for Social Research, Sangren 3121. This room is located on the third floor of Sangren at the end of the hall near the Department of Sociology. I will have signs posted in case you get lost.

Please plan on arriving 5 minutes before our scheduled session. If you can no longer participate please let me know!

Thanks!

Lisa Kruse
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Sociology
Western Michigan University

Appendix E

Flyers for Group Interview Recruitment

Reality Television Research Study

Western Michigan University
Department of Sociology

Description of Study:

The study seeks to understand better reality television viewing practices and perceptions of the programming including how authentic, or real, the events as portrayed on the programming are. This study also seeks to look at the events surrounding the Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries divorce.

Who is Eligible?

Western Michigan University Undergraduate and Graduate Students, 18 and older

Those who do NOT watch reality television and those who DO watch the programming

Those who are fans of, or watch any of the Kardashian reality programs including *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*

What will you be asked to do?

Participate in a focus group session lasting between 45 minutes and 1 hour with between three and nine other people.

Compensation

Each participant will receive a ten-dollar gift card for attending the focus group session and will also have the chance to enter and win a hundred dollar gift certificate.

If you have any questions or are interested in participating, please contact:

Lisa Kruse at (269) 387-5125 or Email: lisa.m.kruse@wmich.edu
(Tags with info will be included for interested individuals to pull off and take with them)

Appendix F

Instructor Recruitment Letter Attached to Flyer

Hello Everyone:

I am conducting research for my dissertation on college students' use of reality media and their understandings of authenticity as it relates to reality television viewing. Part of the data collection for this project is an hour-long focus group session about media use and authenticity. I am currently in the process of recruiting participants for these sessions and have posted flyers around Sangren Hall hoping to generate interest. In addition, I am hoping that you'll spend a couple of minutes in class announcing this research project and my need for participants.

I have put a copy of the flyer in your mailbox. If you are willing to announce it to your class, I ask that you display the flyer on your doc cam and briefly go over the main points of the study as discussed in the flyer, allowing a few minutes for students to take down my contact information if they are interested in participating.

Thank you!

Lisa Kruse
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Sociology
Western Michigan University

Appendix G

Email Correspondence with Group Interview Participants From Flyer Recruitment

Dear [Student's Name],

Great! Thank you so much for your interest in participating in my study!

The purpose of this study is to find out more about reality television viewing practices, general perceptions regarding the programming including its popularity and the authenticity of the genre of programming.

To give you some general information: you will be asked to participate in one focus group session lasting about 1 hour where I will ask questions related to the study as described above. Please know that your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to decline participation at any time. To compensate you for your time, you will be given \$10 at the focus group session and an entry form for a chance to win a \$100.

I am organizing groups based off of amount of television watched and level of interest regarding the Kardashians. Please respond to this email by answering the following questions so that I can place you in the appropriate group:

- Do you consider yourself someone who watches little to no reality television or would you say that you are a regular viewer of the genre?
- Have you watched any of the Kardashian reality shows including Kourtney and Kim Take New York?
- Are you able to meet for a focus group session on Monday afternoons at 5:30 or 7:30 pm? If not, is there a better time and/or day that you could participate?

I should be in touch with you within the next two weeks to schedule a session.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you again!

Lisa Kruse
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Sociology
Western Michigan University

Appendix H
Informed Consent for Group Interview Sessions

**Western Michigan University
Department of Sociology**

Principal Investigator: Gregory Howard, Principal Investigator
Student Investigator: Lisa Kruse, Student Investigator
Title of Study: Authenticity Construction in the Reality Media Viewing Process: An Audience Study of College Students

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "*Authenticity Construction in the Reality Media Viewing Process: An Audience Study of College Students*." This project will serve as Lisa Kruse's dissertation for the requirements of the doctorate of philosophy. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

The topic of this study, and the purpose of the focus group, is to find out more about general television viewing practices and, more specifically, habits regarding reality television. Your answers will be very beneficial to advancing our understanding of reality programming and television viewing practices especially in that we are increasingly becoming interactive and diverse in our use of the media (i.e. posting in forums, voting for winners, texting to networks).

Who can participate in this study?

Anyone who is a college student at western Michigan University can participate in this study. Focus groups participants will be screened for their media use and placed into groups with those who consumer a similar amount of television and reality programming. The screening process takes place during the email phase. The student investigator has asked potential participants to indicate whether they watch little to no reality television or if they consider themselves to be a regular viewer of the genre as well as their familiarity with the program, *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*.

Where will this study take place?

Focus group sessions will take place in Sangren Hall in a designated conference room.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?

Participants will be involved in one focus group that will take approximately one hour.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

Focus groups are designed to carry on like a conversation. The student investigator will ask some prompter questions to promote the start of the discussion. The conversation may deviate from the original question posed and new areas of discussion may be included. There are no right or wrong answers to questions and participants may contribute to any or all of the discussions taking place.

What information is being measured during the study?

This section will describe the measurements that we are going to take during your participation in the study. This focus group is designed to collect qualitative data. Focus groups will be recorded and the conversations, or narratives, will be transcribed. Your responses will be looked at for patterns on various topics discussed.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?

While your identity will not be linked to the research in any way, anonymity and confidentiality cannot be promised due to the nature of focus group participation in that other participants in the focus group are privy to your responses. It is expected that everyone will be respectful of one another's participation in the conversation and participants are strongly encouraged to not discuss the conversation as discussed in this room elsewhere. The topics discussed in the focus group may be sensitive or create discomfort but it is not expected that this will be the case. You can choose to not participate in the conversation if you feel discomfort at any of the topics discussed during the session. You may also leave the session at any time without penalty or prejudice. Contact information for the student and principal investigator as well as the HSIRB board and the Vice President for Student Research is listed at the end of this consent form should you feel that you have been harmed in any way during the course of your participation.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

There are no foreseeable direct benefits to you for participating in this study besides the possibility of becoming more aware of your consumption of media and possibly enjoying a pop culture conversation.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

The cost associated with participating in this study is a one-hour time commitment. There are no other foreseeable costs associated with participation.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

Each participant who arrives for the focus group session will receive a ten-dollar gift card and an entry form for the chance to win a one hundred-dollar gift card. The drawing will take place once all the focus groups have been completed and the winner will be notified via email. If you decide to leave the focus group at any time during

the session you will still remain in the drawing for the one hundred-dollar gift card and can keep the ten-dollar gift card.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

Only the student and principal investigator will have access to the information collected during this study. Your identity and the information collected will remain confidential. Your name will not be connected to the information you provide. Rather, I will ask you to provide a pseudonym that you would like to go by for the purposes of transcribing the data and disseminating the results. The focus group session will be audio and video taped and the data will be transcribed and reviewed by the student investigator. Tapes of the focus group session will be destroyed following transcription and the typed transcriptions will be locked in a filing cabinet in the principal investigator’s office for at least three years. Any reporting of conclusions as part of a conference paper or publication will involve the use of pseudonyms rather than your real name.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

This focus group is completely voluntary and you should feel no pressure to participate. You can decline to discuss any issue or answer any question as well as stop participating at any time. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study.

If you have any questions concerning this research or your participation in it, please feel free to contact the student investigator, Lisa Kruse at 269-387-5215 or lisa.m.kruse@wmich.edu or the principal investigator, Dr. Gregory Howard at 269-387-5280 or gregory.howard@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of this study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the lower left corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant’s signature

Date

Appendix I
Group Interview Prompter Questions

Focus Group Prompter Questions

Basic Questions Regarding Reality Media and Motivations for Viewing:

- Do you or have you had any exposure to reality television and know what I mean by the term?
- How would you define reality programming?
- What shows do you:
 - Know about?
 - Watch?
 - What are your favorites?
 - What makes them your favorite?
 - Your friend's favorites?
 - Why do you think these are favorites of your friends?
 - Least favorites?
 - Why?
- If you could choose one show as your favorite, what would it be and why?
- If you could choose one show that should have never been produced and aired on television, what would it be and why?
- Why watch reality television over other types of programs or vice versa? Why do you think other people watch this type of programming?
- Have you ever engaged in interactive behavior with regards to reality programming? If so, in what ways and why do you engage in this behavior?

Defining Authenticity within Reality Media

- How real do you think reality television is? How much of it is real and how much of it is scripted? How can you tell?
- What does authentic mean to you?

Determining and Verifying Authenticity:

- Have there ever been any participants on reality programs that you considered fake? Not real? Or real? Authentic? What is it about these participants that make them real or fake? Authentic or inauthentic?
- How do you feel about the Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries divorce?
- Who do you think is at fault in the divorce? What do you think happened? Why?
- Are you watching *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*? Have you ever watched a Kardashian show?
- Do you think that people watching the show will be able to get the information they need to determine if the marriage was staged? Why or why not?

Linking to Everyday Life:

- Some studies have concluded that individuals watch reality programming because it has application to everyday life. Do you think this finding is valid? Why or why not?
- What about this idea of authenticity: do you think that it is helpful in everyday life to be able to determine when people are being real or fake/authentic or inauthentic on television? Do you think you can use the same techniques in everyday life? Why or why not?
- Have you ever used any of what you've learned on reality programming in your everyday life? If so, in what ways have you applied reality programming to your everyday life?

Appendix J:
Group Interview Demographic Survey

Demographic Information

1. What is your gender?
 - a. Man
 - b. Woman
 - c. M to F Transgender
 - d. F to M Transgender
 - e. Intergender/Genderqueer
 - f. Two-Spirited
 - g. Prefer not to answer
 - h. _____

2. What is your racial classification? Circle ALL that apply.
 - a. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - b. Asian American
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Hispanic or Latino
 - e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - f. White
 - g. Other
 - h. Prefer not to answer

3. How old are you? _____


4. What is your class standing?
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Graduate Student
 - i. Master's
 - ii. Doctoral

Appendix K
HSIRB Approval



Date: March 20, 2012

To: Gregory Howard, Principal Investigator
Lisa Kruse, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number 12-02-86

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Authenticity Construction in the Reality Media Viewing Process: An Audience Study of College Students" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: March 20, 2013

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Kim, and Heather Mendick. Forthcoming. "Keeping it Real? Social Class, Young People and 'Authenticity' in Reality TV." *Sociology* (ahead-of-print): 1-17.
- Abercrombie, Nicholas, and Brian Longhurst. 1998. *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Andrejevic, Mark. 2006. "The Discipline of Watching: Detection, Risk, and Lateral Surveillance." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 23(5): 391-407.
- . 2004. *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*. Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield.
- . 2003. "The Uncanny Fetish: Reality TV, Ideology, and the Savvy Audience" International Communication Association. New Orleans. May.
- . 2002. "The Kinder, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother: Reality TV in the Era of Digital Capitalism." *New Media & Society* 4(2): 251-270.
- Barrett, William. [1958] 1990. *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Barton, Kristin M. 2009. "Reality Television Programming and Diverging Gratifications: The Influence of Content on Gratifications Obtained." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53(3): 460-76.
- Baruh, Lemi. 2010. "Mediated Voyeurism and the Guilty Pleasure of Consuming Reality Television." *Media Psychology*, 13(3): 201-21.
- . 2009. "Publicized Intimacies on Reality Television: An Analysis of Voyeuristic Content and Its Contribution to the Appeal of Reality Programming." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53(2): 190-210.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1983. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext.
- Beck, Ulrich A. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Biltreyst, Daniel. 2004. "Media Audiences and the Game of Controversy: On Reality TV, Moral Panic and Controversial Media Stories." *Journal of Media Practice*, 5(1): 7-24.

- Boylorn, Robin M. 2008. "As Seen on TV: An Autoethnographic Reflection on Race and Reality Television." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25(4): 413-33.
- Callero, Peter L. 2003. "The Sociology of the Self." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29: 115-133.
- Castells, Manuel. 1996. *The Rise of Network Society*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Charmé, Stuart Zane. 1991. "Sartre's Images of the Other and the Search for Authenticity." *Human Studies*, 14: 251-64.
- Clemens, Priya David. 2011. "Kardashian, Humphries Marriage Take: \$250K a Day." *CBS News*, November 1. Retrieved December 19, 2011 ([http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-500185_162-20128322/kardashian-humphries-marriage-take-\\$250k-a-day/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-500185_162-20128322/kardashian-humphries-marriage-take-$250k-a-day/)).
- Clissold, Bradley D. 2004. "Candid Camera and the Origins of Reality TV: Contextualising a Historical Precedent." Pp. 33-53 in *Understanding Reality Television*, edited by S. Holmes, and D. Jermyn. New York: Routledge.
- Cloud, Dana. 2010. "The Irony Bribe and Reality Television: Investment and Detachment in *The Bachelor*." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 27(5): 413-37.
- Converse, Jean M., and Stanley Presser. 1986. *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Corner, John. 2002. "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions." *Television & New Media*, 3: 255-69.
- Dandeker, Christopher. 1990. *Surveillance, Power & Modernity*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Dong, Anlei, Zhang, Ruiqiang, Kolari, Pranam, Bai, Jing, Diaz, Fernando, Chang, Yi, Zheng, Zhaohui, and Hongyuan Zha. 2010. "Time is of the Essence: Improving Recency Ranking Using Twitter Data." *World Wide Web Conference*, Raleigh, NC: April 26-30.

- Dressler, William W., Borges, Camila D., Baleiro, Mauro C., and José Ernesto Dos Santos. 2005. "Measuring Cultural Consonance: Examples with Special Reference to Measurement Theory in Anthropology." *Field Studies*, 17(4): 331-55.
- Dubrofsky, Rachel E. 2011. "Surveillance on Reality Television and Facebook: From Authenticity to Flowing Data." *Communication Theory*, 21:111-29.
- , 2007. "Therapeutics of the Self: Surveillance in the Service of the Therapeutic." *Television and New Media*, 8: 263-84.
- Dubrofsky, Rachel E., and Antoine Hardy. 2008. "Performing Race in *Flavor of Love* and *The Bachelor*." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25(4): 373-92.
- Durkheim, Émile. [1938] 1982. *The Rules of the Sociological Method*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Eagleton, T. 1996. *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Erikson, Kai. 1969. *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Wiley.
- Everett, Anna. 2004. "Trading Private and Public Spaces @ HGTV and TLC: On New Genre Formations in Transformation TV." *Journal of Visual Culture*, 3(2): 157-81.
- Finlayson, Ariana. 2011. "Kendall and Kylie Jenner Land Deal with Jewelry Company Glamhouse." *Us Magazine Weekly*, December 13. Retrieved December 19, 2011 (<http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-style/news/kendall-and-kylie-jenner-land-deal-with-jewelry-company-glamhouse-20111312>).
- Fischer, Claude S. 2011. *Still Connected: Family and Friends in America Since 1970*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Ford, Rebecca, and Lauren Schutte. 2011. "Kim Kardashian Divorce: 10 Signs the Marriage Was One Big Hoax All Along." *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 31. Retrieved December 11, 2011 (<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/kim-kardashian-divorce-kris-humphries-media-publicity-255371>).
- Foucault, Michel. [1975] 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Random House.

- Gamson, Joshua. 1998. *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Shows and Sexual Nonconformity*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge, Mass: Polity Press.
- Gilbert, Craig. 2005. "Reflections on *An American Family*." Pp. 307-326 in *New Challenges for Documentary*, 2nd ed., edited by A. Rosenthal and J. Corner. New York: Manchester University Press.
- Gilsinan, James F. 1991. "Public Policy and Criminology: An Historical and Philosophical Reassessment." *Justice Quarterly*, 8(2): 201-16.
- Godlewski, Lisa R., and Elizabeth M. Perse. 2010. "Audience Activity and Reality Television: Identification, Online Activity, and Satisfaction." *Communication Quarterly*, 58(2): 148-69.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Books.
- , 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Griffen-Foley, Brigit. 2004. "From Tit-Bits to Big Brother: A century of audience participation in the media." *Media, Culture & Society* 26(4): 533-548.
- Grindstaff, Laura, and Joseph Turow. 2006. "Video Cultures: Television Sociology in the 'New TV' Age." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32: 103-25.
- Haggerty, Kevin D. and Richard V. Ericson. 2000. "The Surveillant Assemblage." *British Journal of Sociology*, 51(4): 605-22.
- Hall, Alice. 2009. "Perceptions of the Authenticity of Reality Programs and Their Relationships to Audience Involvement, Enjoyment, and Perceived Learning." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53(4): 515-31.
- , 2006. "Viewers' Perceptions of Reality Programs." *Communication Quarterly*, 54(2): 191-214.
- Hall, J.A. 1977. "Sincerity and Politics: 'Existentialists' vs. 'Goffman and Proust.'" *The Sociological Review*, 25(3): 535-50.

- Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy. 2010. *Mixed Methods Research: Merging Theory with Practice*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Hill, Annette. 2005. *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television*. New York: Routledge.
- , 2002. "Big Brother: The Real Audience." *Television and New Media*, 3(3): 323-40.
- Holbrook, Alice, and Amy E. Singer. 2009. "When Bad Girls Go Good: Models of the Self and Reality on VH1's *Flavor of Love Girls: Charm School*." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 37(1): 34-43.
- Hollander, Jocelyn A. 2004. "The Social Contexts of Focus Groups." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 33(5): 602-37.
- Holmes, Su. 2004. "'But This Time You Choose!' Approaching the 'Interactive' Audience in Reality TV." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7(2): 213-31.
- , 2008. "'The Viewers Have...Taken Over the Airwaves'? Participation, Reality TV and Approaching the Audience-in-the-Text." *Screen*, 49(1): 13-31.
- Holmes, Su and Deborah Jermyn, eds. 2004. *Understanding Reality Television*. New York: Routledge.
- Howard, Gregory J. and Elizabeth Bradshaw. 2010. "Surveillance and Public Space". Pp. 159-184 in C. Crawford (Ed.), *Spatial Policing: The Influence of Time, Space, and Geography on Law Enforcement Practices*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press
- Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184 (1964).
- Jameson, Frederic. 1984. "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review*, 146: 53-92.
- Jhally, Sut, and Justin Lewis. 1992. *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Johnston, Elizabeth. 2006. "How Women Really Are: Disturbing Parallels between Reality Television and 18th Century Fiction." Pp. 115-32 in *How Real is Reality TV? Essays on Representation and Truth*, edited by D.S. Escoffery. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

- Jones, Janet M. 2003. "Show your Real Face: A Fan Study of the UK Big Brother Transmissions (2000, 2001, 2002). Investigating the Boundaries between Notions of Consumers and Producers of Factual Television." *New Media & Society* 5(3): 400-421.
- Kilborn, Richard. 1994. "'How Real Can You Get?': Recent Developments in 'Reality' Television." *European Journal of Communication*, 9: 421-39.
- Kjus, Yngvar. 2009. "Idolizing and Monetizing the Public: The Production of Celebrities and Fans, Representatives and Citizens in Reality TV." *International Journal of Communication*, 3: 277-300.
- Klein, Naomi. 2000. *No Logo*. New York: Picador.
- Krueger, Richard A., and Mary Ann Casey. 2009. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research, 4th edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lair, Daniel J. 2011. "Surviving the Corporate Jungle: *The Apprentice* as Equipment for Living in the Contemporary Work World." *Western Journal of Communication*, 75(1): 75-94.
- Lane, Robert E. 2000. *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Lasch, Christopher. 1979. *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. Skopelos: Nisides.
- Leone, Ron, Wendy C. Peek and Kimberly L. Bissell. 2006. "Reality Television and Third-Person Perception." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 50(2): 253-269.
- Livingstone, Sonia. 2004. "The Challenge of Changing Audiences: Or, What is the Researcher to Do in the Age of the Internet?" *European Journal of Communication*, 19(1): 75-86.
- Lyon, David. 2007. *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Manning, Peter K. 1973. "Existential Sociology." *The Sociological Quarterly*, 14(2): 200-25.
- Marx, Gary T. 2003. "A Tack in the Shoe: Neutralizing and Resisting the New Surveillance." *Journal of Social Issues*, 59(2): 369-90.

- Mathiesen, Thomas. 1997. "The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' Revisited." *Theoretical Criminology*, 1(2): 215-34.
- Maxwell, Joseph A. 2010. "Using Numbers in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 16(6): 475-82.
- McGrath, John E. 2004. *Loving Big Brother: Performance, Privacy and Surveillance Space*. New York: Routledge.
- Mead, George Herbert. [1934] 1967. *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Miles, Ann. 2008. "Of Butterflies and Wolves: Enacting Lupus Transformations on the Internet." *Anthropology & Medicine*, 16(1): 1-12.
- Monahan, Torin. 2010. *Surveillance in the Time of Insecurity*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Montemurro, Beth. 2008. "Toward a Sociology of Reality Television." *Sociology Compass* 2(1): 84-106.
- Morgan, David L. 2004. "Focus Groups." Pp. 263-85 in *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice*, edited by S.N. Hesse-Biber and P. Leavy. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morris-Reich, Amos. 2003. "The Beautiful Jew is a Moneylender: Money and Individuality in Simmel's Rehabilitation of the Jew." *Theory, Culture & Society*, 20(4): 127-42.
- Murray, Susan and Laurie Oullette, eds. 2004. *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Nabi, Robin L. 2007. "Determining Dimensions of Reality: A Concept Mapping of the Reality TV Landscape." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51(2): 371-390.
- Nabi, Robin L., Biely, Erica N., Morgan, Sara J., and Carmen R. Stitt. 2003. "Reality-Based Television Programming and the Psychology of Its Appeal." *Media Psychology*, 5: 303-20.
- Niedzviecki, Hal. 2009. *The Peep Diaries: How We're Learning to Love Watching Ourselves and Our Neighbors*. San Francisco, CA: City Light Books.

- Newman, Julie and Leslie Bruce. 2011. "How the Kardashians Made \$65 Million Last Year." *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 16. Retrieved December 11, 2011 (<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/how-kardashians-made-65-million-100349>).
- Nielsen. 2012a. "The Cross-Platform Report, Quarter 3, 2012." *State of the Media*, Retrieved January 13, 2013.
- . 2012b. "The Social Media Report, 2012." *State of the Media*, Retrieved March 7, 2013.
- Nielsen. 2011a. "The Cross-Platform Report, Quarter 1, 2011." *State of the Media*, Retrieved September 28, 2011 (<http://www.nielsen.com/>).
- Nielsen. 2011b. "10 Years of Primetime: The Rise of Reality and Sports Programming." *Newswire*, Retrieved June 12, 2013 (<http://www.nielsen.com/>).
- Nock, Steven L. 1993. *The Costs of Privacy: Surveillance and Reputation in America*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- O'Connell, Michael. 2011. "'Kourtney & Kim Take New York' Hits Ratings Records with Season Premiere." *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 28. Retrieved December 11, 2011 (<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/kim-kardashian-kourtney-take-new-york-ratings-266655>).
- Oliver, M.B., and G.B. Armstrong. 1995. "Predictors of Viewing and Enjoyment of Reality-Based and Fictional Crime Shows." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 72: 559-70.
- Orbe, Mark P. 2008. "Representations of Race in Reality TV: Watch and Discuss." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25(4):345-52.
- . 1998. "Constructions of Reality of MTV's 'The Real World: An Analysis of the Restrictive Coding of Black Masculinity,'" *Southern Communication Journal*, 64(1): 32-47.
- Oullette, Laurie, and Hay, James. 2008. *Better Living Through Reality TV*. Malden, MA; Blackwell.
- Oxford English Dictionary. 2011. Retrieved June 23, 2011 (www.oed.com).
- Papacharissi, Zizi, and Andrew L. Mendelson. 2007. "An Exploratory Study of Reality Appeal: Uses and Gratifications of Reality TV Shows." *Journal of*

- Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51(2): 355-70.
- Pecora, Vincent P. 2002. "The Culture of Surveillance." *Qualitative Sociology*, 25(3): 345-358.
- Penzhorn, Heidi, and Magriet Pitout. 2007. "A Critical-Historical Genre Analysis of Reality Television." *Communicatio*, 33(1): 62-76.
- Pew Research Center. "Twitter Reaction to Events Often at Odds with Overall Public Opinion." March 4, 2013. Retrieved March 6, 2013
([http://www.pewresearch.org/2013/03/04/twitter-reaction-to-events-often-at-odds-with-overall-public-opinion/.](http://www.pewresearch.org/2013/03/04/twitter-reaction-to-events-often-at-odds-with-overall-public-opinion/))
- Postman, Neil. 1988. "Defense Against the Indefensible." Pp. 20-35 in *Conscientious Objections: Stirring Up Trouble about Language, Technology, and Education*. New York: Knopf.
- Pozner, Jennifer. 2010. *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rae, Gavin. 2010. "Alienation, authenticity and the self." *History of the Human Sciences*, 23(4): 21-36.
- Reed, Adam. 2005. "'My Blog is Me': Texts and Persons in UK Online Journal Culture (and anthropology)." *Ethnos*, 70(2): 220-40.
- Reed, Lou. 1990. "Sick of You." On *New York* [Audio CD]. New York: Sire Records.
- Reiss, Steven, and James Wiltz. 2004. "Why People Watch Reality TV." *Media Psychology*, 6: 363-378.
- Richter, David H, ed. 2007. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. 2nd ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martins.
- Roscoe, Jane. 2004. "Multi-Platform Event Television: Reconceptualizing our Relationship with Television." *The Communication Review*, 7(4): 363-9.
- Rose, Randall L. and Stacy L. Wood. 2005. "Paradox and the Consumption of Authenticity through Reality Television." *Journal of Consumer Research* 32(2):284-296.

- Rubin, Alan M. 1993. "Audience Activity and Media Use." *Communication Monographs*, 60(1):98-105.
- Ruddock, Andy. 2007. *Investigating Audiences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Schee, Carolyn V., and Kip Kline. Forthcoming. "Neoliberal Exploitation in Reality Television: Youth, Health and Spectacle of Celebrity 'Concern.'" *Journal of Youth Studies* (ahead-of-print): 1-14.
- Seagal, Debra. 1993, November. "Tales from the Cutting-Room Floor: The Reality of 'Reality Based' Television." *Harper's Magazine*, 50-57.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1993. "Epidemics of the Will." Pp. 130-142 in *Tendencies*, by E.K. Sedgwick, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sender, Katherine, and Margaret Sullivan. 2008. "Epidemics of Will, Failures of Self Esteem: Responding to Fat Bodies in *The Biggest Loser* and *What Not to Wear*." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 22(4): 573-84.
- Skeggs, Beverley. 2009. "The Moral Economy of Person Production: The Class Relations of Self-Performance on 'Reality' Television." *Sociological Review* 57(4): 626-644.
- Skeggs, Beverley, Nancy Thumim and Helen Wood. 2008. "'Oh Goodness, I am watching reali TV:' How methods make class in audience research." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 11(1): 5-24.
- Stallings, Robert A. 2002. "Weberian Political Sociology and Sociological Disaster Studies." *Sociological Forum*, 17(2): 281-305.
- Staples, William G. 2000. *Everyday Surveillance: Vigilance and Visibility in Postmodern Life*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Stefanone, Michael A., and Derek Lackaff. 2009. "Reality Television as a Model for Online Behavior: Blogging, Photo, and Video Sharing." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14: 964-87.
- Stern, Danielle M. 2009. "Consuming the Fractured Female: Lessons from MTV's *The Real World*." *The Communication Review*, 12: 50-77.
- Stryker, Sheldon. 1980. *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings.

- Taylor, A. (2011). *Single Women in Popular culture: The Limits of Postfeminism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tincknell, Estella, and Parvati Raghuram. 2002. "Big Brother: Reconfiguring the 'Active' Audience of Cultural Studies?" *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5(2): 199-215.
- Thompson, Megan. 2011. "'Kourtney and Kim Take New York:' Premiere Scores Millions of Viewers." *Reality TV Magazine*, November 29. Retrieved December 11, 2011 (<http://realitytvmagazine.sheknows.com/2011/11/29/kourtney-and-kim-take-new-york-premiere-scores-high-in-ratings/>).
- Trottier, Daniel. 2012. *Social Media as Surveillance: Rethinking Visibility in a Converging World*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Trujillo, Joaquin. 2007. "Accomplishing Meaning in a Stratified World: An Existential-Phenomenological Reading of Max Weber's 'Class, Status, Party.'" *Human Studies*, 30: 345-56.
- TV.com. 2007. "Rock of Love with Bret Michaels Forums: Lacey is Producer's Choice." Retrieved March 5, 2013 (<http://www.tv.com/shows/rock-of-love-with-bret-michaels/forums/lacey-is-a-producers-choice-84705-850154/>).
- Twenge, Jean M., and W. Keith Campbell. 2009. *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. New York: Atria Paperback.
- van Zoonen, Lisbet. 2001. "Desire and Resistance: *Big Brother* and the Recognition of Everyday Life." *Media, Culture and Society*, 23: 669-77.
- Weinstein, Deena, and Michael A. Weinstein. 1978. "An Existential Approach to Society: Active Transcendence." *Human Studies*, 1(1): 38-47.
- Western Michigan University. Office of Institutional Research. 2011-2012. "WMU Factbook." Retrieved March 22, 2013 (<http://wmich.edu/ir/factbook.php?year=2011>).