Four Case Studies of Entertainment Reality Television:

Survivor, *The Bachelor*, *The Real Housewives*, and *American Idol*

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the phenomenon of Reality Television *as a form of television*. Although existing research does analyse several notions of what Reality Television *is*, this research seeks to understand the *how*. Employing four case studies of global Entertainment Reality Television formats on air between 2000 to 2018, this research asks, *'What is Reality Television doing, and how?'*. These four case studies develop a critical understanding of how the hybrid nature of certain formats have unfolded. In doing so, the research is centred on case studies of formats that were broadcast for at least a decade previous: *Survivor, The Bachelor, The Real Housewives,* and *American Idol*. This provides the opportunity to examine individual developments within each format, with a focus on identifying peculiar characteristics that have been incorporated within a format to maintain an engaging and compelling show. The characteristics are: the long-running narrative of soap-opera; the live event; the expression of region; and encouraging audience interaction via digital media. With analysis ranging from individual shows to multiple seasons, through to multiple regional versions, this research demonstrates how each format has incorporated and adapted specific attributes more commonly associated with another television genre to remain distinct. Additionally, an underlying theme throughout the research is its concentration on how each format has developed this hybridity over time: each format can therefore be analysed to foreground the differences between early and later seasons. In doing so, this thesis presents an understanding of liveness and time as has appeared within these shows, and to some degree, the Entertainment Reality Television genre.

This malleability and dynamism of the Entertainment Reality Television genre is constituted by (1) *the inclusion of defining characteristics of adjacent genres*, and (2) *how they contribute to the longevity of the format.* It will further argue that: subsequent seasons can no longer feign innocence; the format bible is a living document; even closed texts must include liveness; and across both open and closed texts, all case studies encourage audience engagement. Ultimately, this thesis will show that flexibility allows formats within the Entertainment Reality Television genre to flourish.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Rebecca Trelease

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Chapter One - Introduction

1.0   Introduction

"Well Reality TV has had *quite* the evolution. It's a *different* reality. And I should know because I was there at the beginning, with *The Comeback*. Back then it was just me and people eating bugs on *Survivor*… 'ah… what's this? This is entertainment?' Well, as it turns out, yes, yes it is. I was right. And now people can't get enough. You've got dancers, and duck hunters, and designers and… oh, just the other night I saw a show where it was just real people, sitting on a couch watching a show! And I thought well, it's official, they've run out of ideas. So, looks like it's time for me to come back."

Valerie Cherish (Lisa Kudrow), in *The Comeback* (2014).

1.1   Picture this…

A thirty-something single woman applies to be a participant on one of her favourite Entertainment Reality Television shows. A long-time fan of the genre, she has followed many of the prominent American shows since their inception – *Survivor* (2000 -), *American Idol* (2001 -), *The Amazing Race* (2001 -). Observing human behaviour of those thrust into extraordinary social situations is rather fascinating, as is following and rooting for a 'favourite' – she cries during an elimination at least once a season. Watching these shows makes her consider how she 'believes' she would behave or react, and what personalities she can identify with (or would prefer to avoid in 'real life'). The Reality Television 'boom' coincided with her leaving home for the first time, and these shows became a method of sense-making throughout her teen and early adult years.

Of course, she has considered what shows she would participate in if given the chance. *Survivor* was never an option because she hates camping; *MasterChef* (2005 -) would be interesting but only if she learned to cook without a microwave; *Big Brother* (2001 - 2008) more appealing in that the Australian series seemed like a summer vacation by the pool.

But with the call for single woman to apply for the second season of *The Bachelor New Zealand* (2016), and just scraping beneath the upper limit of the age range, it appears this is a show she is eligible for! The previous season (2015) had been surprisingly 'kiwi' –

participants chose to leave if they were not interested in the hero, and they were mostly nice and considerate of each other on screen. The 'winner' is still in a lovely relationship with a man who seemed justified to be the Bachelor (as of 2019 the couple is engaged). The show is a matchmaking success!

She applies, and to her disbelief, is chosen as one of 25 Bachelorettes. Her biggest fear is that the other participants will be mean (not true), and that she'll be the older than everyone in the mansion (she is). After six and a half weeks locked in a mansion under complete supervision, with no access to technology and limited contact with her family, her time on the show comes to an end when she does not receive a rose.

When she returns home, the show had already begun airing, and she realises its reach when she must get used to being recognised at the supermarket. She's surprised to find that based on the questions they ask, viewers are not as aware of edited or manipulated moments as she had thought. More importantly, that they are also a lot younger than she expected (largely pre-teens when the American live shows seem to suggest a more mature audience make up the fan base). Most unsettling are the requests for dates from complete strangers that she receives via social media, particularly those men who ask multiple participants from the show (yes, participants do remain friends), and the number escalates after her elimination episode airs. She declines all requests politely, with no apparent issues from the men who ask.

Meanwhile, the marketing of the prime-time show is in full swing, with all requests for interviews or events to be approved by the production company. Most of the opportunities offered to this woman – nicknamed the 'brain' (McKee, 2016) – are denied mostly because they involve discussing production of the show (which is against her participant contract, which has a stringent non-disclosure agreement built in).

The production company does, however, approve one opportunity. In it, the woman is to work as a hired consultant, to provide feedback on a new business venture. A group of businesses on a nearby island known for vineyards, beaches, and tourism, is collaborating on a service for 'new couples'. The venture's goal is to match couples looking for an

extravagant first date and design them a bespoke experience of food, fun, and activities, to facilitate their initial meeting. The entrepreneur behind the company mentions a business plan and methodology in the job brief, but the role entails meeting the business owners, discussing what they hope to provide, and to offer suggestions in a written report. The woman's qualifications as a 'romance consultant' largely lie in that she fits the 'target demographic' as a thirty-something woman (the matching service and bespoke experiences will not be cheap), she has critical and analytical experience as a result of her university education, and 'romance experience' from the show. There is an hourly rate as a consultant, as well as the bonus of enjoying the food and activities on offer. The opportunity is too good to be true and completely different to advertising teeth whitening on Instagram (which seems to be the more typical opportunity for unsuccessful participants globally).

The day begins with a scenic helicopter ride across the harbour before landing in style at a fabulous vineyard. Via wax-sealed envelope she is introduced to a man who is also a 'romance consultant', and that – surprise! – they will be experiencing the activities together, as the business plan is centred on two people. This is not what she expected, but she is a professional, and embarks on what is essentially a treasure hunt around the island. More envelopes are located across the island - under a park bench, in a library book - each including questions to spark conversations (these are all remarkably in tune with topics the woman mentioned while on the show). One activity has them entering a retirement village and joining a knitting group, something that makes her feel uncomfortable and leaves her wondering what to write in the final report. She convinces herself to follow the logical reason that the business is simply tailoring activities to what it knows about the individuals involved (she had worked in a retirement village prior to going on the show, a fact that featured regularly in a variety of ways). She reasons this is just a by-product of having been on a popular Reality Television show.

The sealed envelopes, however, reveal increasingly personal topics and questions, and the penultimate one contains a three-page, A4-size, declaration of the other consultant's romantic position. Then the final envelope contains direct transcripts and screenshots from a media interview that took place after her elimination, which gives the woman the impression that this business idea needs to be extremely toned down before the launch.

After six hours the consultancy is over, and slightly bewildered that the day did not include any discussion of a business plan or even meeting some of the owners involved, she writes up the report. She tries to put it delicately that there would need to be a specific type of individual who would enjoy all of that for a first date… and in that respect perhaps she was not the target market.

Soon after the entrepreneur emails to say that the man she spent the day with (the other consultant) would like to stay in contact with her; she responds, again politely, that she is not currently looking for a relationship after the extreme experience of the show. In reality, she has no intention of looking for a 'spark' or 'connection' with this man (to use words from the show she was on), especially given that she met him in a professional situation.

In response, she receives an email that begins perfectly normally; she is thanked for her time and dedication to the consultancy role. Incredibly, however, the 'entrepreneur' also decides to come clean… the other consultant is, in fact, him. Every aspect of the business and his identity as the entrepreneur were concocted for the sole purpose of meeting his favourite participant from the recent show – her. You see, they both had such similar interests and personalities (based on what he knew of her from the show), and he realised there was a chance at true love for the pair – if only they could meet! First, he had worked out what must be her university email address and tried contacting her – twice! – with lengthy emails (and pictures of himself) requesting to meet. When she did not reply either time, he realised he needed to think 'outside the box'. Granted, helicopter and horse rides, vineyards and rest homes are not quite in the same vein as an invitation for a coffee, a movie, or dinner, but she's been on such an extreme show: he really needs to get her attention.

The woman is very confused, as while it does explain his intense attention to the details of her life, her university email is a random combination of letters and numbers (years later she finds she also had a staff email address that was based on her name, and this was the address he had used). She drafts many replies in response to this extremely bizarre and worrying confession. At the heart of every version is that the entire business, the 'man', the day itself, were all lies. She can see he obviously must be very confident in admitting to such

an elaborate façade despite being told she was not interested. But how to reply to such confidence? It feels wrong to thank someone for telling the truth after maintaining a separate identity via emails for weeks beforehand, and then playing a role for a full six hours in person.

Further this man was utterly deceptive: in making a romantic gesture under the guise of a professional role, he was deliberately demonstrating his power and wealth, and ultimately, his desire to control (obviously he paid for the helicopter, the private wine room, the activities they went through on the day, *her fee*). Whether she had received his initial emails or not (again, she did not have access to the account until two years after the event), the situation was, at the least, weird and potentially dangerous. Someone else may have responded differently (maybe another woman *would* find this romantic?), but for her, it feels incredibly creepy, especially when considering that he had transcribed her interviews, printed screenshots of her, and ultimately, *paid* her to meet him.

In the end, I did not respond to the 'confession' email. After taking advice and spending considerable time considering my options, I reinforced my polite 'no thank you' by not engaging any further. Thankfully – and perhaps remarkably – neither the 'entrepreneur' nor the 'consultant' pursued me any further, and I donated the 'consultancy fee' to charity.

This is the power of Reality Television: this man had watched *The Bachelor* and presumably identified with the mediated representation of me as a participant in the show to the point of believing he and I would be compatible in real life. Now on one level, this is a normal, everyday process: bedrooms are filled with One Direction posters; countless women (and men) cried when Jack froze in *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997). Typically, however, teenagers grow out of their infatuation with boy bands and, if a particularly fervent viewer does not receive an email reply from Leo DiCaprio, they tend not to contact his management in order to get him to take part in an elaborate, deceptive, deeply alarming 'business opportunity'.

One key reason here is that most viewers know (or at least acknowledge) that popstars and actors do not inhabit the same world they themselves live in. Their lives are obviously 'out

of reach' as a component of their celebrity; their screen time mediated or at least shaped by the role they play (be it teen heartthrob, film character, or star-on-the-endless-promotional-loop-that-accompanies-the-film). Participants in Reality Television shows like me, by contrast, are substantially more accessible. As viewers we identify with a participant as a 'real person' who appears in their domestic spaces every week. We share their frustrations at hitting a bad musical note, the elation of nailing their favourite dish, and when we pick our favourite we *really* want them to succeed. These participants become our friends; they have jobs like regular citizens, and when a show ends we can eat at their new restaurant, or walk through their Open Homes. And in a country as small as New Zealand, you may randomly meet them on the street or know 'a friend of a friend' who could even introduce you.

But there are also those – like the person who concocted the elaborate 'experience' to meet me – who do not rely on chance to meet the participant they have bonded with via their screen. My experience, while frightening and deeply weird (I experienced quite a shock over the weeks and months afterwards as the true complexity and details this man had schemed to develop sunk in) fits into the 'abnormal but broadly safe' category: I am well aware that I was lucky not to attract the attention of an erotomaniac, a person who delusionally wanted to hurt another to impress me, or, worst of all, someone who intended to harm me physically. Nevertheless, finding out the lengths this dual-personality went to – one example was him calling the helicopter company every second day to ensure their staff did not reveal his secret during my flight – reveals the astonishing amount of time, effort, and financial expense he devoted to someone he had never actually met in person. There is no doubt he felt very strongly that we had met, but the person he saw onscreen was not, could not, have been "me". For one thing, I was a participant in a form of gameshow, and my interactions with people on the show were shaped by the circumstances and rules of the format (such as always being fully made-up, wearing glamorous outfits, and having a glass of bubbles in my hand most of the time we sat around the pool). For another, the decisions to portray "me" onscreen were ultimately not my own. Producers and production staff manipulated my 'storyline' with the questions they posed for me to respond to, the bachelor worked to an agenda of his own, and post-production decisions literally edited "me" into a wider

narrative. And yet someone felt such a connection to that persona that he literally would not give up until he had the chance to 'prove' that he and I were meant to be together.

At one level a story like this is an extreme example. Yet it is no exaggeration to say that millions of people around the globe live vicariously through their favourite Reality Television 'stars' every week. They experience real, deep, and long-lasting emotion. They choose to devote their time and money to stay up to date with their favourite's actions (via the tabloid media for example) and / or their 'output' (songs, recipes, products promoted via their Instagram feed). Rather than write off my experience as simply speaking to a (fortunately ultimately harmless) romantic delusion of an individual person, I consider it towards one end of a continuum of reaction and behaviour that underpins the attraction and durability of Reality Television itself: there is something qualitatively different about how this genre speaks to viewers, and how viewers feel able, and emboldened, to 'speak back'.

1.2   Context – the importance of television

The medium of television plays a central role in everyday life whether socially, technically, or historically. We invite the television set into our homes; to entertain, for information, or to fall asleep to the sounds of chatter and white noise. As times change, so do trends in content, which is, in turn, subject to popular and academic commentary and interrogation. My thesis aims to engage with a specific and very popular contemporary genre that has surprised some with its longevity and refusal to relinquish its reign over primetime television – Entertainment Reality Television.

Since its introduction to the family home in the 1950s, the television set has become a personal portal to worldwide occurrences. Major historical events became accessible to the general public from the very beginning; one early example was the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. Despite real and deeply felt concerns about the effects of popularising (and therefore demystifying) the monarchy, television coverage of the coronation afforded viewers a new level of accessibility, as the footage from inside Westminster Abbey – a building few had the chance to enter - was broadcast to homes and public houses throughout the country (*The Royal Family Website*, n.d.). The power of the image was

impressively obvious, with more than twice the number of people in the UK watching the coronation on television as opposed to listening on the radio - 27 million to 11 million respectively (*The Royal Family Website*, n.d.). With this one event, television demonstrated how it could provide the novelty and immediacy of visuals, the drama of the live broadcast, and a comprehensive level of accessibility for the public.

Importantly, it is the images from television broadcasts that first come to mind when recalling more recent historical events – Kensington Palace's sea of flowers after the death of Princess Diana, planes flying into the Twin Towers, or terrified children leaving the scene of a school shooting. Of course, these images also appear on the front page of a newspaper or the homepage when we start our browser. But it is the combination of image and sound, the immediacy of this information, and the respect and gravitas of those who bring it to us (and interpret it for us) via our television screens that truly delivers impact. Television can transport the viewer as close as possible to global events, despite their physical location (Dayan & Katz, 1992). It can place the viewer in the role of a witness (Peters, 1999). It literally brings the pain – and the triumphs – that make the world into our most private domestic spaces. The importance of such abilities is, of course, a very important area of research in itself (see: Bourdon, 2000; Marriott, 2007; Scannell, 2014), and I will return to these theories and scholars throughout this thesis. In particular, I will pay particular attention to the concepts of viewing communities and live events in my consideration of how the Reality Television genre attempts to bring the viewer as close as possible to supposed 'once-in-a-lifetime' events.

In being a part of our domestic lives television plays a huge social role in the lives of the vast majority of people. For example, with the introduction of television into the family lounge, existing furniture was oriented towards the television set (Nathan, Anderson, Field, & Collins, 1985). Television changed the structure of daily life, as dinner or social activities had to fit in and around 'must-see' scheduled programmes (Zerubavel, 1985). It also changes the ambience of the home, as even if no one is paying attention, a switched-on television set is always contributing to the soundscape (Medrich, 1979). Over many decades scholars have consistently demonstrated how the role that the television plays within everyday life demonstrates its centrality to the lifeworld of viewers as individuals, members of families,

workmates, friends, colleagues, and so on (see: Ellis, 2000; Kataria & Regner, 2011; Mittell, 2010). Such ideas underpin this thesis, particularly the role television plays in promoting, enabling, and encouraging certain types of social interaction. Despite the pace of technological change in recent years and the resulting proliferation of media devices and content platforms, it is often necessary to watch the latest show to understand and join in with the conversation at the 'watercooler'. Even with the introduction of time-shifting technologies, the need to be up to date requires that watching a show as it airs remains a priority.

The television set itself is a site of constant technological evolution. The move from black and white to colour was only the first of these changes. Today's television set may have 4K resolution or 3D capabilities, internet connectivity, or link with as viewer's smartphone which then functions as a remote. Here, research can centre on the technologies and their capabilities (see: Ciciora, Farmer, Large, & Adams, 2004; Cinque & Vincent, 2018; Cipolla-Ficarra, Alma, & Cipolla-Ficarra, 2018), but I do not have the space or inclination to explore this pathway in my thesis. What is relevant to my research, however, is the fact that television will always shift towards emerging technological trends, and this in turn can greatly affect how we watch television. Between 2000 and 2018 there have been considerable advancements across many digital media fields, and many of these have influenced and shaped the Reality Television genre. Where appropriate, they will be incorporated in my thesis. With the introduction of broadband, the smart-phone, and an ever-expanding range of 'the latest' social media applications, the combination of emerging technologies and how they interact with television is worthy of further exploration.

Relatedly, there have been considerable changes to the delivery and consumption of television content. One example is the historical move towards commercialisation which changed the structure of programmes, as narrative storytelling methods had to consider segmentation for advertising breaks (Newman, 2006). Here, I will consider how the commercialisation of the New Zealand television industry may have influenced the Reality Television genre locally. Another, perhaps more important example for my purposes, however, is how the relationship between a production and the concept of time can be directed and controlled, particularly in relation to the live event (see: Dienst, 1994; Scannell,

2014; Williams, 2004). One issue here that previous scholars have not necessarily focussed on, but that will be significantly important for my research, is the investigation of Reality Television shows as a component of 'primetime' (Esser, 2010). This time slot is particularly important for my research, as networks maximise their advertising potential during the time of their highest audience numbers, and therefore if Entertainment Reality Television formats screen in primetime, we can reasonably assume that they play an important financial role in the commercial television ecology.

With the rise of Web 2.0 the television industry learned very quickly that it had to adapt to changing methods of viewership, as web-based content could compete with 'the TV set in the corner'. With such strong competition, each network must choose what shows will not only attract, but also keep, their audience. Losing viewers means losing revenue, so a network must be confident that those shows airing during prime-time will deliver advertising dollars (Deng & Mela, 2018). This is the main area of focus for this research – clearly networks are placing their faith in the Reality Television genre, but why do certain shows maintain their influence after 18 years? When we consider how often negative connotations are associated with Reality Television (see: Bennett, 2006; Corner, 1999; Paget, 2011), the commitment of dedicating the most important broadcast hours to this genre is intriguing. One example here, is that from 2017 New Zealand's Channel Three has screened the home makeover competition show *The Block* (2012 -) in primetime slots four nights a week, Sunday to Wednesday, consistently winning in key ratings demographics (Mediaworks, 2017). Clearly, despite much popular and academic criticism of the genre, this Reality Television show becomes an advertising drawcard for the 13 weeks it was on air.

The desire to watch 'reality' is not new. In ancient Rome, gladiatorial events literally sublimated citizen's potential to advocate for political change at the same time as they provided massive real, live, spectacles where the lives and deaths were as bloodthirsty and tragic as they would be on a battlefield. And of course there is evidence of the power of myth, legend, and fiction to interpret, situate and police 'reality' through the sages, poems, comedy and tragedy throughout recorded history. The relationship between, and the problematics inherent in the 'popular' and the 'real' and 'quality' and 'art' are, therefore, in

no sense new or unique to the present day (Ewigleben, 2000). In fact, we can see how the presentation and re-presentation of reality in contemporary society is constantly developing at an ever-increasing pace. Soon, for instance, the power to manipulate moving footage digitally will be as seamless and undetectable as that which currently applies to still images. With that background, and in the context of a reflexive modernity that constantly prioritises making and remaking the self (as a person, an image, a brand, in fact in relation to any component part of one's identity), the Reality Television genre shows no sign of becoming less relevant, let alone disappearing. Instead, as this research will prove, some shows constantly speak to and incorporate established or emerging trends and developments across a wide range of sites to rework itself, reimagine its role, and remain relevant.

1.3   Chapter Breakdown

Chapter Two provides the required context for this thesis, including an overview of New Zealand television broadcasting, the state of local content within that system, and the early development and adoption of the Reality Television genre. This is then followed with an understanding of the term Reality Television and how it has been defined by academia. Lastly, I provide my personal viewpoint within this thesis, particularly how my cultural and academic background, and former production experience positions my approach.

Chapter Three is the literature review, which focuses on scholarship around the themes of genre and class as they apply to television. Elements include the progression from documentary beginnings, and the influence of the television medium, to establish a sense of hybridity within the Reality Television genre. Also included is an examination of the relationship between high and low class in conjunction with good/bad quality. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the key influences around the Reality Television genre, as well as identifying the main issues that may impact this thesis.

Chapter Four develops a taxonomy of liveness in order to position that concept as a conceptual model for understanding the television medium and the potential place of Entertainment Reality Television within it. Here, I highlight key components of liveness including talk, units of time, commodifying time, the everyday, and cultural capital. The aim

is to produce a critical understanding of television in and of itself that can offer an alternative to approaches like standard political economy that often devalue and or discard forms of television that are pre-defined as unserious, cheap, diverting, or low-brow.

Chapter Five details the methodological approaches I have taken in the thesis, with the primary structure being a collection of case studies. The findings from these case studies culminate in wider discussion regarding how all four shows offer an understanding of Entertainment Reality Television between the years 2000 and 2018. I will employ textual analysis, with the content and structure of a format considered as it is presented in the broadcast episode or series. While relevant production or audience factors may be taken into consideration, the research focuses on the analysis as provided by the original broadcast text.

Chapter Six features the first case study, that of the *Survivor* format. The analysis will show that the established long-running narrative of the format is deliberately utilising and repurposing characteristics from the soap-opera genre.

Chapter Seven is a case study that centres on the concept of the live broadcast and demonstrates how elements of liveness appear within the premiere episode of season nineteen of *The Bachelor*. This chapter demonstrates how incorporating these elements revitalised the format without disrupting the original show structure.

The case study in Chapter Eight investigates the expression of region in *The Real Housewives* format. It will show that despite the structure of the format, unique aspects of each region are integral to the success of the show, as they provide a counterbalance to an otherwise one dimensional, consumerist and politically conservative narrative.

The final case study in Chapter Nine analyses how *American Idol* encourages audience engagement via digital media. The analysis will show how the format has developed over fifteen seasons to incorporate new and emerging modes of engagement while striving to retain the typifying characteristics of the format itself.

Chapter Ten offers a discussion of the wider significance of developments within these four case studies, in that these shows remain remarkably flexible and malleable as a form of television. In addition, this chapter includes reflection on the limitations and research implications of the thesis, as well as suggestions for further avenues for research.

Chapter Two – Background

2.0   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of the Entertainment Reality Television genre and my approach to this research. I will begin with an academic discussion of Reality Television to locate the origin and definition of the term before positioning my personal entry-point into the thesis.

2.1   Origins from within New Zealand

New Zealand presents a unique situation in that due to the size of the population, the 'biggest national audiences are equivalent to regional or niche audiences in larger countries' (Horrocks, 2004, p. 7). Deregulation in the years following 1989 geared broadcasters towards a commercially-driven market, creating an innovative broadcasting space, despite having one of the lowest levels of local content (in 2002 only 27.4% of aired programmes were New Zealand-made, compared to Australia's 55%, the UK's 70%, or USA's 90%) (Horrocks, 2004, p. 10). Although New Zealand audiences have 'unrestricted access to the best of American and British productions', it has perhaps come at the expense of the riskier venture of investing in local productions (Dunleavy, 2005, p. 2). However, the country has instead become a site for exploration and possibilities, in television commercials and, particularly, when utilising the 'cheaper' genre of Reality Television. In fact, some of the earliest examples of formats that became Reality Television staples emerged in New Zealand.

Flatmates (1997), a 'kiwi' take on MTV's *The Real World* (1992), followed six strangers and their experiences of living together in a segregated house. This concept was also explored further in *kiwiflatmates.com* (2000), with five strangers living together in a house but bound by 'house rules'. *Flatmates* was an obvious precursor to the *Big Brother* format: participants could leave for up to four hours a week, but otherwise remained in lockdown, with webcams throughout the house and an elimination every three weeks. In *kiwiflatmates.com* viewers could watch online from around the world and interact with participants in the website chatroom (Cleave, 2000). The concept was well-received globally, with statistics of 'more than two million page impressions' in under two months, and international news

coverage (Brown, 2000). *Treasure Island* (1997 - 2007) stranded 'unknown' (and in later seasons celebrity), participants on a Pacific Island to face challenges and eliminations while trying to locate hidden treasure. While remarkably similar in format to *Expedition Robinson* (1997), the New Zealand format pre-dates that of *Survivor*, which did not begin until 2000. The timings of these shows demonstrate the potential for fast adoption of new formats across different countries or territories.

The most important New Zealand innovation in Reality Television, however, was *Popstars* (1999), which documented the creation of the all-female band *TruBliss*. The show covered the entire process from auditions and eliminations through to the production and release of their first single. There was only one New Zealand season, but the format remains one of New Zealand's most influential television exports to date. The creator, Jonathan Dowling, sold the rights to Australian company Screentime, resulting in the Australian show and the band *Bardot*. Screentime subsequently sold the format rights to England, Canada, Germany, Italy, and Denmark, as well as the Warner Brothers network, making it the first New Zealand reality format to be sold to America (Cleave, 2000). It is clear that the origin of many successful series lies within *Popstars*, as 'that show's DNA defines the world's most successful TV formats, including *The X Factor*, *American Idol* and *Britain's Got Talent'* (Shaps, 2009). The UK version of the show produced the band *Hearsay*, as well as instigating a giant move in Reality Television:

> It was then that Fuller himself spotted something stirring in the forest, moved in and created a further twist with *Pop Idol* for ITV. *Pop Idol* introduced two new elements, which would both prove crucial: audience participation by phone vote, and Simon Cowell's participation on the panel. "Having a great idea isn't everything," says Dowling. "It really took the Simons [Cowell and Fuller] to gear it up to another level" (Shaps, 2009).

The impact of the show remains significant, as its contribution to the Reality Television genre demonstrates (see: Halloran, 2017; Shuker, 2013; Shuker, 2017). While a relatively small country, New Zealand had sufficient creative talent to find a commercially-driven, but unique local cultural voice. And because the most obvious expression of the voice was within Reality Television, it is possible to show that commercialism is `not, in and of itself, a barrier to innovation and, indeed, quality . At this point, therefore, it is important to provide

an understanding of the term Reality Television, isolating a moment the genre began, and how the term is defined within this research.

2.2   What is 'reality' and what does it mean?

In this section I will outline the definition of Reality Television as a cultural artefact, and how I will employ this definition as a term of art in my research. In her work on Reality Television audiences, Annette Hill provides a solid and succinct starting point: 'reality tv is a catch all category that includes a wide range of entertainment programmes about real people. It's located in border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama' (Hill, 2005, p. 449). Beginning with an examination of uses of the term broken down chronologically, then thematically, and followed by an analysis of the emergence of the term in New Zealand television broadcasting, this analysis will culminate in my deployment of the term 'Reality Television' in this thesis.

Defining 'reality' is a task that required constant recalibration as the genre developed. Noted television scholar Jonathan Bignell defined Reality Television in 2002 as 'programmes where the unscripted behaviour of "ordinary people" is the focus of interest'; however by 2004 he admitted this definition as 'problematic', as it could be applied to all kinds of programmes outside the general consensus of Reality Television (2005, p. 1). Although he does not provide examples, this definition could potentially include documentaries - unscripted texts following ordinary people - as Reality Television. This difficulty with definitions demonstrates the need to understand the how the term 'reality' within television terminology has appeared throughout the years.

While most research focuses on more recent eras of reality, Richard Kilborn suggests that elements of 'reality' first appeared much earlier than academic coverage would suggest (2003). He compares moments of constructed elements in the documentary film *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty, 1922), with those of Reality Television, arguing that the origins of the genre have been present in film since the early 1920s (p. 54). Similar examples of reality characteristics can also be seen in the early 1950s, with Anna McCarthy labelling Allen Funt's 'hidden camera' segments for *Omnibus* (1952 - 1961) a 'timely social document of

reality television' (2004, p. 19). Kilborn echoes this sentiment, positioning the 1950s and 1960s as a television era rich in the characteristics of reality, as the game or quiz shows ultimately revolved around the participation of ordinary members of the public (2003, p. 25). These early examples suggest that despite the current inescapability of the reality genre, the underlying characteristics have been present longer than is generally recognised.

The 1970s provided the oft-cited "beginning" of Reality Television with *An American Family* (1973) (see: Gilbert, 2005; Ruoff, 1998; Rupert & Puckett, 2010). However, its connection to the Reality Television genre has been identified relatively recently, for at the time producer Craig Gilbert labelled it 'a real-life soap opera' but with cinematic stylistic techniques (Murray, 2009, p. 65). Susan Murray's research found television listings allocated *An American Family* a range of differing classifications, and critics comparing the show 'to everything from home movies to situation comedies' (2009, p. 65). This suggests that, at the time, multiple narrative and characteristics were being utilised to form a new expression of television, but this had not fully formed into a recognisable genre. Yet the approach to capture and capitalise on this combination continued into the 1980s, as British television began to popularise the entertainment-oriented documentary (Kilborn, 2003, p. 9).

Twenty years after *An American Family*, discussion turned towards its influence on *The Real World*. Robert Thomson, cited in Huff, states 'what *The Real World* did was come up with the idea of setting up a completely artificial family, under artificial circumstances, and do *An American Family* treatment' (Huff, 2006, p. 13). By contrast, Huff argues differently, and defines *An American Family* as a documentary, versus the created television experiment of *The Real World*. However, Huff does concede that *The Real World* was the first genre-defined Reality Television show, with 'real people…in non-acting roles' (p. ix). This aligns with Richard Kilborn's 1994 definition of Reality Television, as 'slice-of-life observational documentaries' (Kilborn, 2003, p. 55). One of the most intriguing attributes is the difference between these shows of the early 1990s and those that premiered later that decade. Huff argues that the relatively limited audience for MTV was why the term did not catch on in the early 1990s, but Kilborn counters that by stressing MTV's overall importance – the fledgling network attracting attention to the entertainment / documentary combination before launching on major American networks (2003). What is certain is that from 1999

onwards the reality genre became a popular mainstream genre, particularly with Peter Bazalgette's assertion that the arrival of *Big Brother [Netherlands]* (1999 - 2006) presented 'a new form of engagement with television' (Bazalgette, cited in Kilborn, 2003, p. 7). Likewise, Huff states that *Survivor* 'actually launched the reality revolution in the United States', in that 'the medium of television was changed forever' (2006, pp. ix - x). By 2003, Kilborn updated his previous interpretation of Reality Television from ten years earlier by recognising that the genre was in constant negotiation, which of course has not stopped in the intervening years. What is clear overall however, is that the term was recognisable and in common use by the end of the 1990s.

Rather than isolating specific texts across the years, there is research that prefers to group texts by influential movements. Although still chronological, there is a greater emphasis on the television culture, than independent texts. As Misha Kavka explains, the difficulty in researching this genre is that 'traditionally chronological history could [not] cover such diversity, nor explain reality TV in terms of a single origin' (2012, p. 4). In this sense, what now follows covers the terminology around these groupings.

Anna McCarthy places emphasis again on the 1950s, as Allan Funt's *Candid Camera* (1948 - 2014) offered 'the representation of real people through concealed observation' which she defines as the 'first wave of reality TV' (2004, p. 22). By contrast, Annette Hill locates her 'first wave' as crime and emergency services shows on UK television during the late 1980s and early 1990s (2005, p. 24). Similarly, Kavka's definition identifies a 'first generation', that includes reality crime programmes from the early 1990s in the US, or the second half of the 1990s in the UK (2012, p. 9). From here the two differ, as Hill's 'second wave' focuses on lifestyle programming in the mid to late 1990s, while Kavka's 'second generation' begins with *Big Brother Netherlands* introducing the competition game show.

Situated at some point between these two views, Huff credits *The Real World* and later *Road Rules* (1996 - 2007) as 'ground zero of the reality television wave', in that 'it took *The Real World* to turn that into a programming form' (2006, p. 14). This period is not included in Hill's analysis until her 'third wave', which consists of social experiments and controlled environments during the early 2000's (2005, p. 24). Kavka's 'third generation' refers to the

'production of celebrity', as the genre 'disengages from its documentary roots and becomes a self-conscious participant in the rituals of self-commodification and self-legitimation that define contemporary celebrity culture' (2012, pp. 9 - 10). From this point, both acknowledge the constantly developing nature of the genre, with Hill's 'current wave' (2005 onwards), as a 'free-for-all' (2005, p. 24).

It is clear, therefore, that while scholars may not agree on the exact timing of each successive 'wave' within the genre, there is a very obvious sense in which it can be analysed in terms of significant changes to or additions within the formats available. With regards to the classification of a television broadcast, however, it is possible to pinpoint the moment when 'Reality Television' becomes a specified genre.

Hill finds that prior to the early 2000s the BBC had listed 'general factual entertainment' as separate to 'specialist factual programming'. From 2003 onwards, the BBC changed the 'structure of factual genres to reflect the changing nature of factual television' (2005, p. 42). As a result, six new categories were formed within the one overall genre structure, including 'contemporary factual; specialist factual; current affairs and investigations; arts and culture; lifeskills; and new media' (p. 42). Isolating the moment in which UK broadcasting defined the Reality Television genre is significant because it provides a moment in time – 2003 - in which the BBC found the genre classification necessary. Further, this importance is underlined by the fact that the BBC found the genre so diverse that it required six parallel categories.

For a New Zealand context, my own analysis of weekly television schedules in *The New Zealand Listener* (1939 -) from the late 1990s and early 2000s establishes the term 'Reality Television' was used as a genre classification from January 1998. Listings throughout 1997 include shows that are now considered Reality Television, but these had no specific classification. For example, *The Real World*, airing in June 1997, is not categorised at all (Weekly TV Listings: 28 June, 1997). Two months later, *Ice TV* (1995 - 2001) promotes an interview with '*Flatmates* star Craig Wright', choosing not to specify his role in the show as both participant and cameraman (Weekly TV Listings: 16 August, 1997), perhaps because this collation of roles was too outside "the normal". In December 1997, *Sylvania Waters*

(1992) (listed as a repeat), is labelled as a 'fly-on-the-wall documentary' (Weekly TV Listings: 27 December, 1997).

In January 1998, the TV Highlights section features the first 'Reality TV' category, featuring *Storm Warning* (information unknown) and *Extreme Close Up* (1997 - 1999), (Weekly TV Listings: 10 January, 1998). It is important to note, however, that articles relating to shows that now would be considered Reality Television, for example *Changing Rooms* (1997 - 2004), do not use the term 'reality' (Weekly TV Listings: 10 January, 1998). These listings diversify over the following months, as shows labelled under Reality Television appear under the sub-categories of 'Comedy', for example, *Fresh up in the Deep End* (1997 - 1998) or 'Cult', for example, *Changing Rooms* (Weekly TV Listings: 7 February, 1999).

It is likely that the impetus for the new term was the introduction of two new television stations, MTV and TV4, in June 1997 (Weekly TV Listings: 28 June, 1997). Targeting a 'youth audience', TV4 in particular consisted mainly of shows such as *The Real World* (*Generating An Audience,* 1997*)*. There was an intense industry-focus on these two new stations over a period of six months, and the increased exposure to reality content that they brought was most likely the impetus for the term 'Reality Television' to be deployed in New Zealand. The listings also demonstrate that once the term was established, the need for further clarification was required, as in the BBC example, which confirms the constantly developing nature of the genre.

Although there remains considerable debate within academia as to the specific moment the genre was 'born', what is clear is that characteristics of Reality Television can be found in many (sometimes unexpected) television genres. It could be argued that it is this combination of various components of other genres that creates such compelling and successful shows. What the majority of academics agree is that with the introduction of *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, and the singing talent competition format in the late 1990s / early 2000s, Reality Television was firmly positioned within the mainstream both in terms of audience popularity and prime-time exposure. My research is based on this period of widespread initial popularity for two reasons. First, these often-repeated formats remain popular staples, raising the question as to *what* is it in their creation that positions them as

unique within this genre? Second, *how* is it possible that these formats continue to be relevant so many years after their initial broadcast? This thesis, therefore, focuses on the period after 1999, and pays specific attention to the competition format.

2.3   Personal Viewpoint

The final section of this chapter provides an important context for this research: my ideological position as a critical, academic viewer. In terms of research design, I will conduct my case studies so the steps within them will be replicable; however, there will be instances where my subjective positioning may identify particular issues or trends that might not be obvious to other viewers.

My cultural background and ethnicity is New Zealand European and New Zealand Māori, with the European heritage a result of English migration to New Zealand following World War II. My whakapapa[1] Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi, situated within my maternal lineage, is represented in the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi by my ancestor Te Kaeaea. My experiences in the lived reality of bridging opposing cultures of New Zealand colonial history may have influenced my desire to explore the 'glocalization' of Reality Television models – how is identity constructed/reinforced within a standard global format?

Having progressed through the New Zealand secondary school system, I completed a Bachelor's Degree with first class honours from the University of Waikato. To complement this, I also achieved a Master's degree from the University of Warwick, ranked in the Top 10 Universities in the UK during my studies there in 2013/2014 (The Complete University Guide, 2017). The Film and Television Department was also ranked first in Communication and Media Studies in the UK during this period (The Complete University Guide, University Subject Tables 2014, 2017). My Honour's research project focused on the juxtaposition between documentary and surrealism, while my Master's dissertation enquired into the relationship between the female and the abject in the horror genre. This current research

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[1] Whakapapa best translates to English as "genealogy". A person's Whakapapa, therefore, identifies their familial links which bind them too an iwi (tribe). Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi is an iwi that is historically located in and linked to the Whanganui area of the lower North Island. In contemporary society it is somewhat unusual for an individual to descend directly from a signatory of the Treaty of Waitangi.

project on Reality Television is to fulfil the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy. Taken together, these educational achievements do place me within an elite group in New Zealand society (that is, those with tertiary, and postgraduate, qualifications), and as such, my viewing position will be influenced by a higher educational (and therefore also socio-economic) level than average.

Building on this, I also recognise my positionality as a critical television scholar. Here, my viewpoint will no doubt be influenced to some degree at least by an awareness of two deeper level factors: (a) the production process itself (for instance the role of post-production in the construction of the final text); and (b) the creative dynamics embedded within the wider film and television industry (for instance the intertextuality that can emerge as a series develops over time). Although I began watching the first seasons of *Survivor* as an 'average viewer', the key factor of that programme that intrigues me 17 years later – the long-running narrative that is constructed and deployed across multiple seasons – may not be a motivating factor for another viewer to watch multiple seasons of the show. And one can also point to the importance of technological change in situating critical viewership; the method by which an audience member could interact with singing competitions in the early millennium was voting via telephone (either landline or mobile). By contrast, now any viewer can interact with participants during a live broadcast via twitter.

At a yet deeper level I also have the experience of being a practitioner in the film and television industries for 15 years. I have been involved as an actor in television productions in both New Zealand and Canada, experiencing first-hand the particular differences between genres, for example soap-opera versus drama. Experiencing and recognising these differences (such as those between countries, industries and / or genres) has informed my viewing position beyond an academic critical standpoint. For example, my time as an actor has shown me the 'behind the scenes' aspects of production that are only available to those who have direct lived experiences. This immersion into a text via performance, and by observing the basic functions of production roles, has educated me in the importance of considering many production aspects behind a text, whether that text is for a student short film or a US network television show.

Even closer to my field of research, I was a participant in the second series of a large-scale Reality Television show, *The Bachelor New Zealand*. This was an immersive experience, requiring me to live within the reality production format for six and a half weeks, as well as coping with the demands of associated media requirements (for example radio and press interviews) after my subsequent elimination was broadcast. Living within this environment and then viewing the final edit provided me with a unique subjective viewpoint: I was both a participant and also a critical, scholarly viewer. Having watched the American format (and its various spinoffs) since their inception, over the years I had progressed from an 'average viewer', to an 'educated viewer'. Now I am also able to view and interpret the show from the vantage point of a previous participant.

While my time on *The Bachelor* is not explored within this thesis, my experience of living within a reality show production does afford me a unique perspective. It is important to note that participants do not always appear on these shows for fame (see: Grindstaff, 2012), and in fact, my intent in participating was for my personal enjoyment; I did not enter the show as an academic. In filmed conversations (interestingly removed from the final edit), I explained that I chose to enter into such an extreme and public way of finding love because of the personal enjoyment I had as a viewer and as a fan. Having watched so many formats I always wondered – on a completely subjective level – what such an experience would be like. I often find myself identifying with those participants with similar personality traits to mine, and like many viewers I would consider how I would fare in such a competition. Unfortunately, I am not skilled enough for a cooking show, talented enough for a singing competition, and would never survive the first week of *Survivor*. In fact, the only formats I would ever consider competing in would be *The Bachelor* - no skills required - or *The Amazing Race*, which must be performed as team. Having seen the success of the first season of *The Bachelor New Zealand*, I entered the show as a participant in good faith, believing in the concept of finding 'true love'.[2]

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[2] The 'winners' of the New Zealand version of *The Bachelor* season one recently announced their engagement; despite criticisms of the format there are always success stories, which is why I continue watching.

My personal positioning then could be considered in three ways: as a fan of the genre for the past 18 years; in my scholarly view of screen and media as an academic; and my experiences as an actor and reality show participant. And although it is possible – indeed almost certain – that every contestant consists of multiple identities (fan, academic, viewer), unfortunately this agency is not afforded to a participant of the 'harem' (Dubrofsky, 2006). Simply put, in my experience "the girls" were constantly encouraged to identify with and play up to a specific persona / stereotype. As the oldest of the contestants on Season Two, I had the dubious honour of rejecting the "time's running out – think of your age!" persona and later, when a daily newspaper learned I was a PhD student I had to firmly rebut the idea I was a "femme fatale / deceitful spy" within the narrative of the show. In my experience, the complexity of the reality of lived experience of a young single woman was not interesting to the production team. As an example, I was never identified as having Māori heritage, as I do not present myself that way (for instance, I had blonde hair at the time of filming). By contrast the bachelor himself was permitted to have a more multidimensional identity. For me this was particularly important: in Season Two the 'hero' was, unlike me, positioned as having a career in the film and television industries, AND being capable of looking for love.

Although there are multiple ways my experience could have been used for this thesis (examples include an autoethnography of the experience, participant analysis of the other women, the application of 'learned knowledge' to 'game the system' etc.), I never had the intent to organise my research in this way. I entered the show to experience those things that always appear on television to be fun and exciting methods of finding love. Unfortunately, that did not happen for me or, even, for the eventual 'winner'.[3] Of course, my research may possibly be influenced by my participation within one format and my aim is to deploy what I learned from my time as a contestant where appropriate, this thesis remains a critical analysis of the overall Entertainment Reality Television genre, including how various formats have developed over an extended period of time. Any analysis of or reflection on my personal experience will feature in future research projects.

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[3] The relationship of the 'winners' of the New Zealand version of *The Bachelor* season two ended very publicly the day after the final episode aired.

2.4   Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the general field of Reality Television as a site of study, and provide details of how my personal circumstances have influenced my research. In the first case, New Zealand played an important role in the early development of the Reality Television genre. In the second case, it is important to remember that, although there is general agreement on the term Reality Television and what it means, the specifics have been debated from its earliest uses. And finally, my personal viewpoint is important, as my cultural identity, and particularly my ability to bridge the gaps between 'viewer', 'scholar' and 'participant', guides and informs my research approach and the methodologies and methods I will employ. Before outlining those, however, it is necessary to review the literature relating to the Reality Television genre.

Chapter Three – Literature Review

3.0   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to critically analyse previous research that relates to the nature of the Reality Television genre. First, it will outline the overall treatment of the genre to date, with a specific focus on its development from documentary origins through to the definitions that are used. Second, this chapter will cover the social, political, and economic factors involved with the development and cultivation of the Reality Television genre. Finally, this chapter will specify the definitions and concepts I will use in this research and state my research questions.

3.1   Reality Television as a Genre

The starting point for this chapter is to consider the documentary origins of the Reality Television genre. While the two share similar characteristics, the underlying thread throughout the research is that documentary and Reality Television are distinct and need to be conceptually and practically separated. I will therefore first establish the academic argument in which Reality Television developed from a documentary 'base'. This begins with unpacking the changes that occurred within the documentary genre that eventually resulted in a hybrid approach combining both documentary characteristics and story creation. I will then outline the various definitions and terms of art with which Reality Television has been described and discussed, with the purpose of once again establishing the diversity of viewpoints that are held within the scholarship.

3.1.1 Documentary Beginnings

The starting point to better understand Reality Television is to understand and unpack the documentary foundations of the genre. This will ultimately demonstrate that documentaries began incorporating different characteristics which resulted in what we can now identify as a hybrid. This hybrid, in turn, led to the development of an identifiable Reality Television genre. Here, we can see one of the foundational characteristics of Reality Television as a genre: incorporating characteristics from other genres into a dominant framework has

always been a part of what makes Reality Television. This, I argue, accounts for some of its dynamism and the ease with which it can adapt as new opportunities present themselves.

The pioneering definition of documentary is 'the creative interpretation of actuality', attributed to documentary producer John Grierson in the 1930s (Kerrigan & McIntyre, 2010). Although the study of documentary has become increasingly layered during the past 90 years, this definition is still used as a keystone. Although 'actuality' lies at the base of a definition, most, if not all, factor in an artistic nature. Grierson's inclusion of both 'creative' and 'interpretation' suggests both subjectivity and play or manipulation. Despite using the word 'actuality', definitions take note of outside influences that effectively undermine the nature of actuality. Elisabeth Cowie, for instance, emphasises the artistic expression that must be present, as a documentary text should not be 'mere recorded actuality' but '"a new art" of filmed reality in a presentation or performance of recorded reality' (2011, p. 19). In both cases we can see here the key point that documentary formats interpret and re-present reality to audience members, a process typically conceived of as the result of the artistic or professional skills of the production team (often notably the director-as-auteur). What is evident across definitions is the need to emphasise that documentary is not actuality, while at the same time, emphasising that documentary is not fiction either. In his brief history of the documentary genre, John Ellis's definition likewise focuses on 'activity', and he stresses that a documentary 'consists of filming without fiction' (2012, p. 8). Filming itself is one of four stages (the others are ordering, organising, and affecting) that combine to allow documentary makers the ultimate opportunity to present reality (p. 8). Ellis directly calls upon Harold Lasswell's fundamental questions for communication studies ('Who says What to Whom through Which channel With What effect') and considers this the basis of the theoretical underpinning of his focus on 'activity'. Similarly, in addition to the interpretation of an activity, Ward raises the issue of creative intent behind a text, over and above the delivery or the content:

> the assumption seems to be that there is somewhere 'out there', the 'model' or 'typical' documentary, against which all attempts at documentary are measured. Documentary worth is more often than not equated with an ideal of 'transparency' and 'objectivity' (Ward, 2012, p. 25)

There are, however, six accepted modes of documentary style. At the most basic level these are: expository (narration); observational ('fly on the wall'); participatory (interaction between filmmaker and subject); reflexive (references the creation of the text); poetic (mood or tone); and performative (subjective to the filmmaker) (Nichols, 1991). While almost all documentaries can be labelled as belonging to one of these particular modes, however, there is more to the genre than a specific list of technical requirements – as David Saunders points out, a text can utilise multiple documentary styles to find the right expression for the content (2010, p. 26).

This concept was followed up by Nichols himself relatively quickly, as he posited a new format combining documentary characteristics, but situated between hard news and tabloid journalism: Reality Television, he argued, 'continuously peeks behind the screen, flirting with the taboo and forbidden' (1994, p. 46), with its focus on the dangerous, unusual, or death and autopsies. Further, he went on to distinguish Reality Television and documentary by holding that the former lacks two important documentary characteristics: it does not involve 'imaginative representations' or 'questions of ethics' (pp. 47 - 48).[4] Nichols argues that without these characteristics, authors are not bound to represent history accurately, and that the audience is not encouraged to question the construction of the text. Of course, as Nick Couldry states, the documentary can be critiqued as it 'nevertheless involves more disreputable features of cinema usually associated with the entertainment film' (2010, p. 2); however, this criticism does not detract from the central difference between Reality Television and documentary: the latter is more artistic and philosophical. It is also true that, as documentary makers have developed and extended the form, the use of multiple viewpoints and definitions, and the subsequent inability to be taxonomically exact about the genre, means 'it has now become problematic to use [documentary] as a catch-all term' (Ward, 2012, p. 8). The key point here is the inherent challenge of accounting for and portraying reality: 'documentary, if it is anything, is a "perpetual negotiation between the real event and its representation"' (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 13).

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[4] Here, Nichols is writing in 1994 when the understanding of reality television was quite new, and the overall genre had not necessarily developed to the behemoth that is viewed today. 'Questions of ethics' have come increasingly to the forefront of reality television between 1994 and now, and Nichols' observation of the difference between documentary and reality television in this regard no longer applies.

3.1.2 Documentary and Hybridity

What we begin to see, then, is that the documentary genre, like all genres, has constantly evolved. Describing this evolution is not as easy as simply listing recognisable tropes, but requires recognition that 'a documentary resides somewhere else, in the complex interaction between text, context, producer and spectator' (Ward, 2012, p. 16). In this way, the sense that there are boundaries being broken leads to space for new expressions to open up within the genre. As John Corner puts it, 'documentarianism has never been more imaginative and various than it is at the present, never more aware of both its discursive limitations and its distinctive potential' (1999, p. 182). Interestingly, given the time of his writing (the later 1990s; that is, prior to the take-up of Reality Television in the mainstream), Corner appears to assume that hybridisation will be a detriment to documentary: 'it is right to be wary and sceptical at the moment', particularly as to whether such changes are beneficial, or even sustainable (p. 183).

Derek Paget emphases the powerful effect Reality Television has on pushing genre boundaries, and illustrates this with a table showing opposing characteristics of documentary and drama formats. He argues that an oscillating docudrama text 'offers an experience through which audiences are challenged to reconstruct their mental model of the real through codes both documentary and dramatic' (2011, pp. 7 - 8). His model places agency on the viewer in how they identify and relate to a given documentary / drama hybrid. However, it could be argued that a similar table could demonstrate the 'mental model of the real' within a Reality Television text. Unfortunately, although Paget establishes how such a table makes docudrama a worthy format for exploration, the same ability to oscillate between characteristics is what makes Paget unsure about the usefulness and importance of the Reality Television 'phenomenon' (p. 3).

In a similar manner, Corner analyses factual television during the 1990s to locate 'intensive hybridisation' and 'specific shifts in format and style' (1999, p. 173). Incorporating definitions by academics like Bill Nichols, Corner finds that the 'old epistemic and discursive boundaries [of documentary] are being regularly and heavily blurred' (p. 176). What is particularly telling in Corner's work is notable lack of enthusiasm about these

transgressions, and, further, his full support for a 'vigorous re-establishing' of these boundaries (pp. 175 - 176). Here, the focus lies firmly on Reality Television, and its consequent distortion – or as, citing Nichols, Corner terms it, 'perversion' (pp. 175 - 176) – of 'traditional' documentary characteristics. Taking Corner and Paget together, a strong negative academic view of Reality Television suggests that, while such scholars recognise the ability of Reality Television to manipulate the documentary format and use its characteristics (however ironically or "playfully"), their obvious preference is to reinforce formally identifiable boundaries to maintain a distinction between television documentary (as a "quality" format) and Reality Television (as an "inferior" format).

An underlying notion to be considered here is that in addition to a sense of genre and class (quality versus inferior), such discussions indicate the use of a particular *style* may also indicate class. Much like how documentary style is used as a recognisable signifier in mockumentary, despite the similar application, they are still two distinct genres; one of which is factual, the other comedy or satirical. What is implied here then, is that anything attempting to align with a documentary style, that ultimately is *not* documentary, is inferior and indicates low class.

3.1.3 The Television Medium

At this point I argue that it is now possible to establish that in the later 1990s / early 2000s academics recognised that documentary and Reality Television could be critically understood as textually and taxonomically related (through a lens of hybridity). My next step is to situate this hybridity within a framework of the wider television medium itself. In other words, how was the emerging genre of Reality Television placed within understandings of television overall (in addition to or over and above its connections to the documentary format). John Ellis, for instance, begins by acknowledging these connections (such as similar production values and filming tropes) but convincingly argues that, with the incorporation of artificial situations and tasks, Reality Television shows move away from the observational (that is, representing – in some way – a reality independent of the show) towards becoming format based (that is, relying on a constructed – whether partial or complete situation to provide the narrative and narrative tension) (2012, p. 8). For Ellis,

despite its documenting foundation, Reality Television has thus moved to become hybrid of genre characteristics: 'Reality TV formats contain a little reality that is stretched a long way in a format that is essentially a gameshow or even fiction' (p. 9). The reference here to gameshows is telling because their strictly controlled and reliable format can, as we now know, provide a very useful (and often low-cost) template for a Reality Television format to develop within.[5]

For Nicholls, the correct positioning of Reality Television lies outside of the fundamental integrity of the documentary format, in that 'television network news [serves] as linchpin between documentary tradition and reality television…oscillating vividly between sobriety and spectacle' (1994, pp. 48 - 49). Ellis agrees that the television medium has an effect on the content it produces, as '[d]ocumentaries shared TV space with both fiction and news, and had to distinguish themselves from both' (p. 10). Just as documentary characteristics can provide a relatively sober and purportedly accurate representation of events, Reality Television focuses clearly on the spectacle, characterised by a 'feeling of tone in the viewer…isn't that amazing!' (p. 52). Although, as Corner argues, the documentary format can involve or even require manipulation or hybridisation (for example, 'interview speech' can be placed out of context as it 'can be recorded and then used against visuals within a programme' (1999, p. 178)), there is a clear qualitative difference between such techniques and those of Reality Television. Paget, for instance, observes how Reality Television can work to the detriment of the 'documentary-as-record' format, because of its potential for 'shameless exploitation of both documentary presence and dramatic licence' (2011, p. 3). Paget's position here not only defines Reality Television as separate from docu-drama and drama-doc; it also reinforces the critical / negative approach towards the genre by asking whether Reality Television may be 'a "dumbing down" of television culture' (p. 2).

Once again there are underlying elements of class aligning with stylistic use of the truth. Documentary, at its core, presupposes a lack of intervention that shapes the overall narrative. One of the criticisms of documentary is that, as a genre, it has moved past simply documenting fact, with a shift in rhetoric towards presenting a case or argument. For

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[5] An example here might be the way a dating 'gameshow' format (like *Blind Date*) can form the basis of a much more spectacular and pseudo-scientific / titillating reality format (like *Naked Attraction*).

example, a true crime documentary is not simply a summary of legally correct facts, but requires an overarching narrative in, say, the implicating of a murderer. Environmental documentaries are not just an assemblage of footage of rainforests and oceans, but more often appeals to the audience to become a part of the climate change solution. What then, given the selection of facts to construct a narrative, separates documentary and Reality Television? The answer lies in the relationship to truth, and that the documentary aligns closer to the type of *factual* truth of a news piece. In contrast, Reality Television does not necessarily present the factual truth, in that producers can intervene to deliberately antagonise and create circumstances that will instigate emotional outbursts. What is subsequently captured for Reality Television is an *emotional* truth. These two genres are dealing with different registers of truth, and the distinctions between the two, once again, relate to a high or low-class connotation when discussed within the literature.

3.1.4 What *is* Reality Television?

Given my clarification here of the various links and tensions between documentary and Reality Television, it is now appropriate to move onto developing a more positive definition, and one that does not necessarily rely on defining Reality Television in reaction to or against any other television format. Typically, such definitions all largely follow similar lines of thought. As Annette Hill argues, the genre is extremely flexible (2005, p. 45), in that there is 'a sliding scale of factuality in reality programming. At the far end of the continuum are more informative based programmes such as *Animal Hospital*, and at the other end are documentary gameshows such as *Survivor'* (p. 50). Obviously, this points to a key problem in trying to develop a single definition for Reality Television: covering both sides of this continuum is clearly difficult. It is, however, possible to develop definitional approaches that treat Reality Television as a site of study on its own terms.

The first level at which such definitions can be developed is by using the terms 'real' and 'life': the genre 'invites viewers into the everyday, domestic, and backstage regions of ordinary individuals' lives' (Cavalcante, 2014, p. 49); the audience 'are promised "real" people in their "real" lives' (Alsultany, 2016, p. 3); and the shows are 'not traditionally scripted, cheaper to produce and feature "real" people instead of celebrities' (Buchanan,

2014, p. 3). What is being presented, therefore, is to some extent at least accepted to be real and representative of a person's lived experience (however that may be presented to the viewer). For instance, when analysing *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* (2012 - 2017), Carissa Massey argues that the show offers a representation of people 'going about their normal lives, with plot points ranging from the quotidian, such as grocery shopping, to the unique, remarkable, or bizarre, such as social rituals native to a particular geographic region or socioeconomic class' (2017, p. 365). In such a text, we can see how 'reality television constructs a modern-day panorama of the social world and its inhabitants' (Stiernstedt & Jakobsson, 2017, pp. 697 - 698). Of course, the panorama thus constructed must be one that appeals to commercial television audiences, a 'fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real' (Murray & Oullette, 2009, p. 3). This self-consciousness highlights, again, the constructed nature of even the most apparently "observational" Reality Television show: perhaps the genre's most fundamental goal is to somehow overcome viewers' abilities to critique the underlying nature of what they are watching. What this ultimately identifies is that key terms situate an overarching purpose to Reality Television, which is the enjoyable voyeurism in following an individual's lived experience. This encapsulates much of the continuum, with scripted reality shows at one end such as *Laguna Beach* (2004-2006), *Keeping up with the Kardashians* (2007 -), and *The Real Housewives*. On the other end, highly structured competition shows such as *Survivor* or *Big Brother* also revel in the voyeurism of an individual's lived experience, albeit from a 'fish out of water' storyline. These definitions help identify an overarching purpose across Reality Television shows, communicated and showcased in a myriad of ways, not least of which is an integral underlying constructed jeopardy the people have to negotiate (how to work through family dynamics versus how to be popular and not be voted off the show).

The second level at which definitions of Reality Television as a site of study on its own terms lies is in the understanding its technical conventions. Here, it is possible to focus on the apparently unscripted (and therefore unpredictable) nature of reality (Stiernstedt & Jakobsson, 2017, p. 701), the strength of the ties that bind particular groups of people together as they move through their everyday lives, or the ways in which individuals react to the (imposed) trials and setbacks revealed by "unseen" cameras or revealing "tasks" (Hill, 2005, p. 41). Obviously, these technical conventions are clearly linked to certain

documentary characteristics (for instance Richard Kilborn's 'slice-of-life observational modes of documentary film making' and 'fictional drama rooted in real-life situations' (1994, p. 423)); however, the deployment of these conventions within a Reality Television text is qualitatively different to documentary. For example, viewers cannot help knowing that, by definition, Reality Television involves more artifice than documentary. It may be that in initial seasons, the extent of the artifice is unclear. For example, for the first season of *The X Factor UK* (2004 -), the participants are ordinary people within an overall process. As production continues over multiple seasons, it is possible to become aware of the artifice. Knowledge of this artifice comes down to the function of media literacy, as the ongoing viewing of a text will increase understanding of the text. But on another level is an increase in knowledge of the genre. Over time, the differences between competition formats - *The X Factor* versus *The Amazing Race* - or nuances between the same sub-genre - *The X Factor* versus *The Voice* (2011 -) - also become learned knowledge of the artifice. Reality Television has always involved more artifice than the documentary genre, and this is known due to accumulated knowledge over time and exposure. By contrast, even the most commercially anticipated documentary is still not going to be as exciting as Reality Television because the differing distinctions and presentations of truth results in entirely different end products.

In focusing on the technical conventions of Reality Television, this second order of definitions highlights the importance of production in the construction and (re)presentation of the text. For example, the directive nature of replicating events to better fit the demands of television (to, for instance, highlight the potential for conflict) and propagate the overall narrative of the show, is a central component: 'the production team stage or re-enact everyday encounters and experiences and prompt dialogue and interactions' (Thompson, Stringfellow, Maclean, MacLaren, & O'Gorman, 2015, p. 480). This, in turn, stresses the underlying dynamic of "making television", the intent to create a "good show". From here, it is relatively easy to see how it is possible to account for reality format's dominance of primetime after the turn of the millennium (Hill, 2005, p. 44); we are dealing with a product

that, in its current formation, has been intentionally designed to be highly attractive to audiences within a free-to-air commercial television mediascape.[6]

Once scholars had worked through a broad definition of the reality format overall, it became clear that a more nuanced, robust argument for what Reality Television actually is could be developed, with Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood, for example, arguing that Reality Television is 'a curious space between documentary and home video' (2008, p. 569) showcasing 'recognizable lifeworlds' (p. 565). More programmatically, Richard Huff argues that Reality Television lies at the intersection of three concepts. The first is connected to the genre's game show origins, and is the use of real people in competitive settings. The second is the concept of showing ordinary people live in front of the camera (as in *Survivor*). And the third is that, unlike a documentary like *An American Family*, reality shows like *The Real World* is conceptualised as 'a created television experiment' and can be (and usually is) heavily influenced by its producers (2006, p. 13). In combining "competition," "real life" and "a produced creation" Huff is perhaps defining the genre too narrowly; some more recent formats (such as *The Real Housewives*) would not be included. It is nonetheless true, however, that Huff's work here establishes an integrated definition of the genre that can be used as a basis against which more recent developments can be evaluated and critiqued.

Julie Haynes, for example, builds on Huff's position to argue that, not only can competition shows be 'both game show-like and talent-based', Reality Television can also include almost endless variations on themes such as 'makeovers, dating, "docusoaps," court or legal television, and behind-the-scenes views of occupations or lifestyles' (2014). An observational "variation" – like *Antiques Roadshow* (1979 -), or *Piha Rescue* (2001 - 2017) for example – showcases a completely different environment and atmosphere to "competition" like *X Factor*. And even within the observational framework techniques can range from not including personal interviews, as in *Made in Chelsea* (2011 -), setting up interviews with an off camera figure, as in *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*, or employing

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[6] In other words, following this logic, I argue that this intentionality ensures that the reality "product" will focus on attracting high ratings from certain audiences demographic and psychographic groups, which in turn means a focus on drama, conflict, novelty and the "Hey Martha" factor (e.g. demanding a housemate come and see what's just been shown on screen).

direct to camera interviews where we "look into their eyes", as in *America's Next Top Model* (2003 -). Yet, even with the complexity that such analyses bring, viewers typically have no difficulty identifying a particular show as part of the Reality Television genre. There is now a high degree of media literacy and cultural capital built up around this form of television, for example, in the *Survivor* format there is an increasing degree of self-referential narratives as the seasons develop from one to the other. The assumption is not only do the viewers have that knowledge, but the *participants* also have that knowledge, and they bring that to their participation.

In this section I have outlined the trajectory of the definitional (even taxonomic) academic discussions of the Reality Television genre. In doing so, this has highlighted the large number of potential ways to develop a closer explication. For my purposes, the key stepping-off point in this regard is to engage with questions of class, citizenship, and the positioned viewer.

3.2   Class, Citizenship, and the Positioned Viewer

One of the most obvious entry points to a discussion about Reality Television is the real or perceived positioning of the viewer of such shows as belonging to a particular class, taste public, or audience psychographic profile. This is due to two factors. First, culturally, Reality Television is a down-market, low-class form of television. Second, such judgements fall within a historical account of cultural production that is based on power and implied class positions.

3.2.1 Political and Economic factors

The history of the Reality Television genre cannot be separated from the political and economic factors that underpinned its rise. As early as the 1950s, Theodor Adorno pointed to the need to critically understand the kinds of developments or trends that came to be expressed in reality television from the early 1990s:

> By exposing the socio-psychological implications and mechanisms of television, often operating under the guise of fake realism, not only may the shows be improved, but, more important possibly, the

public at large may be sensitized to the nefarious effect of some of these mechanisms' (1954, p. 213).

Here, for Adorno, raising awareness has improved the situation in two ways: better texts, and more knowledgeable audiences. Notably, this view demonstrates that a critical (even socialist) standpoint does not necessarily lead to dismissing the Reality Television genre as cheap, damaging or otherwise unworthy.

In a similar vein Chad Raphael notes that performing textual analysis without appreciating the wider political and economic ecology within which the text(s) is constructed 'may risk reifying it as an expression of audience demand, or of their creators, or of a cultural, discursive, or ontological shift unrelated to the needs of those who run the television industry' (2009, p. 119). As a counterpoint, Raphael delves into the interplay between three key factors shaping production: (1) the influence of regulation; (2) industry guild strikes; and, perhaps most importantly, (3) the ability of a show to recoup costs per episode upon airing. The argument Raphael deploys is that each of these factors intervenes and shapes the production process in ways that may not be particularly obvious to the average viewer. For instance, it is arguable that one major consequence of the 2007-2008 writers' strike, intended 'for fair compensation for digital distribution platforms' (Writers Guild of America East, n.d.), was a significant increase in Reality Television (as it requires much less scripting than "normal" drama). Despite the 2007-2008 strike action networks still needed content, and the 'traditional' method of scriptwriting i.e. employing writers to script the content needed before filming, was not required for Reality Television. The paradox that has arisen is that Reality Television is so co-dependent with documentary that to admit a Reality Television show uses writers strays too far from what the product is supposed to be. Unfortunately, to construct an artistic or subjective creation of the 'reality', writers are a necessary tool in order to deliver entertaining, commercial, content. But this is where the Writers Guild, in classifying writing for film and television as distinct from Reality Television, effectively provided networks with a loophole in which they could hire writers to create content. Instead of a writing credit, titles such as Producers, Assistant Producers, or Story Producers may be used in Reality Television (Writers Guild of America East, 2021), which means there is essentially no default contract – or indeed, union – to represent workers who are writing narratives in the unscripted television industry.

One significant effect of the Writers Guild strike was the relaunch of Donald Trump which, in turn, contributed to his successful bid for the US Presidency. Launched during the strike, *The Apprentice USA* (2004-2015), positioned Trump as a highly successful businessman and a decisive and controversial figurehead. Trump was therefore able to rebuild his persona as a successful businessperson, and in turn, the network and show producers needed Trump's success to continue to aid their brand. Jonathon Braun, an editor on the first six seasons of *The Apprentice*, describes how the show positioned Trump as the ultimate businessman, despite the fact that "most of us knew he was a fake... he had just gone through I don't know how many bankruptcies. But we made him out to be the most important person in the world. It was like making the court jester the king" (Keefe, 2019). Situating Trump as embodying a high-class lifestyle <u>and</u> as the person who could provide access to that lifestyle obviously worked for the participants within the show: the winner literally got a job with Trump. It can also be argued that same dynamic underpinned his political success, as voters bought into his self-image. This convoluted nature of the ecology of a text which Raphael identifies as integral, yet not always so obvious, to the average viewer shows that Reality Television can be seen as considerably more significant than low-end popular entertainment.

Looking slightly wider, Anna McCarthy agrees with Raphael in that her analysis considers how the prevailing political economic conditions shape Reality Television texts. Here, McCarthy is arguing that typical neo-liberal / New Right ideologies are common in the genre:

> To see reality television as merely trivial entertainment is to avoid recognizing the degree to which the genre is preoccupied with the government of the self, and how, in that capacity, it demarcates a zone for the production of everyday discourses of citizenship (2007, p. 17).

The key point here is that the limits of the self to be governed and the discourses of citizenship to be produced are set by unquestioned and unquestionable neo-liberal norms. One example here would be that success within competition shows always comes down to the individual; success and failure are not in any way a reflection on the social circumstances

that the individual has come from. In the end, the unit of analysis that *matters* in the Reality Television context is the individual.

Similarly, Nick Couldry interrogates the dominant 'voice' present within Reality Television. Following Adorno, Couldry identifies that Reality Television opens a site where viewers (even the viewers-positioned-as-consumers under neoliberalism) could expect to find an outlet for or an amplification of their voice (2010, p. 73). This democratising potential is emphatically and deliberately unrealised, he argues, and the dominant voice is literally that of the producers:

> Reality TV shows such as Big Brother comprise space governed by an external authority whose validity or rationality can never be questioned. There have no doubt been occasions where such authority was questioned in private, but this rarely surfaces in the broadcast output (Couldry, 2008, p. 10)

And this packaging of and speaking for participants (instead of allowing them their own voice) continues after they have left the competition but remain part of the narrative of the show (as, for instance, the latest to be evicted from the house). Those participants that do not follow these rules, or deliberately undermine the rules, will face the one consequence that participants are to fear the most: elimination. Ultimately, the influence of 'authority' over a participant's voice is demonstrated with the persistent use of external psychologists, or industry experts, to explain the participant's behaviour (Couldry, 2010, p. 79), and that 'media authority and prestige [therefore] takes its place alongside other forms of authority which serve neoliberal governance' (p. 82).

In the years since Couldry's work was published and this writing, there have, of course, been significant advances in digital platforms (and access to them) that would allow participants to develop alternative channels for their voices to be made available. To his credit, Couldry acknowledges this potential (2010, p. 74) and also points out that the 'singing or dancing competitions based on popular voting (*Pop Idol, American Idol, Britain's Got Talent*) – lend themselves to be interpreted as providing 'voice' to audiences' (p. 75). He identifies, therefore, two areas where contemporary studies might profit from further investigating the effects of digital media, and one purpose of this thesis is to revisit some of Couldry's ideas.

Laurie Ouellette and James Hay also investigate concepts of governmentality and social responsibility, as 'the citizen [under neo-liberalism] is now conceived as an individual who's most pressing obligation to society is to empower her or himself privately' (2008, p. 3). Here, their focus is primarily on those shows that demonstrate to the viewer how they should be living their lives, through work, play, as person, or, even, as a parent. The ability to transform oneself into becoming a better citizen comes 'at a time when privatization, personal responsibility, and consumer choice are promoted as the best way to govern liberal capitalist democracies, reality TV shows us how to conduct and "empower" ourselves as enterprising citizens' (2008, p. 2). In my view, Ouellette & Hay are identifying a crucial question about current Reality Television: whether Reality Television as a 'pedagogical guide' encourages or impinges on individual agency. On the one hand, it could be argued that participants and viewers might be exposed to areas of knowledge and socio-cultural capital that were hitherto unavailable to them (see below). On the other, however, it cannot be denied that such exposure is consistently ideologically framed within a consumerist, individuated, and highly commodified lived social reality. It may be that the answer lies in either, or possibly both, depending on the circumstances. An individual might be encouraged in their individual agency, while at the same time, discouraged to explore wider societal expectations; ultimately these are the two options that Reality Television provides.

The obvious starting point to extend this idea is the exchange of labour for exposure that occurs when a person chooses to be a participant on a Reality Television show. Unsurprisingly, with the rapid and, so far, unattenuated growth of the genre, the demand for new participants – and, equally, for them to be 'good television' - has continued to increase rapidly. For those who do choose to take part (and are selected), their exchange, often for a nominal fee, of their life experiences and emotional responses is usually framed within a context of self-improvement or talent recognition (hence the equally increasing rapid growth of ever more tragic back stories for contestants on, say, *American Idol*). In reality, however, there is only the *chance* of the advertised "prize" for winning (be it a recording contract, a house, a million dollars, or everlasting true love) and, perhaps more crucially, the prospect of earning a living as a career Reality Television participant (with additional tabloid coverage and endorsement deals) or achieving the holy grail of transitioning from "reality" to "normal" television and becoming a presenter or personality /

brand in their own right. Participants are asked to contribute to the ultimate 'sunk cost' of personal labour for the chance to potentially be a winner. On a wider scale, tens of thousands may enter a show such as *The X Factor*, with only one winner. This requires tens of thousands of participants contributing many personal hours of labour, all for the *chance* of winning a million dollars and a record contract. Taken from this perspective, the actual prize is a considerably small fraction of the value of the labour that participants are actually providing (especially when a large fraction of the dollar value of the contract is earmarked to pay the recording company for its services).

Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood cover such developments in-depth with their analysis of participant performance, audience reaction, and a critical understanding of value (2012). They ultimately suggest 'an economy of personhood', as the 'intimate' self is exposed to 'evaluation and exploitation', with the 'performance of intimacy' becoming a commodity (p. 12). This work focuses particularly on the exchange of 'feelings', and how reactions are the form of labour and currency. This, in turn, both reifies the underlying logic of Reality Television (we can all reach our goals / win the prize / be seen for who we really are) and intensifies the need for apparently real and ever more emotionally resonant personal narratives. This highlights once again the difference between documentary and Reality Television, in the way that documentary works to construct feeling, but not as overtly, deliberately, or manipulatively as Reality Television does. And it almost goes without saying that this pattern necessitates that any given participant accepts, or at least sufficiently plays along with, the way in which their story arc is shaped within the particular show.

Examining labour within Reality Television can also highlight the labour that is seen being performed within formats – particularly the domestic labour performed by women (Wood, Skeggs, & Thumin, 2009). In this way, within a lens of neoliberalism, gendered expectations of participants can be related to, for instance, social discussions about 'unpaid' domestic labour in the 1980s. Here, one could argue that a key feminist criticism within contemporary society (that increasing life chances for women to access careers and roles outside the home has not seen a concomitant reassessment of domestic labour within the home) is opened up every time a female participant, for example, is shown either (a) happily accepting that her professional success must be achieved at the same time as none of her domestic

'responsibilities" are neglected or (b) employing another (usually lower status) woman to perform some of "her" domestic duties to allow the freedom to be a "success". While this example is easily evidenced within *The Real Housewives* format, another example lies in the unpaid domestic labour of a stereotypically beautiful contestant to be eligible to appear on *The Bachelor*, a form of domestic labour and responsibility that cannot be shirked. By contrast, and in a way that confirms such gendered expectations, when the reverse appears in contestants for *The Bachelorette* (2003-), the men are not necessarily spending as much time on an applicable beauty equivalent when vying for the attention of a female heroine.

Here, one can see parallels with Alison Hearn's application of the principles of 'the social factory' to Reality Television - where 'the social becomes the site for the creation of new forms of productive activity and their transformation into commodities' (2006, p. 132). Hearn's focus is specifically on how participants are required to construct a self-conscious public persona and the self-reflexive process of commodification of the self in that labour is performed both for the show and in creating an individual image (p. 133). The participant is expected to fall neatly in line with previously established 'characters' – for example, the jock, the vixen (p. 134), or perform the process of making it in an industry, as in *American Idol*, or *America's Next Top Model* (p. 136). The 'persona' becomes the commodity, performed as labour by the participant, marketed by the text, for the production's profit margin.[7]

Of course, as Skeggs and Wood argue, some participants do break out of this model of simply exchanging labour to only benefit the revenue of a company and create an image outside of the particular text they feature within that can be sold to tabloids, moved to another Reality Television text, or even cross-over to 'Celebrity' versions of the original text (2012). Even then, when there is success, there is a massive difference in potential. For every Harry Styles there are many 'winners' such as Steve Brookstein, dropped by Sony BMG within eight months of winning the inaugural *The X Factor* in the United Kingdom. The purpose of this section was to demonstrate how the political economic underpinning of the Reality Television genre can, and does, shape the various forms within it, the labour and

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[7] Interestingly, this argument neatly parallels and reinforces aspects of Adorno and Horkheimer's Culture Industry thesis, namely the standardisation and pseudo-individualisation of cultural products.

personas of participants, and, even, the expectations of audiences and audience members. To fully understand the last of these, however, requires a summary explanation of the role of class and taste.

3.2.2 High / Low Culture, and the consumption of art to distinguish social hierarchy

Pierre Bourdieu's seminal works about class, consumption, and culture provide a crucial entry point to understanding the hierarchy of art, and within this, the corresponding hierarchal position of Reality Television. The following section will demonstrate how the consumption of art performs one's position within class society, while at the same time, also creating a hierarchy within a genre itself.

Like most continental thinkers of his era, Bourdieu offers a world view of human behaviour as a demonstration of power. In short those with power work to legitimise their power and to maintain it. In previous ages, laws and rights existed that meant those in a position of power could demonstrate that power physically (for example, inflicting violence without punishment). Violence could also be inflicted symbolically; sumptuary laws, for example, permitted only citizens of a certain level of class to wear certain colours or items of clothing. The key here is that legitimated control over inflicting actual violence and symbolic violence is precisely the site of power in every sense (be that social, gendered, political, economic, familial and so on). An optimistic historical view here is that over time, societies disestablished laws that enabled this power dynamic in the search for increasing equality. A more realistic view, however, might be that change was instigated only when there was sufficient threat of violent revolution 'from below'.

It is in this struggle for power where Bourdieu identifies the strategy to manage the disruption by adapting to demands for social change (to a greater or lesser degree) and finding alternative (usually more subtle) ways to exert power. From the middle and upper classes, then, we can see a teleological narrative develop much like the Whig version of history where power is dispersed as, say, increasing numbers of the population become literate and therefore knowledgeable enough to responsibly cast a vote. From the lower

classes, however, that same history is one of constant struggle to achieve and retain the same rights and obligations as previously privileged groups like the propertied class (as eligibility to vote was decoupled from property ownership) or men in general (as women became recognised as capable of exercising their own judgement).

Under these circumstances, and whether for the best of intentions or as a safety valve to stave off more violent revolution, Bourdieu argues that the power dominance within society necessary to reinforce social hierarchies gets made manifest through concepts such as class, consumption, and taste. As the formal right to exercise political power and the economic ability to become rich move from a select minority to, in theory at least, literally anybody, it is through the identification and deployment of taste and distinction that power truly resides. As a result, for example, 'members of the privileged classes are able to assume that they are intellectually gifted, [and do not recognise that] … the education system works to inculcate and buttress the structures that support privilege' (Schirato & Roberts, 2019, p. 95).

One of the most important ways of understanding this is that knowledge is not sufficient in itself. In order to properly exercise power, Bourdieu would argue that one has to have access to knowledge but how one learns this knowledge (if indeed it is learned), and how one *performs* this knowledge are the more important factors. This *symbolic system* is built entirely around the possession of, or those who must work for, privilege. The earlier an individual is enrolled in an exclusive sector of the education system, for example, the higher in class this person must be: in order to attend the most expensive kindergarten preparatory school, a child must be essentially born into the elite. As the child is already within the dominating class of society, the ability to attend such a school continues providing the individual with the knowledge required to remain in said social class. This trajectory from the best kindergartens through to Oxbridge is perhaps best thought of as not the *provision* of advantage but the *lack* of disadvantage. Individuals may still have a subjectively negative experience, but objectively, this is a very different struggle to the individual who has no access to such a spot in the first place. Any advantage lies instead across economic and cultural dimensions of life, forming a virtuous spiral, where advantages reinforce each other by preserving a lack of obstacles.

Those that have risen from the working class will instead take time to gain entry to a similar standing, for example, working hard during secondary school to gain entrance into an Oxbridge college. They remain therefore at a real and subjective disadvantage in comparative terms. While elite families do not enjoy the same legal powers over the working class that existed in pre-modern society, this symbolic system allows them to 'fulfil their political function as instruments of domination' to position themselves above others with their *symbolic power* (Bourdieu, 1979). No longer able to inflict physical violence without legal consequence, the elite continue to uphold and maintain their power in what become acts of *symbolic violence*, where language and education demonstrate the domination of one class over another.

The system is not rigid or moribund, however. To inspire hope within "the masses", a special few individuals are allowed entry to the upper classes, to show that social mobility is possible, if only they were to "work hard enough". However, such opportunities are limited to those deemed 'useful' to those in power, and the overall number is small enough to give the impression of inclusion, but not large enough to have an impact as to be considered legitimate. Institutions like universities can be seen in this view as safety valves wherein a small number of useful and talented people can gain sufficient knowledge to enter the elite. Social hierarchies are classified, then, by what an individual "chooses" to consume, as dictated by and in the 'interests of the dominant' (Schirato & Roberts, 2019, p. 115). For instance, it is understood that our society would have no difficulty elevating a brilliant individual to enter the dominant social classes because they have a great facility for writing cultural critique. Such elevations are only allowed to happen because they do not upset the social order very much. In fact, according to Bourdieu, if they did upset the social order, they would not happen.[8]

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[8] Although shifting sideways into an intersection of class and ethnicity, Shonda Rhimes ability as a cultural critic within television has been elevated to the point where Thursday nights on ABC were dominated by three hours of ShondaLand. While her inclusion has brought much success to the networks and companies she creates content for, the industry as a whole has not necessarily removed disadvantages for other women of colour who have had to work just as hard.

Set within this hierarchy of knowledge, Bourdieu argues that 'highbrow' (or 'legitimate') art is by definition difficult to perform and requires extensive training to master, with examples such as painting and performing opera (Bourdieu, 1984). Such cultural artefacts and/or experiences are also often presented in exclusive and highly governed spaces – a gallery, a museum, an opera house. Underlining both these factors is that one needs the ability to pay for training and access to elite institutions to become competent enough to succeed in these fields. This, in turn, requires a specific economic standing (either of one's own or that of a sponsor or patron). It is obvious then, how 'highbrow' art has been defined by the dominant classes as a desired form of spending 'free' discretionary time because it requires knowledge and money accrue from their historic positions of power. Further, Bourdieu's concept of 'taste' theorises that the people who choose to pursue and enjoy such artefacts as "connoisseurs" are in the position to accumulate even greater cultural capital because, ultimately, they possess greater economic capital. Possessing greater economic capital allows them the time to become connoisseurs in the first place, that then reinforces itself as part of a self-perpetuating virtuous spiral.

In stark contrast to this, artefacts considered 'lowbrow' require significantly less training and are publicly accessible, with Bourdieu's examples being musical theatre and popular music (1984). These forms of art are easier to attend and access, and it is in this way, an individual's choice towards consuming 'highbrow' or 'lowbrow' culture reflects the economic wealth, or class, of the individual involved. One example is that amongst the upper-middle class, studies found those who 'name the artists of their paintings and to use the discourses of art to identify value and difference in them' (Prior, 2005, p. 129) as a demonstration of social hierarchy. Here, it is possible to see the act of symbolic violence in deliberately positioning themselves as holders of knowledge (over those who do not), but also the ever-present desire to be seen as possessing this elevated status. The ability to perform such critique of high cultural art requires time, effort, and expertise that one has because they are not required to work. By contrast, the art of low culture are either created or performed *during* work, such as songs that keep a rhythm for fishermen or washerwomen, or folk music that is created in a communal setting in the pub after a day of labour in the mines. The distinction of high or low class comes to whether you have the time

and money to devote your entire life to becoming a dancer, singer, or artist (or appreciating or collecting the product of their labour) or whether your participation and involvement with culture has to fit in during, alongside or in the gaps between your own labour inside or outside the home.

This concept of class largely succeeds if the dominators feel superior, and the dominated accept the feeling of being inferior. In between, are those who desire to be seen as a member of the elite, and therefore reinforce this symbolic violence towards any level they consider to be higher than. Integral to the act of consumption is that it must be social and in public, so that this level of power can be demonstrated to yourself and in front of others, reinforcing to all involved who has the power in the setting. Those who do not subscribe to this philosophy are an anomaly, a danger to the system, for they do not recognise the power of the dominators, nor take on board the requisite feeling of inferiority. Integration into the elite lies, for example, in both knowing which knife to use for the fish course *and* being able to explain why Beethoven is a better composer than Mozart. The first demonstration of cultural superiority here is the dependence of cultural knowledge in the rituals that are performed. But equally, if not more important, is the ability to contribute to a discussion using your cultural knowledge, the points you are able to make, and the conversations you can take part in. Of the two, the first could potentially be mimicked, or copied from those who you are in the presence of; whereas the second requires a sense of immersion in cultural knowledge that cannot be feigned.

3.2.3 Three layers to consuming

Bourdieu outlines three levels within the act of consumption that demonstrates position within the social hierarchy. The first level could, in a sense, be best described as sensory. It is possible to enjoy various forms of culture as they appear to be, or as an example that will be utilised throughout this section, hearing a piece of music. Whether this is popular music or orchestral, or drums, or acapella, the first level is sensory. There is a level of enjoyment, it is not necessarily connected to the ability or the need to articulate *why* there is enjoyment. The digital platform Spotify may curate a playlist of songs you may enjoy, and you do, but it is impossible to explain in words what exactly is drawing you in. What is demonstrated here is appreciation, but a lack of knowledge in articulating your appreciation. Bourdieu positions

here that music can be enjoyed on a sensory level without needing to know why you enjoy it, at this stage there is no second-level needed to articulate your enjoyment.

Bourdieu's second level includes a recognition of work or labour involved in the creation of the text that provides an enjoyment in the art of recognising. You have to be *seen* as recognising, with the intended purpose that you are demonstrating to others your recognition. This is no longer merely being in earshot and listening to a tune. The second level involves decoding, and it is this act of decoding that is more important to the act of consumption: it is not so much enjoyment of a passive auditory experience that is sought after, but in 'recognising' the work involved, and being *seen* doing this. The labour of decoding provides true enjoyment, understanding *why* you like the piece, and that one can, in turn, communicate this in words. For example, appreciating high art may be listening to Luciano Pavarotti, and understanding the sound as amazing. At the second level, there is listening to Pavarotti and knowing he is reaching notes very few can, and those who do may do so with less sustain and control, meaning Pavarotti is demonstrating a unique ability. This is in contrast to someone like Kiri te Kanawa who has impeccable ability, but who performs within a narrow range. Knowing and distinguishing between two such artists is an example of moving within the second level.

To find a similar example within the realm of popular music would be the lyrical artistry of Taylor Swift, as she references other songs or events in her life that fans have the wider level of knowledge to connect with. The level of enjoyment is not the song itself, but decoding the hidden meanings behind the lyrics, and basking in that superior knowledge. Consumers in this sense are assured of their own learned knowledge, but also demonstrate a sense of symbolic power by pointing out hidden meanings that may not have been recognised by others. The symbolic violence that is present as to what level an individual can decode Taylor Swift lyrics reinforces both the personal identity of being in the fandom, and the inferiority of those who cannot. In what could be a threat to this power dynamic, is an individual that does not recognise Taylor Swift knowledge as a symbol of power at all, and therefore does not recognise this exertion of power, or experience their own inferiority. If so, they are told in no uncertain terms any social acceptance depends on accepting their inadequacy in this realm. Recognising the inadequacy requires acknowledging you do not

have the knowledge, and you must now spend the time, money, labour, in acquiring such knowledge. This will help you attain or retain social adequacy – or not, which means accepting the judgment of others and acknowledging that you do not fit. There are consequences to not having the required knowledge, and this involves the individual having to change or lose friendship.

Bourdieu's third layer is that a viewer or listener who consumes while forgetting that they are performing the labour. If the first layer suggests someone who does not know why they like a text, and the second layer of expressing their knowledge as to why they like a text, this third layer suggests that the knowledge and labour required is so second-nature to the individual – so ingrained within them due to the length of time exposed to such codes – that the labour is now effortless. This third level is impossible for the individual to communicate, as it is a state that cannot be described. In a personal example of this, I can watch an episode of *The Mandalorian* (2019-) and consume as a text. The second layer would be to critique the series' place within the wider *Star Wars* universe – not only would I be enjoying my superior knowledge of the topic, but I can also perform my level of *Star Wars* knowledge in order to dominate those who are not, 'truly', *Star Wars* fans. To reach Bourdieu's third level, with the inability to describe the experience, was during *The Rise of the Resistance* ride at Disneyland.[9] This *Star Wars* themed ride was the closest experience I could ever have of living in a *Star Wars* situation. While I enjoyed the other rides, I cannot say that I was able to experience the iconic rides such as Splash Mountain to the level of decoding or understanding that someone growing up fully immersed in American culture could experience.

However, on this one ride, I was able to experience the *Star Wars* world in a way that I cannot explain. Knowing the films, the wider universe (novels, collections, etc.), and knowledge of the film-making process (the use of green screens on set requires imagination from those involved), the moment of exiting a 'transport ship' into the expanse of an

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[9] This ride opened in California's Disneyland Theme Park in January 2020, experienced a few weeks of breakdowns, and the park has been subsequently closed since April 2020 due to Covid-19. The fact that I have had the chance to even participate on this ride at all only adds to the exclusivity, and therefore superiority, I can demonstrate within the Star Wars fandom.

Imperial Star Destroyer faced by numerous Stormtroopers… the knowledge, the feeling, the immersion, I have an absolute inability to communicate. There is a transcendent quality to that experience that stands apart. This is one way to explain an "unconscious mastery of the instruments of appropriation" (Bourdieu 1993: 228), a kind of second-nature relationship to artistic rules' (Prior, 2005, p. 127), and despite the 'popular' level of *Star Wars* within our culture, the level of decoding, the mastery of knowledge, is within the individual. At this third level, the individual may not even be aware that they possess the knowledge needed to understand the text, it is so ingrained as to their place in society that it has become second nature, an instinct, an automatic reaction.

Ultimately, Bourdieu's three levels expand on *how* an individual consumes. In addition to seeing and then decoding it is the ease of ability with which someone is able to access and perform moving through cultural spaces and perform the required action that informs others of the individual's status. The level of education prepares an individual with a way to move through the world, and 'those with adequate levels of education 'feel at home' with high culture, while subordinate groups are bound to be disoriented' (Prior, 2005, p. 126).

3.2.4 Demonstrating superiority through consumption

Obviously, there is considerable room within Bourdieu's theories for notions of play, creativity, and the Avant Garde, and, equally obviously, the meta idea of "culture" is more usefully conceived of as a continuum rather than binary groups of 'high' and 'low' (see: Coulangeon & Lemel, 2007; Kane, 2003; Sconce, 1995). While the first take on this is that it would require a specific line or boundary in which could be defined and therefore categorised whether an example lies on one side or the other, the best example would perhaps lie in the journey over time that cultural artefacts have begun as low, and are now held in high regard. For example, Elvis Presley, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones; the reception of these artists from the lowest of low to 70 years later having a high level of respect for the long-standing nature of their art, is a clear demonstration of how a set binary of one or the other is not entirely applicable. It remains true, nonetheless, to observe that, even within more popular media (like television) and everyday location within that medium (like entertainment), contemporary culture easily mobilises notions of taste and distinction

to both (a) imbue certain producers as more (or less) skilful and (b) characterise certain audiences as more (or less) critical, intelligent, and cultured.

To capitalise on this level of ingrained knowledge, it is possible – or even necessary - for the elite to recognise 'art' before it is even classified as such. In this situation, not only does the viewer possess the knowledge and vocabulary to decode the art in the first place, but they are able to identify what constitutes art *before* others are able to do so. This ability to recognise art before the general populace suggests such ingrained education in what art is, but also, an importance on *when* the elite can perform this. With this example, it is possible to see how time becomes a marker of the elite, in that the individual can pre-empt any ensuing popularity. However, this skill is dependent on said artist or subject ultimately becoming mainstream, as only when the dominated become aware of what is 'cool' can hipsters be cast 'as elite consumers and trendsetters' (le Grand, 2020, p. 191), that must now reject the object (le Grand, 2020, p. 185). Indeed, it is possible for an object to become 'too' popular. With the object recognised by the dominated (in a sense, catching up with the elite), the elite must demonstrate their superiority, in which case, they are likely to move on to find the next, obscure, and not yet omnipresent, object to admire (le Grand, 2020, p. 189). This constantly shifting knowledge of what *will* be cool, rather than what already *is*, reinforces the constantly changing dynamic between the dominant and the dominated from the perspective of time.

What is integral to note here is that the concept of 'cool' is an additional layer with which to explore high and low culture. Cool, in itself, is not an aspect within Bourdieu's examination of culture, but can be used as an extension in addition to what he describes. As a late-20th century development, philosophers present 'cool' as a way in which people with no economic capital, can possess so much cultural capital, that the lack of economic capital is irrelevant. An example is the way hip-hop as a style comes from a particular socioeconomic group of the systemically poor and disadvantaged within the American population. Black artists coming from the projects and housing estates have essentially no economic capital (largely due to systemic and institutionalised racism), but what they do possess is an affect, an attitude, a sense of reinvention and play, that can only originate from the conditions of society, that ultimately aligns with the concept of 'cool'. In this sense, 'cool' as a concept

allows someone to have achieve high cultural capital with little or no pre-existing economic capital. It is telling, however, that ostentatious displays of material plenty are the marker of success within the hip-hop community.

Consuming the artist over and above the text is another way of demonstrating social hierarchy. In terms of being an artist, it is the mastery over the subject that indicates culture. It is not so much appreciating the text itself, but in appreciating how the artist has controlled their creation as it appears. In that sense, it is in the understanding of what the text is *not*, that again, provides a richer experience of viewing (or decoding) what the piece *is*. In order to recognise what an artist has not done, it is imperative for the viewer to know of all the potential options they could have pursued, and deliberately did not, for this is as important as what is included. Only at level three can an individual understand the unique place in which the art is situated, by possessing the acquired knowledge of all potential areas the art could have gone, and therefore requiring education and time.

Without delving too far into what is, and defines, the 'popular aesthetic', Bourdieu considers that the creation and purpose of a text can position its place within the continuum of high and low art. Bourdieu's choice of words (despite being translated) such as 'ordinary' people and lives, the working class, and the use of art to extend the human condition, argues that it is not the form art takes that has precedence, but the format. Audiences comprising of 'the dominated' desire a *result* from viewing, for example laughing or crying, the ability to identify aspects of their own life within the art. In this manner, the text is providing a function for the viewer to consume. In contrast, Bourdieu's 'intellectuals' place priority in the choice of representation, not that which is being represented. Here, it is not the West End performance itself, but that it is existing as a live show, and not a film. It is not just beer as a beverage, but 'the craft beer of the hipster is… linked to notions of craftsmanship' (le Grand, 2020, p. 185). Once more, the ability to perform such a recognition requires knowledge over all formats, and the labour required in recognising what decisions were *not* made. This demonstrates just how difficult it is to reach the elite for, alluding to my earlier example, not only do you have to know the knife to use, and the ability to discuss the elements of Beethoven that make his work better than Mozart's, but also all the unspoken and not-chosen elements that make Beethoven better.

One way that artists can play with this appreciation of the form is the limited-edition release:

> 'exploiting the desires of consumers to signal their status and identity through the consumption of unique products… anyone with a subscription can access music via music streaming services, but the ownership of limited-edition physical recordings is restricted to those 'in the know' and those who are able and willing to a pay premium to be in a select group of co-consumers (Webster, 2020, p. 1918).

In this example, there is no difference between the function of the art, but the form it takes that demonstrates superiority/domination. In an era where having everything at your fingertips is the norm, deliberately choosing a more time-consuming format such as vinyl can also be used to demonstrate distinction (Webster, 2020, p. 1921). The consumption of vinyl is considered 'superior' as it 'invokes a greater sense of cultural ownership' (Webster, 2020, p. 1921). The revival of vinyl as an 'authentic' experience occurs from the home through to performed labour, for example the DJ in the club who uses vinyl is considered more 'authentic' than those who have a laptop playlist. The attributes of the song are as important as the format in which it is consumed, that demonstrates class and superiority. Again, it is also no coincidence that vinyl is increasingly expensive when compared to digital formats.

It is the ability to understand and perform such codes that tells the individual, and those around them, who we are within the social strata. We can use these consumptions of art to classify our own, and others, identities in relation to each other. This sense of classification is a constant dynamic that is negotiated and renegotiated as individuals move through social relationships depend on the circumstances. Someone may be culturally knowledgeable in opera only, much like an individual as well-versed solo in Taylor Swift's discography. While Bourdieu would argue that one could be distinguished as higher than the other, but in both cases, the classification occurs in relation to how other people engaging with the cultural object. Bourdieu uses the metaphor of choice of food as to what will be filling (necessity) or the manner of presentation (luxury), to *view* art versus the ability to *understand* art. The only way in which a person can understand the difference – particularly Bourdieu's third level – is relative to their length of time spent in education of this field. That this (lengthy)

education requires time and money, indicates that the manner in which someone engages with art corresponds with their position within society: taste 'manifests as a naturalized ease and certainty in moving through cultural spaces, activities and performances, and knowing how and when to behave in specific contexts' (Schirato & Roberts, 2019, p. 124).

The act of consumption is a choice – the level of attention and knowledge applied to any decision is what elevates someone within the social hierarchy. Bourdieu's explanation of this social hierarchy as a way to distinguish ourselves can be seen across many examples of consuming culture. While his theory is relatively recent in the overall philosophical world, the methods of consuming in the digital age says so much about an individual's position within the hierarchy. These methods of how an individual chooses to entertain themselves, or spend their discretionary time, distinguishes the class of the individual. The National Theatre at Home streaming service allows paid subscribers to view productions on the television in their own home, previously only available in cinemas, although both products are on a different level than attending the theatre. However, the 90 minutes that an individual could spend on consuming a National Theatre production, according to Bourdieu, would be 'better' than spending the same amount of time, within the same medium, watching the latest Simon Cowell production. The innate class associations of the cultural product consumed surpasses the fact that the medium and the time are no different, other than the consumption of a National Theatre text requiring more knowledge, a closer reading, undistracted attention, and a subscription fee, to distinguish the product of a higher class. Subsequently, an individual can then communicate, perhaps sharing on social media, that this was their preferred choice of using their discretionary time to confirm their place within the social strata.

Given how high and low culture has been used to distinguish between high and low quality 'people', the same ideas that were developed by critical theorists like Theodor Adorno can assist in understanding and positioning Bourdieu's arguments with respect to television. Adorno had applied similar – if more overtly political – criticisms to his first "love", music and, especially, composition. His intent was to generate and apply precise terms to define popular and serious music than merely 'lowbrow and highbrow' (Adorno, 2006, p. 76), in order that a subsequent hierarchy of cultural value could be deployed. Adorno makes a

'clear judgement' as what separates the two; the 'fundamental characteristic of popular music: standardization' (p. 74). From Adorno's point of view, it was unnecessary that a listener hear an entire song, as 'every detail is substitutable; it serves its function only as a cog in a machine' (p. 75). For Adorno, popular equated to standardised, resulting in a 'fill in the blank' form of music.

A second characteristic of popular music Adorno identified was imitation, as popular records that achieved success would be quickly replaced with very similar and even ersatz versions (p. 77). Adorno's analysis is that the standardisation and the resultant simplification of the song provides the appeal, and these factors almost promote reproducibility, and the end result is an entire musical genre which demands no effort in order to be listened to and appreciated (p. 77). Popular music therefore provides 'distraction and inattention', and, in this sense at least, Adorno at least implies that popular music has a purpose, even if that purpose is ephemeral and, ultimately, conservative or even fascistic (p. 81). This lack of emancipatory political purpose is Adorno's ultimate criticism of the 'lowbrow': the ability to distract, the ease of listening, and the obviousness of where how the song develops merely perpetuates and often reinforces exploitative social and economic relations. On this basis, quite clearly, Adorno would have had equally critical and damning comments to make about Reality Television. In the same vein as high versus lowbrow, the popular masses versus the culture industry, I would argue here that from Adorno's perspective, Reality Television would be viewed as a safety valve that subverts and prevents revolutionary socio-economic change. As a consumed product of the culture industry provided to the ordinary people of the masses, the popularity of Reality Television productions buy keep the lower classes separate from those above. Adorno's argument is that if the masses are focused on the consumption of popular culture, of which Reality Television is widely considered, they will be preoccupied from focusing on bettering their social and economic conditions.

In fact, Adorno did write about contemporary American television and argued very strongly that there were obvious parallels with what the 'output of contemporary cultural industry has in common with older "low" or popular forms of art' (1954, p. 214). Here, this 'low' form of popular culture provides the spectator with deeply comforting and conservative ideological messages, in that the text becomes formulaic, 'superficially maintained' tension,

and ultimately caters towards the spectator 'feeling on safe ground' (p. 216), and that the values and inner conflicts of 'highbrow' literature has given way to 'cliché-like characterization' (p. 217). It is arguable, however, that Adorno did not appreciate the potential for innovation and development within the format standardisation he so decried. Perhaps because the television industry was so new when he was writing, Adorno did not have the benefit of seeing the potential for skilled and dedicated practitioners to use the limitations of the form to comment on wider social reality or, even, transcend the form itself (qualities he would have solely reserved for 'highbrow' artists).

Perhaps a more productive approach than the high / low dichotomy is to focus on the differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' forms of popular culture. Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel investigate this cultural aspect of popular music: 'the worst thing which we would say of pop music is not that it is vulgar, or morally wicked, but, more simply, that much of it is not very good' (2006, p. 51). Hall and Whannel strive to understand why it is *bad*, and what are the necessary conditions that produce the exceptions that are *good*. To do so, their analysis of popular music includes looking at more than just the song as an isolated text. Instead, they argue that factors like the industry behind the text, the publications promoting and the audience receiving the text, the performer their specific and unique delivery of the text must all be considered in understanding what comprises a 'good' song (p. 46). This broad approach, coupled with drawing attention to specific elements of the song – not only lyrics, but also the beat, backing, presentation, inflections of voice, or intonations (p. 48) – demonstrates how a popular culture text is able to withstand rigorous analysis. However, what Hall and Whannel ultimately present here are high-class judgements about what music *should* be, in the argument that, overall, popular music as a majority form is bad, and within that, it is possible to find some good examples. But if we were to consider Bourdieu's first level of engagement, the fact that popular music can be, and is enjoyed, by so many means that it must be good. Therefore, if popular music is enjoyable, and good, then how can this be explored from the perspective of what makes popular music bad? This may come down to a variety of reasons, for example, trying too hard, pushing the boundaries too far, adopting something inappropriate perhaps. But what Hall and Whannel are suggesting here, is the ability to judge something on its own terms; instead of reinforcing the reasons why low is situated within low, but how can we see a

range from high to low within the concept of low itself? And this approach, in which we can see the benefits of appreciating the quality of a popular text using its own criteria (rather than those imposed on it from, say, the socialist political project to replace capitalism) in order to understand what makes it *good* is an incredibly useful example for this research project. In particular it provides me with the starting point to develop a framework wherein I can begin to interrogate the Reality Television genre, and its constituent formats, in the context of their own place within the television schedules and the contemporary world they inhabit.

Obviously, it is a commonplace to refer to Reality Television as located within 'popular culture' (see: Dreyer, 2011; Glynn, 2000; Murray & Oullette, 2009), so it is therefore necessary to provide a brief overview of how the genre has been positioned within the 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' argument. For many academics, issues of taste and class are the typical starting point for their enquiries. For instance, Annette Hill states there is 'an overarching social and cultural order to factual genres, with public service genres at the top and popular genres at the bottom. Reality TV is off the factual scale and has been reclassified as reality entertainment' (2005, p. 2). Likewise, Tony Bennett argues that scholars need to revisit their very foundations of critique, as, for many decades, 'to study popular culture has also meant to adopt a position against and opposed to it, to view it as in need of replacement by a culture of another kind, usually 'high culture' (2006, p. 81). And perhaps most tellingly there is the gendered basis of a deliberate non-interest in Reality Television shows, since 'like daytime television, they have been devalued as "low culture" watched primarily by women' (Johnston, 2006, p. 116). At the same time, however, it is also clear that many scholars point to more positive ways of positioning and evaluating the Reality Television genre. Anna McCarthy's investigations into the origins of the genre, for example, show how, despite contemporary ideas of Reality Television as a 'cheap, endlessly recyclable and licensable programming format … [Alan] Funt's covertly filmed records of real people in unusual situations were an esteemed form of culture' (2004, pp. 20 - 21). In other words, audiences responded to and appreciated the insights given by looking at "themselves" in "reality" on its own terms.

Karen Lury also argues for the need to evaluate television on its own terms. Rather than applying cinema criticism to the mode of television, Lury stresses the importance of recognising all integral aspects of television – whether they be situated in what is considered 'elite' or 'popular', but also 'weather reports, children's programming, or channel idents' (2007, p. 371) in order to better appreciate television as a distinct and distinctive medium. This is the position from which my research will develop. Although the 'highbrow' / 'lowbrow' division has been historically important, it is not particularly useful to best critically appreciate contemporary developments in television as a medium. This is because in adopting the highbrow/lowbrow division, it is then impossible to look at television in and of itself. The pre-existing framework of judgement that places television within the hierarchy of high-brow and low-brow is not useful in understanding what is taking place within the 'distinct and distinctive' medium; why not start with television in and of itself, and begin analysis from there? Further, there is no justification to simply replace each of those labels with 'good' and 'bad'. Instead, my research proceeds on the understanding that Reality Television results, like all genres, from a complex interplay of factors that influence production, coupled with the imperative to continually innovate (in order to stay 'fresh' to promote ratings) and speak to – and attract – a sufficiently large audience to remain viable.

In this respect, it is worthwhile noting the obvious development of Reality Television in orienting towards the so-called 'middlebrow' audience (see: Bourdieu & Whiteside, 1996; Holmes, 2017; Lynes, 1976). Defined as being 'located between the "tabloid addict class" and the "tiny group of intellectuals", middlebrows represented "the majority reader" (Rubin, 1992) when considering the print medium. With respect to contemporary television, this positioning reflects, and partially explains the abundance of shows that 'observe' the extremes of people belonging to classes on either side of the middle, showcasing everyday lifeworlds that the 'middlebrow' never sees. While shows such as *Jersey Shore* (2009 - 2012) and *The Only Way Is Essex* (2010 -) represent a lower economic class, whereas *Made In Chelsea* or any *The Real Housewives* series show the lives of the rich, they all prioritise and reify the same overall life issues: never-ending personal relationship dramas, astounding lack of self-awareness, and the inability to escape the limitations of 'character' to name but three.

Here, however, the idealised middlebrow viewer can effectively look down on the spray tans and sexual antics of the lower class or be amazed at how blasé the higher class can be with money. What is presented, then, as a class-based dichotomy (middle > low, or middle < high) might actually be better conceived of as a result of the nature of television itself: in necessitating the largest possible viewing audience, it is perfectly natural for the developers of Reality Television to focus on the personalities, lives and loves of the minorities of the population who lie outside that broad middle-class demographic. Catering to this middle-of-the-road audience is crucial as it pertains to the biggest possible audience. The texts are not so much showcasing these lives for those who know, but in playing to the relationship the mass audience has with these lives as the 'other'. The majority of audiences can perhaps recognise themselves in relationship to these shows, rather than the absolute content of the actual show.

3.3   Research Concepts

In researching the Reality Television genre, several common concepts appear regularly. These must be addressed at this point for the sake of clarity, and I aim to define three broad concepts so that the remainder of this thesis can be as clear as possible. These concepts are: the dynamics of audience knowledge of Reality Television tropes; the use of the term "format"; and how best to label those who choose to participate in Reality Television shows.[10]

First, we must account for the audience's cumulative knowledge of the characteristics of the Reality Television genre (one could frame this as a form of media literacy: in other words, as time progresses, participants within shows will have the same level of media literacy as those who watch). While this area could be explored thoroughly and in much more depth with audience analysis, it is also possible to perceive a shift by examining the cumulative

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[10] This is an important point. For a variety of reasons, none of my chosen formats / shows features people who are not willing volunteers to participate: I am not interested in police chase, border security, or airport customer-service type shows, primarily precisely because the participants are included because of the overlap between their ordinary life and the world of television. I am interested in the more complex layers of construction that occur in the more developed formats that, while they might include observational tropes, are not solely observationally-based.

content that caters specifically towards this knowledge. One development from observational documentary is the 'mockumentary', a hybrid genre that has risen in popularity contemporaneously with Reality Television (and perhaps for similar reasons: a focus on putatively ordinary people and a much lower cost-per-episode than drama). Mockumentary is not new – one example from many is Spinal Tap, the 'band' that first appeared on television in 1979 and were the stars of *This Is Spinal Tap* (Reiner, 1984). It is, however, very clear that more complex, successful, and high-quality mockumentaries have been coterminous with the rise of Reality Television. One of the best examples of a mockumentary relying on the audience's knowledge of the Reality Television genre is the BBC's *The Office* (2001 - 2003). Following in the tradition of the often-cited examples of British observational reality shows *Driving School* (1997) or *Airport* (1996 - 2008), *The Office* employed the recognisable tropes of following participants in their workplace with filmed interviews. As Lothar Mikos explains, 'although *The Office* follows in the tradition of the British social realist sitcom and the 'comedy verité'… its mockumentary style creates an illusion, or a parody, of realism' (2015, p. 702). The success of the British show led to an American version of *The Office* (2005 - 2013), airing alongside other prime-time 'comedy verité' shows *Arrested Development* (2003-2019) and *Parks and Recreation* (2009 - 2015). The UK also produced *The Thick Of It* (2005 - 2012) with a focus on politics, later reimagined in the US as *Veep* (2012 - 2019). Another example is, *Modern Family* (2009 - 2020), in which the characteristics of *An American Family* (observational documentary style with a focus on family dynamics), translate into 'comedy verité'. All these shows are constructed on the basis that the audience has the required media literacy to develop knowledge of the Reality Television genre, and they can therefore play with those tropes to create a satirical, situationally comedic, and even poignant, exploration of their characters' lives.

Second, there is the term 'format'. For the purposes of this research, 'format' is defined as 'a template which ensures that the stream of real events that make up a particular show follow a predictable and rule-governed pattern of interaction, regardless of variations in local or specific content' (King, 2006, p. 47). 'Format' is used frequently in academia (see: Boyle, 2009; Chalaby, 2016; Moran, 2009), and is also used by the international body that protects intellectual property within television programs - FRAPA, the Format Recognition and Protection Association. The legal rights afforded to protected formats (in the UK at

least) requires defining a format as 'a combination of unprotected elements …   An infringement can only be involved if a similar selection of several of these elements have been copied in an identifiable way' (Challis & Coad, 2004). Legal decisions over several decades centre on locating multiple identifiable elements, rather than the simple idea of a show.

In this thesis I will use the word 'format' in two separate ways. First, I will use the word format in its standard meaning. Second, I will use the term to isolate a specific show within an overall 'genre format' (see: Baltruschat, 2009; Curnutt, 2009; Turner, 2006), as I do not want to use the term 'franchise'. Those who champion the term franchise do so because 'TV formats are sold as commodities, for extrinsic rewards; and the way in which they are sold bears close resemblance to 'business-format franchising' (Esser, 2013, p. 143). This echoes Moran and Malbon in their use of 'franchising' as 'a spin-off, remake or reversioning of elements drawn from an original to produce an adaptation' (2006, p. 105). What must be noted from a "television" point of view, however, is that there are levels of involvement in the selling of a format, and, as explained by Fremantle's chief executive officer, 'the company "operates in foreign markets like McDonald's does… there are Fremantle subsidiaries in some countries, in others there are franchise-holders who produce their own local versions of the original product"' (Raphael, 2009). Since my thesis is not overly concerned with the economics of television, I have elected to use "format" to aid clarity.

This ability to on-sell a show as a unique collection of various element underpins Albert Moran's definition of the 'format bible' (2009). Television formats involve a wealth of knowledge transfer, with the passing of 'a know-how package, enabling autonomous production and encompassing the concept, production rules and elements required for reproduction, such as consulting, the production 'bible', graphic design, demo tapes, music and set-drafts' (Lantzsch, Altmeppen, & Will, 2009, p. 85). Another similar definition by Andrea Esser highlights the format bible as:

> a compilation of instructions and information, including technical requirements, lessons learned, shooting schedules, crew lists and a budget sample. Further included is information about the original pitch, audience ratings, and sometimes market research findings and marketing tips. Where the rights

have remained with the original licensor, successful changes made to the format by licensees are subsequently integrated into the bible (2013, p. 143).

The requirement to follow this bible in such intricate detail means that 'the contestants, the games, and the quiz questions adapt to local conditions' (Mikos, 2015, p. 697). This creates what is essentially a global product, 'glocalized', for a local market. In much the same way as a fast-food chain has the Big Mac as a recognisable product available globally, except for slight variations for different regions, the same can be expected of *The Bachelor* as a format as the same everywhere; except for when they are not. It is probably correct to argue that the more successful format adaptations are an 'interpretation' as opposed to a 'copy', because they need 'to fit the social, cultural, and institutional context of the new country' (Beeden & de Bruin, 2010, p. 17). This does not, however, obviate the need for every show to have its own format bible which is strictly followed for either (a) new iterations within the same production company or (b) sold as intellectual property to a second production company.

For my purposes, it is unnecessary to delve deeply into the production or licensing models used for every show on which I focus and, to reiterate, I am not interested in the economics of Reality Television. I therefore do not have the need in this research to assume whether a particular show is a local subsidiary or a franchise operation. In either case, however, the term format suggests an all-encompassing term of a collection/expression of ideas as a show that is both broadcast and adapted globally, 'for the purpose of licensing internationally to national production firms' (Quail, 2015, p. 186).[11]

Last, I need to determine how best to refer to those who elect to appear on Reality Television shows. It is simply incredibly difficult to differentiate reliably and consistently between "performers", "characters", "constructed personas", or even "victims". Ib Bondebjerg's analysis of the blurring of public and private spheres considers how there is a performed 'middle ground' between the two (1996, p. 37). Although his work is situated in

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[11] It must be noted that the formats included in this research – *Survivor*, *The Bachelor*, *The Real Housewives*, and *American Idol*, are all concepts that have been 'traded internationally' as 'program formats' (Jensen, 2009, p. 165). That said, when citing academic work outside of this research, the author's original and intended term will be used.

the police and crime documentary genres, Bondebjerg argues that as the private life of individuals comes to the fore - affecting and often removing the public/private separation – they construct an affective middle region as part of a carefully managed (or even curated) public sphere. At the same time, the private sphere develops into a 'deep backstage' (p. 37). This idea of negotiation between the public and the private is made manifest by a 'necessity to perform… [but] in the end your "real" self must come out' (Couldry, 2010, p. 77). This self-management of what an individual chooses to express, suppress, and carefully construct suggests a possible high degree of self-awareness and (potential) sense of control over their on-screen presence.

Running counter to this, however, is the idea that an individual's performance of themselves and / or withholding aspects of their personality fatally undermines the 'reality' of Reality Television. As Helen Piper suggests, however, the key here may not lie in what is real or contrived, but rather in the nature of the performative/communicative relationship between participant and camera (2004, p. 282). One consequence of this approach is that even despite an individual's attempt to perform, it is the need to do so on-camera that reveals the 'real' character. An example here may be that a woman competing to win the bachelor's heart may perform an outgoing, outrageous personality; this, in turn, however, reveals that she may believe these are the traits required to attract men. It is the interplay of the woman's performance with the camera in a situation where the audience knows that she knows she is on camera that reveals her real, underlying "self".

The suggestion here, then, is perhaps not so much the reality, but in capturing the authenticity of the person. Aiming a camera at an individual and their subsequent disclosures is what may ultimately encapsulate the authentic nature of an individual. This understanding is not tied to possible moral judgements, for those who communicate well via the camera in terms of an authentic self are not necessarily in the possession of 'good' morals (for example, Ronald Regan, or Donald Trump). Instead, the contemplation of persona suggests an additional layer to any concept of reality and construction, and that is of authenticity. Just how much of the emotional truth of the authentic person is revealed in front of the camera may determine whether an individual is likely to be 'good television' or not. Such notions around performance, or individual intent and agency are examined

thoroughly with in-depth interviews and analysis by Laura Grindstaff (see: Grindstaff, 2002; Grindstaff, 2012; Grindstaff & Murray, 2015) in a series of interesting and sometimes intriguing articles.

There are also some very rare scholarly works by individuals who have themselves appeared on Reality Television shows (see: Fox, 2013; Moore, Cooper, Williams, & Zwierstra, 2017; Wright & King, 2008). While this area is fascinating and important for the overall field of Reality Television, it unfortunately requires in-depth analysis that space does not permit in my research.

There are a variety of options to label those who appear in Reality Television shows, but each comes with complicating connotations. 'Contestants' is often used (see: Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006; Moore, Cooper, Williams, & Zwierstra, 2017; Smith & Wood, 2003), but this term best applies only to competition shows. Shows often use their own terminology as well – *Survivor* may use the label 'castaways' (see: Haralovich & Trosset, 2004; Smith & Wood, 2003), whereas references to *The Real Housewives* format will refer to the women as 'housewives', this is not true outside of the respective shows. Another point for consideration is the difference between shows that focus on 'real' people, versus 'celebrities'. Shows such as *Strictly Come Dancing* (2004 -), *Celebrity Big Brother* (2001 -), or *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here!* (2002), all focus on celebrities in a Reality Television setting: what term best describes these people?

I will use the term 'participants'. Despite the options available, ultimately the approach taken in this thesis is that even if the individual is able to escape being affected by the production process of appearing on a show (by, for instance, having sufficient food to stave off a hunger-induced argument on *The Bachelor*), the portrayal of that person in the programme will nevertheless be influenced by editing and story creation. The term participant best denotes that there are elements of reality, story creation, and editing at play – and how these factors interact to shape an individual's portrayal is different on different shows, and is experienced differently for individuals on the same show.

3.4   Research Questions

This literature review has covered the origins and current discussions around the Reality Television genre. With a working understanding as to what characteristics define or are expected within Reality Television formats, comes the genesis of my first research question:

How does a Reality Television format incorporate conventional characteristics of neighbouring genres?

Obviously, the genre overall is constantly changing, both in terms of new formats being trialled and in terms of innovations and experiments within existing formats. Analysing some of these developments over time will, however, identify and detail the mechanisms through which these trials, innovations, and experiments have been successfully made manifest. This then leads to my second research question:

How have these inclusions contributed to the longevity of the format?

Before investigating these questions, however, it is necessary to return to the question of how best to conceptualise television as a medium.

Chapter Four - Towards a Taxonomy of Liveness

4.0   Introduction

The previous chapter outlined how it is possible to develop a perspective of critique from (a) within the rubric of television studies as broadly understood (by looking at its political economic background or its textual antecedents) and (b) in relation to the deployment of class and taste that surround its production and reception. The purpose of this chapter is to outline a complementary point of view based in the concept of "liveness". Here, my purpose is to show how it may also be possible to situate a critique of Reality Television by enquiring into the phenomenological nature of television itself rather than by looking at the wider system it exists within or the way(s) in which its content supports or subverts dominant social power dynamics. The fundamental contention on which this alternative critique is based is that television offers a unique and highly specialised experience that is centred on the concept of "liveness".

4.1   Reality Television and time

Even the most cursory viewing of a Reality Television format could not fail to note repeated and important references to time and its passing. Whether this is the week-by-week elimination of unsuccessful contestants on *Survivor*, the reflection on 'how far' a singer has come on *American Idol*, or the awkward silence of a stilted conversation as the hero meets an unsuitable lady on *The Bachelor*, every reality format depends centrally on time and time-bounded events.

This is not to say that reality formats are the only forms of television that work this way; sports events, for instance, also have a clear and intensely close relationship to time-boundedness and operate to construct new units of time, such as the action replay. Where Reality Television might be different, however, is that it offers an opportunity to place the question of what television <u>does</u> at the centre of analysis. In ways that sport (because of the rules of the games being played) and media events like disasters or celebrity deaths (because they are essentially singular one-offs) cannot, Reality Television can be

constructed by producers and experienced by viewers as perhaps the most open and malleable genre within which various constructions and deployments of time (within episodes and across series) can be used.

4.2   The concepts of live and liveness

Paddy Scannell attempts to develop a thorough account of the role of 'liveness' in modern broadcasting In doing this, he positions texts as produced for 'absent viewers and listeners' (1996, p. 18). For an audience member that cannot attend a sports game, for example, the produced text provides an entry-point into the experience for an audience that does not have physical access. The ability for a sense of 'presentness' – participating in the moment, but not physically at the location - demonstrates a powerful tool that can transcend spatiality and provide the audience appropriate access to an event as it occurs. Live broadcasting, therefore, provides an ability to attend in terms of temporality, despite an inability to attend in terms of physical space. Building on this, Scannell's work suggests that once a text exists (be it radio or television), it can then be curated towards what the audience indicates it enjoys, and not necessarily what was first envisaged. Scannell asserts that the original motive may have driven the creation of the text, however 'it is not the reason it succeeds' (p. 9). Once the audience is involved, their input (in whatever form, be it feedback, viewership numbers, etc) will inform what exactly caught their interest. While this may be useful for one-off events, ultimately this would be most beneficial to be able to finetune a product in serial form to whatever the audience desired. The circular nature is revealed here, in that to gather this feedback, an initial text needs to be created, to thereafter have engaged and affected audiences, which can then be finetuned to specific needs.

What is intriguing here is Scannell's assertion of the power dynamic between broadcasters and the audience. He suggests that there is little to be done to coerce the audience's behaviour, and so, the only aspect of control broadcasters have lies in the creation of the text (p. 12). *How* the audience received a broadcast was unenforceable, instead, an audience could change the channel, pay little attention, or perhaps, as during the wedding

of the Queen Mother, that 'men in public houses might listen with their hats on' (Wolfe, 1984, p. 79, as cited by Scannell, 1996, p. 77). However, there is one element that can be strengthened by broadcasters in order to motivate the audience to listen or tune in (by piquing their attentiveness): liveness. As Scannell notes, once broadcasters were confidently able to decouple matters pertaining to spaces (for example whether or not man removed his hat in a pub) from questions of time (most obviously the 'nowness' of an event), they could produce incredible impact from the 'eventfulness' and 'aura' of, say, the Queen's coronation.

This 'present-ness' intersects with Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community, demonstrating the power of a live broadcast. Previously, when an event such as a coronation would occur, an individual was required to be in the physical space, at the correct time, to experience the legitimacy of the moment. Anderson's concept positions the written communication and then the cinema as informing a developing imagined national community essentially in a *retelling* of what has occurred. With the ability to produce a live broadcast, it is no longer the case that space and time are joined. In other words, with radio and then television a person can 'be at the event' temporally without being at the event spatially precisely because a sense of 'presentness' is constructed by the 'as it happens' nature of a live broadcast. This shared experience around the radio or television during an event of national importance provides a heretofore novel connection to an imagined community all at the same time, a very powerful tool in strengthening nationhood and furthering establishing the 'subjectivity' of being a member of that nation.

For Scannell, the coronation as an event brought the nation together via broadcast because the liveness of the event required people to listen at the same time as one another despite whatever else they had planned that day. His examples of audience members forced to adjust their daily schedule in order to be a part of the event – or that their day's schedule (being at the hairdressers for example) meant that they unintentionally became a part of the event – highlight how powerfully and all-pervasively live broadcasting can and does shape people's lives. Those phenomena that 'our' national imaginary values are those which

we need to experience live, be that watching the nightly news bulletin, winning an Olympic gold medal, or staying abreast of an unfolding disaster. If we choose not to take part (or are prevented from doing so), we lack the ability to truly be a part of our national story.

The structure of broadcasting as a for-anyone-as-someone mode of address is very important here. Scannell's idea that broadcasting (and live broadcasting in particular) operates as 'available to anyone' but that it 'speaks to me' is crucial in understanding how we can conceptualise broadcast 'talk as conversation' (1996, p. 13). In the early years of radio broadcasting, this conversational structure and tone operated such that unknown voices entered and then, as they became familiar, permeated homes without overly intruding on personal spaces and private realms.

The process of normalising Scannell broadcasting and its schedules occurred as 'listening habits' (1996, p. 10) developed and in developing they, in turn, produced a sense of the expected and the habitual; specifically, 'the ordinary is intended' (1996, p. 6). In furthering this concept of the 'ordinary', in 2003 Frances Bonner explored 'Ordinary Television', that is those series with nothing 'special' about them, were not often investigated academically (if at all) within the television field, but were and remain integral to the construction of television broadcasting (Bonner, 2003). Bonner argues that when it comes to classifying such ordinary television (and, at a later point, Reality Television), two characteristics are required for an accurate definition, the first describes the 'content', the second, the 'form' containing the content. Her examples of *'hospital' and 'series'*, or *'dating' plus 'game show'*, prefigure what became major configurations of Reality Television formats. More specifically, Mark Burnett describes the creation of The Apprentice as '*Survivor* in the city' (Keefe, 2019), effectively communicating the form (competition) and content (business). In this understanding of the ordinary, Bonner reminds us of the importance of elements of the 'everyday' such as Henri Lefebvre's stress on the importance of routine and repetition (2003, p. 30), and the way Michel de Certeau highlights the need to continually strive (pp. 30-31). Bonner adds Roger Silverstone's understanding of television as 'managing the anxiety and chaos he sees characterising social life' (Bonner, p. 31) to these two factors to

produce a conceptual triangle that underpins her concept of 'ordinary': the routine and repetition of sociocultural organisation to reduce chaos.

In this regard, (ordinary) television provides a method to construct a recognisable way of understanding the world. In adding John Hartley's idea of television embedded as 'suburban' (Bonner, 2003, p. 33), Bonner then argues that the regular viewing of television, creates and reinforces the structure of everyday life, and promotes and strengthens 'invisible' ideas about class (p. 51). Here, she also draws attention to the language used within the televisual "address" when she cites Norman Fairclough's idea that 'conversationalization' was 'a move to a more conversational, more everyday language on television' (p.50). In this way her argument aligns with Scannell's, as she is showing how the very ordinariness of television requires a combination of factors to be constructed so that it can enter the private space of the audience. Here, it must be remembered that, despite what broadcasters and scholars may argue, people view television not as a mass audience but as individuals or in small, usually domestic, groups.

4.3   Liveness and format television

Bonner also draws attention to this history of format television, and reflects on the absence of the variety show in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Interestingly, however, *Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway* (2002-), played a major role in the resurgence of the primetime variety show in front of a live studio audience. Only a few years later, the launch of *Britain's Got Talent* (2007-) further reinvigorated the variety format and, unlike reality singing and dancing competition shows, *BGT*'s winners include a gymnastic troupe (2010), performing dogs (2012 and 2015), shadow theatre (2013), a magician (2016), and perhaps ironically, a pianist (2017), a comedian (2018), and a comedic pianist (2020).

She also noted the absence of dance shows (and referred to the original *Strictly Come Dancing*) as a category of show that could previously command an entire section within television literature, such as work by Fiske and Hartley (1978). The contemporary version of

that show launched in 2004 and at the time of writing the dance competition remains very popular in both the UK and the United States. This reintroduction of a format like this can capitalise on the nostalgia of those who originally watched, and popularity with the new generation coming through, an established familiarity and a bonding both in the family and socially. A dance competition show is also easily constructed around various deployments of "live" and "liveness": within each episode (will they win the challenge); the "week of …" episodes (who is eliminated); and through to the season finale (who will win). Further, as a format, *Strictly* is built around the jeopardy inherent in the 'live show': the culmination of a week's preparation, the last chance to nail the performance, and the reason for audience voting. *Strictly* as a format exists for the live performance, and the fact that the elimination show is pre-recorded emphasises the importance of the live performance.

The experience of being a television audience member is at root an individual one. Live television prompts and promotes opportunities for people in real time live circumstances to react to something on their screen with the people they are with at the time. This is about bonding, familiarity, and can be thought of in a sense as an offshoot of that kind of dialogic experience between live *television* event and live *conversational* event on behalf of the audience members who are consuming it at the same time. Therefore *Big Brother*, for example, whether the edited show or the live feed, makes more sense if it is talked about while it is happening - it may be interesting to watch on your own, but it is better when it can be discussed in conversation with other people.

4.4   Positioning the viewer

Continuing with the literature of the early millennium, Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn's edited volume into Reality Television includes the concept of liveness through the lens of production and audience (2004). Estella Tincknell and Parvati Raghuram (2004), argue how liveness within *Big Brother* is integral to the viewer experience:

> there was no need to wait for the edited show each day, at any time a viewer was able to connect to the live feed, or participate in chat rooms on the official website. This 24/7 access reiterates just how

reliant the format of Big Brother truly is on surveillance, which can provide a 'convincing sense of immediacy and liveness' (p. 255).

Here, the recognition of the role additional media play within Reality Television formats is a theme that appears in early understandings of *Big Brother*, but these media play an increasingly important role within the literature as the years progress. Here, Tincknell and Raghuram can identify a characteristic that quickly became integral to more than just the *Big Brother* format.

In the same edited collection Misha Kavka and Amy West conceptualise liveness and temporality in relation to *Survivor* and *Big Brother*. Reversing how liveness is utilised in news or sport (where television cameras are present because the event is occurring independently), the authors argue that with Reality Television 'the event is precipitated by the presence of TV cameras' (Kavka & West, 2004, p. 137). In this sense, it is no longer that the camera is an eyewitness at the scene, but instead, the scene becomes an event precisely because it is triggered by the camera. While there is a dialogic relationship between news event and journalism when the camera might trigger a happening or behaviour(s) within an event, the conditioning function of the camera in Reality Television is that there are highly coded ways for people to conduct themselves in terms of disciplinary behaviour; what the rules are, what the conventions are, what the expectations are. The camera has in fact turned around, it is no longer a recorder or observer on behalf of the audience, it is the provocateur of the events that the audience become involved with. Kavka and West discuss two concepts here that will be elaborated on further within this research – the unpredictability of the moment (*The Bachelor* in Chapter Six), and the viewer belonging to an imagined community watching the same show together (*American Idol* in Chapter Nine). Combined, this 'liveness effect' (Kavka & West, 2004, p. 140) is a central force of the Reality Television show: it is most important that a viewer does not know what might possibly happen during the episode (no spoilers), and that they watch the show as it airs (along with everyone else).

From the production perspective, Kavka and West explore how the passages of time are communicated within the *Survivor* text, for example, the rising or setting sun to indicate the beginning or end of the stated numbered day. In addition to this, the authors also describe how participants communicate time on the island. While preparing for her final three days on the island, for instance, Susan shifts her expression of time from days to "70 hours", and in doing so, makes the goal more bearable by counting down multiple but smaller units of time instead of a smaller number but larger units of time. Another participant, however, (Rudy) describes his length of time on the island in relation to bowls of rice and overall weight lost. In both cases the diegetic formulations of time locate and discipline the viewer within and to the demands of the show and the lived experience of individual contestants. The measurement of time as units related to the format is not unique to *Survivor; The Biggest Loser* (2004-) is of course structured as weekly episodes (and with this terminology used within the episodes), but the ever-looming deadline is more correctly thought of as the effect of time on their participant's journey: how many pounds do they need to lose in order to win? While Kavka and West highlight the expressed units of time within the *Survivor* format, there is a wider implication here that any format that works to deadline has the potential to work to unique format units of time. If a viewers is emotionally involved or invested in the format in any way – as a fan on any level and whatever method of consumption - then those units of time that derive out from the programme can start to structure real life. Viewing has always been structured around appointment or must-see television, but this is a different, and substantially more intrusive, process for viewers.

In 2004 there was a special issue on liveness in both documentary and Reality Television, which provides additional consideration of evolving media technologies and how they offer new avenues for live and liveness to be critically understood. Lunt (2004) begins by suggesting that for any live event the merit lies in the nexus between what is live and what is prepared. It is the negotiation between the spontaneous and the produced that provides the energy of liveness, and the effect is to interweave unpredictability and the skill of broadcasting. For Lunt, Reality Television can deliver exactly this tension as it is structured to live intersperse live components with scripted reality segments. Again, the skill is not in a text as live *or* prepared, but in the complementary facets that demonstrate *produced*

unpredictability and thereby condition the viewer to a expect particular structures and situations.

Nick Couldry (2004) defines liveness as a 'shared attention' to a centre of transmission, in this instance, a television broadcast (p. 354). He explores new technology forms and in particular positions key differences between the terms 'online liveness' (chat rooms, websites), and 'group liveness' (continuous social connection with mobile cell phones). While investigating these new abilities to connect across time and space, there is again an emphasis on requiring a centre of transmission: *what* is bringing everyone together in the early 2000s, *why* do they need to communicate? Couldry's optimistic view of new technology suggests liveness has the potential to expand in new ways, this potential is explored in Chapter Nine of this thesis.

Following this, Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (2005) consider how liveness is perceived by viewers in different global regions. Noting that successful formats in the UK did not always achieve the same level in the US (and vice versa), Biressi and Nunn introduce this angle in relation to the magician David Blaine's 'Above the Below' endurance feat in 2003, living in a glass box suspended above Tower Bridge, with only water to sustain his body for a period of 44 days. While calling on Kavka and West's concept of Reality Television working to deadlines that create specific lengths of time, the authors contemplate why the US celebrity chose London for the stunt, where he was relatively unknown. People in London began interacting with the spectacle by disrupting and subverting its underlying logic and its seriousness, by, for example, throwing eggs at the glass box. Whether this reaction is due to lesser degrees of respect to celebrity in the UK or the UK audience has a heightened 'appetite for watching physical suffering of psychological shocks' (Biressi & Nunn, 2005, p. 132), this difference shows regional differences in how viewers react to the ways time is encoded within texts. 'The implication is that American audiences, in comparison with their European counterparts, have a lower tolerance for the threat of televised real time – a lower boredom threshold or a higher demand for dramatic shaping' (2005, pp. 145-146). In this sense, Biressi and Nunn uncover both the production of Reality Television time, but also

the audience experience of Reality Television time. This would be an intriguing element to examine in more detail using audience research; however, the issue of how one format can be expressed differently across multiple regions is the focus of Chapter Eight in this thesis.

Another theme that appears during the early investigations into Reality Television is the focus on the two main successes of the early 2000s: *Big Brother* and *Survivor.* Aslama and Pantti (2006) use these two formats to explore the 'confessional' as delivered by participants on screen. While their work also explores various 'talk situations' (perhaps between participants, or between a participant and the host), is the participant monologue to camera in which the authors locate the 'specific moments of talking alone … as a truth-sign of direct access to the real' (Aslama & Pantti, 2006, p. 175). While this may involve different stylisations between a diary room confessional (in *Big Brother*) or an off-screen camera operator on an island (in *Survivor*), these monologues in front of the camera provide a 'live', 'real' insight into each participant and their unfolding narrative.

Deliberately referencing the vulnerability and supposed truthfulness inherent in cultural conventions of the religious or psychological 'confession', the context of these monologues is that the true self is being exposed, live, in front of one camera usually positioned straight on to the participant. Although there are much wider considerations at play here (particularly in relation to the assumed awareness of performing a monologue to an eventual viewing audience), the main importance here is how the confessional relates to Scannell's various modes of address, as ultimately this truth-telling is taking place as if it is 'individuals addressing individuals' (2006, p. 175), and capturing those moments offers a suggests a sense of intimacy and connection for the viewer. Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff (Scannell & Cardiff, 1991) identified how from its inception broadcasting was constituted through talk: not speech (as a unidirectional mode of address) but as offering a facility for talk to occur (on a more dialogic plane). Talk, then, is the everyday, the conversational, the semiotic, and the quotidian. With a structure which prioritises individuals addressing individuals, Reality Television can therefore link to this intrinsic,

foundational facet of broadcasting: it is indeed no surprise then that early Reality Television picked up early broadcasting style and centred around talk in a live context.

From 2005 it is clear that there is a broad shift in the literature from being text-based to the beginnings of audience or reception studies. Lundy, Ruth, and Park (2008), for example, clearly state that the need to understand elements of Reality Television from the perspective of the audience must be added to the existing research. Using a 'uses and gratifications' perspective, Lundy et al aimed to determine how Reality Television was intentionally used by the audience, specifically focussing on understanding the motives behind, and functions of, watching. In the context of my research, there are two areas of significance from this work: (1) Reality Television comes with a value judgement and (2) viewers demonstrate a high level of commitment to watch a show when broadcast.

In the first case, Lundy et al unpack the label of what makes *morally good* Reality Television – shows that focus on improvement – and what can be positioned as *morally bad* – nastiness to the participants in the form of criticism or humiliation (Lundy, Ruth, & Park, 2008). This focus on the value or worth of the show suggests that as the number of Reality Television formats increased, so did the requirement to select an underlying mode for each unique format. The definition of *good* or *bad,* based on their audience responses*,* could perhaps be considered in correlation to the number of table-flips, bleeped out profanity, or participant's tears of joy as a souffle rises in the oven. However, it must be considered that both 'good' and 'bad' Reality Television can be 'good' television, as both can ultimately align with what is *entertaining*. This dichotomy works, then, to position the viewer as complicit within the overall moral or values-driven worth of the show.

In the second case, Lundy et al. identified that their audience watched for social connection and the act of viewing together with others. This confirms the findings of a uses and gratifications survey by Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007), who found Reality Television shows to be used habitually and to fill in time, in addition to entertainment and relaxation.

Even further, Barton's (2009) study confirms five similar modes of audience gratification, with social interaction, for instance, the need to stay up-to-date to watch an episode as it airs being a strong motivation for viewers. Here, despite the opportunities afforded by early digital time-shifting technologies, the scholarship shows that viewers are deliberately *choosing* to watch live, at the very same time as other viewers.

Such studies demonstrate how such shows become integrated into audience's lives, and consequently how the habitual nature of television viewing encourages viewers to centre considerations of time based on which show is airing when. Further evidence of the positionality need to watch habitually is the more recent advent of the *Watch Party* on streaming services. Clearly, there is a requirement on the part of many viewers to have a coterminous experience alongside other people (whether these people are co-located or in watching in other places) at the same time. There is a desire to remanufacture the experience (often seen as a limitation) of analogue broadcasting because there is something socially important about the act of knowing one is "watching together" with others. What is essentially being remanufactured here, is the liveness of the viewing event.

In focussing on four modes of audience reception Carolyn Michelle then shows how the composite multidimensional model, which places the audience at the centre of research, and classifies 'meaning making' as transparent, referential, mediated, and discursive (Michelle, 2009, pp. 138-139) allows us to further interrogate the ways in which liveness positions the audience with respect to Reality Television. Michelle positions the audience as understanding a text in a number of separate but interlinked modes: *as* life, *like* life, as a *production*, and as a *message*. The key here is how Michelle identifies that it is possible for a viewer to move *between* modes. This mode-shifting suggests a dynamic understanding of a text, between what is occurring within the text and then, say, subsequently communicating those thoughts online. A viewer must work to continually engage with the text, as the real-time shift between modes is actively experienced and then shared with others. Michelle's examination of message boards as a site of interaction, then, reinforces that in order to fully participate actively the viewer must watch at the same time as everyone else. Once again,

viewers are positioned with respect to their ability to join the communal conversation as it happens, during the live broadcast of a show.

4.5   Liveness and the global strength of reality formats

The next component of Reality Television where live and liveness became relevant was the way those concepts underpinned the global success of various formats from the mid-2000s onwards. By the early 2010s, for instance, formats devised nearly 10 years earlier were continuing to dominate, with the hybridising process of glocalization affording a range of regional variants. An example here is Doris Baltruschat's (2009) identification of how textual elements made *Canadian Idol* (2003-2008)specific to that nation / region. The ability to locate 'Canadianisms' provides an excellent perspective into how a format can be modified for a region, and although only from an *Idol* perspective here, the lesson holds for all 'glocal' formats. As Baltruschat explains, for instance, in the final stages of *Canada Idol* there are live viewing parties in the regions of the final contestants in which the live experience of watching "their" contestant succeed or fail becomes folded back into the mediatised events within and surrounding the show itself. Canada is not unique in this regard, and it is therefore understandable that this approach would also be utilised in other countries with distinct regional (that is sub-national identities). In this way, Baltruschat shows that, that no matter where a particular nationally-based version of a format might be located, it is quite probable there will be an importance placed on liveness as spectacle. It may be that the original intent of regional rivalry in *Canadian Idol* was a method to increase voting numbers (and therefore profits); however the coverage of supporters at live events, within the broadcast itself, reinforces the spectacle of liveness as a mode of participation. I will return to the dynamic interplay of nation and region as explicated in various formats in my case studies later in this thesis.

In large part no doubt because of their remarkable success and popularity, even a decade after the first introduction of the major Reality Television formats *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, and *Idol*, they remained the focus of much academic analysis. Katherine Meizel (2009), for example, looks at the 'American Dream' via *American Idol*. Meizel conceptualises talented

contestants as 'comic book superheroes', who come from the farm or in service jobs, and remove their Clark Kent glasses to reveal a superstar voice (a significant contrast to the success of William Hung, an Asian-American who was spectacularly bad in his audition in the 2004 season and parlayed his notoriety into a successful career as a motivational speaker and author). Meizel focuses on the dichotomy between a person from struggling lower class who then transitions to a 'star' (and the corresponding 'upper' class), a change that takes place temporally within one season of the show. Again, the 'American Dream' of success, is portrayed within a unit of time proscribed by Reality Television. Such contestants have most likely spent many years training their voice, as the necessary labour required to achieve sufficient vocal styling would naturally take considerable time. Instead, Reality Television can re-present years of training as a three-month success story. Continuing this theme, this then raises the question of what is the kryptonite for these people who achieve overnight success; what could be the one thing that shatters the illusion? Ultimately, this may come down to authenticity, and perhaps the perceived gap between the reality of the construction, and the 'constructedness' of the construction. Any exposure that reveals this would perhaps undermine the central conceit required.

Similarly, Dana Cloud (2010) presents the concept of the irony bribe: a 'textual strategy' within *The Bachelor* that uses the contradictions of both inviting and distancing the audience at the same time. The irony bribe, much like Lunt's ideal positioning between live and produced, utilises the tension raised at the intersection of two approaches. In this sense, 'viewers can regard the program as ''real'' and ''not-real'' and therefore worth viewing and worthless at the same time' (Cloud, 2010, p. 415). Like Meizel's discussion of *American Idol*, *The Bachelor* is considered as a text that manipulates the 'regular' amount of time it takes to establish a relationship to the point of engagement. However, it also *condenses* the regular amount of time, and it does this in two ways. First of all, although there are relationships out there that may culminate in an engagement within 12 weeks, such a short timeframe is not necessarily standard, other than within the context of a 12 week broadcast schedule. But also within the hour long show, what is ultimately seen is the condensing of at least a number of days of filming into a singular coherent narrative arc. The screened content of the show only contains the highlights, the emotionally charged

moments, the passion (positive or negative). There is no ordinary, there is a change in expectation that comes through. For the female participants, there is an awareness of limitations of time – and the pressure to disclose – while waiting out the time in which to hear their fate.

In a link back to the definition from Aslama and Pantti above, Cloud analysis one participant's confessional voiceover in which she states 'I know I need to show him more' twice, obviously conscious that time is running out to convince him of her feelings. Having expressed her anxieties over the ticking clock (a not so subtle reminder of the ticking biological clock), she then can only wait until the end of the episode to learn her fate. By contrast, the bachelor takes on his role of listening, withholding any authentic articulation of his feelings until the final moments of the season. The bachelor has the full length of time to make his decision, while the female participants endure an episodic deadline in addition to a season deadline (which could range from one episode to the full season depending on how 'successful' they are). Each episode - a three-day unit in Reality Television time – presents participants as they try to race the clock, but then also wait out the clock. The format then, is essentially up to 25 women living two methods of experiencing time, within each episode and across the entire season.

Building on this, it becomes clear there is a gendered experience of time, as the bachelor has much more agency in how he experiences his time, and agency in condensing the time of the women, as he chooses who gets alone time, who is sent home. The difference here is crucial to the structuring of the show as television: without the tension inherent in these radically different presentations of lived temporality within the show (all of which contain elements of liveness such as a cocktail party or the rose ceremony), the fundamental dynamic of "women competing to win the heart of a man" simply would not work. While in this example, the gender dynamic means the women positioned at the disadvantage, it is important to note that similar, if not perhaps as powerful, techniques would also be expected to be in play when male contestants "compete" for a bachelorette.

While not necessarily focusing on Reality Television as such, Jonathan Gray (2010) dissects the paratextual world of film and television, discussing transmedia approaches centred around a televisual text. Gray introduces the 360-degree view of storytelling (p. 210), and this is based upon an implied positioning of space and related spatial arrangements (for example, with the text situated at the centre of various paratexts). However, this physical position can be expanded to consider a temporal position as well. Gray's investigation into how a viewer could experience the television series *Heroes* (2006-2010)to its full extent is in direct corelation to the level of involvement that viewer might have with a variety of paratexts.

Gray does not state the point explicitly but a viewer's ability to involve themselves with paratexts is time-dependant. Beginning with the episode as it airs, the paratextual world of *Heroes* continues, say, with a second viewing of the episode with cast commentary, an updated webpage, online comic, official character blogs, and even a subscription text message service for clues about the future (Gray, 2010, p. 211). Extending this into the range of paratexts that are available, including watching along with, or the recap of, or the analysis of the latest episode, live tweeting, etc. Integral to these are that they are live, because it is immediate, it is dialogic, and there is a familiarity and talk that takes place amongst groups of fans and groups of people. While Gray positions the many methods in which the audience can engage (whether altogether or just the episode), important to note here is that these paratexts are all within a constructed time frame. Given that they all lie in connection with the base text of a broadcast date and time, all other texts must be consumed after, but still before, the next broadcast episode; after which the next round of accompanying paratexts appear. While *Heroes* did often incorporate necessary information from these paratexts into the 'main' plot in subsequent episodes of the show, if the viewer wished to know more *now*, that information was only available if they engaged with other media. The decreasing circles of time that come with these paratexts is also important, as if there is a weekly text, that is one circle of time. But for every additional text, each circle of time is linked, but decreasing, which means it may structure your life even further than a standard 'weekly' timeframe.

Connecting again with Scannell and Cardiff's discussion of functional broadcasting as structuring our daily and weekly lives, here we can see a deepening and a furthering of the structuring of our lives, through broadcasting, occurring on two levels. First with the show itself, and then with the paratexts and the interrelationships between the show and the paratexts. Depending on how much of a fan you want to be, the opportunity to structure your life even further are available in ever decreasing circles, as even more content builds on those already released paratexts between episodes. Ultimately, the viewer has a choice (across pre-determined time frames) as to the level they wish to engage with *Heroes*. A viewer can invest in a one-hour episode each week, or multiple hours within that same timeframe (the cast commentary episode alone doubles the time investment). With Gray's positioning of paratexts as an auxiliary method of consuming a text, the different levels of involvement might ultimately depend on how much time the viewer can invest before the impending deadline of the following broadcast. This involves structuring their life (as broadcasting has always done), but deeper and further than just the show itself.

In 2011 Jayne Raisborough examined similarities between lifestyle Reality Television and the self-help industry with a particular focus on two avenues of thought: communicating to the viewer, and communicating one's narrative. Her first perspective relates to a one-to-many conversational style highly reminiscent of Scannell's discussions of broadcast talk. The sub-genre of lifestyle Reality Television is defined by Raisborough as focused on the self, and she shows how we can be addressed as the viewer as '"unmarked individuals', and the neutral and universal "you"' (Raisborough, 2011, p. 10). The intriguing focus of Raisborough's critique, however, is whether an unmarked and universal viewer positionality is actually possible. Here, she is arguing that viewers are complicit in the same social issues that have led to participants requiring help within the shows. The lived experiences of viewer and participant are neither separate nor separable despite narratives and implications to the contrary. Reality Television provides only a neo-liberal individualist approach to dealing with life's problems; there is no focus at all on structural power, collective action, or the power of social movements to effect change. One example is how such shows do not address the underlying need to overwork (insufficient income under contemporary capitalism), but instead finding a solution to cope with the effects of overwork (medication). Another is how

applicants for a transformational home renovation must be deserving (due to say serious misfortune like 'illness' or 'unemployment') rather than undeserving (say, self-inflicted consequence 'poor financial management') (Raisborough, 2011, p. 131). While these shows may include a universal 'one-to many' approach to the talk within them, Raisborough dissects them to emphasise how the selection process for participants itself side-lines specific types of individuals from the very beginning.

An element of liveness is however apparent in how a participant communicates their narrative to the viewer. A show presents an individual in 'confessional spaces as life narrative' (Raisborough, 2011, p. 26); in other words, what led them to this specific moment in their journey, and where they desire to go. This 'meaningful past and directed future' (Raisborough, 2011, p. 28) is the narrative presented by participants to explain the circumstances leading to the present (perhaps hoarding), and to express their desire going forward (an uncluttered household). It is this specific moment in time captured within lifestyle programming, and in addition, uses the episodic unit of time to demonstrate the experts' ability and efficiency to intervene and (help) solve the problems (Raisborough, 2011, p. 28). Again, there is a peculiar construction of temporality at work here, in which the various layers of unfolding "time" within the show themselves deploy underlying dynamics of power. In particular, there is a reinforcement of liveness in that the participant communicates they are not merely 'being', but 'becoming' (Raisborough, 2011, p. 48) through the agency of the show. The viewer is therefore meeting the participant as an individual who does not have a static understanding of self, but with an imbued sense of momentum of an individual in the throes of self-improvement. Reality Television hereby is utilising the act of witnessing moments of confession/confessional (by people within the show and by the viewer of the show) to construct, deploy, and present liveness.

In the same year, but with reference to the *Idol* format, Jean Chalaby (2011) likened formats to bridges that connect cultures together. Much like Bonner's discussion of format bibles, Chalaby argues how the same 'distinctive narrative dimension' can be spread globally provide it contains sufficient local flourishes. In the case of *Pop Idol*, the multitude of

winners across world-wide regions necessarily led to a *World Idol* (2003-2004)and at the time of writing, the format has taken place within 58 distinct national "regions" – slightly more than the 54 countries united by the Commonwealth. And much like Bridges before her, Chalaby notes the essential engineering required to stabilise the format of the show lies in the centrality of *singing live*. The format bible is about more than mere aesthetics; it functions as ' civil engineering and those who tamper with it risk seeing it collapse!' (Chalaby, 2011, p. 300). In addition to the bridge analogy, the 'skeleton' and 'flesh' are also used to describe both the rigidity of the format bible as well as the potential for regional flourishes. As every season across every region provides the experience to fine-tune the format bible, this ongoing process suggests the format bible becomes a self-referential dynamic living document that is never completed: for example the advent of social media was relatively easily incorporated into the *Idol* format. Although it must be noted that these format bibles are rarely seen (even participants are not necessarily aware of what is included in a show they are appearing in), this method of industrialising an idea ensures that money can be saved as well as the delivery of a better product for the 'market'.

The format bible as a useful tool in a capitalist society is a particular intersection explored by Gareth Palmer (2011), linking formats with brand and understanding the economic backbone of the genre. As a format becomes an easily commodifiable entity, Palmer explores how participants are ultimately introduced as commodities in the creation of the text. What is interesting however, is that the branding of a format is not necessarily fixed across time: as Palmer cites Celia Lury, the 'brand is not fixed in time but has a fluid mode' (Lury, 2004, p. 1, cited in Palmer, p. 133). This is particularly evident – and necessary – for those formats that have existed for a considerable duration. For instance, while it is common to see product placement or corporate sponsorship within most formats, including the four explored in this thesis (i.e. the housewives attending a spa, a *Survivor* reward of Doritos), the *methods* and *extent* to which these shows are commodified will be very fluid as seasons progress.

Tracking the number of products per episode, the quality of brands, and even the commercial cost of incorporating / giving away a product – all indicate the value of the status of the format as commodity. Using, for example, the first season of *The Real Housewives of Orange County* (2006), there is extremely little 'advertising', other than filming at the local Country Club, or the housewives working for their own businesses. This lack of commodifying the product reflects the original intent of the text as a pseudo-documentary of a gated community. By contrast, as a format progresses, the increased appearances of promotional products can be woven into the live aspects of the show, in the same way that advertising is woven into our everyday lives. We expect to see billboards, commercially saturated environments, so it is acceptable when such promotion appears in these shows. This increasing liveness can be used as an indicator of the current popularity of a format: as viewing numbers rise, so does the ability to establish paid partnerships. This shift can be seen quite dramatically between seasons one and fifteen of *American Idol*, where the judges table has improved from a simple office-style desk with a curtain taped along the front to a much larger executive table in front of a fabulous view from a penthouse-level suite with extraordinarily prominent Coca-Cola branded cups. What this suggests, is that the *brand* of a format is not fixed, but instead an ongoing navigation of popularity with viewers. If a scandal were to befall a format, the threat of losing income from paid partnerships would give producers reason enough to avoid potential issues (while at the same time, courting scandal in a way to encourage viewership). Again, the ability to commodify a format will depend on various factors, and in this sense, is a fluid, and live, process. With the example of the Coca-Cola branded drinking cups, there are many layers of understanding this text. Scholars and critical viewers know that is likely an obligation for a judge to be required to take a certain number of drinks throughout the show, as per a contract. But for the ordinary viewer, thirst is an ordinary feature in an everyday life, and is experienced in real time.

Another example in which a format demonstrated encapsulating the 'live' social moment was in positioning a 'post-racial logic' to a season of *Survivor* that aired in 2008. Drew (2011) conducts systematic content analysis to a seasonal 'twist' that segregated tribes by race. While Drew identifies that there was the potential for discussion regarding race and society,

instead, the production and subsequent text appears to have focused on whiteness. The reasoning behind this may have been an attempt to return to the 'social experiment' origins of the game, but that original concept could be augmented here, as particularly in the wider sense of the Reality Television genre, 'scripted reality' were on air at the same time. This meant there was a lot more possibilities for producers to shape potential conflicts or issues and not have to rely on participants acting in ways where they emerged on their own.

Further, as the genre overall was widening to include shows containing scripted elements, *Survivor* could perhaps at the very least retain, if not gain more of an audience share, by highlighting the unpredictable nature of an 'OG' format. This (suggested) awareness of positioning the format amongst the wider genre offers a sense of recognising the opportunity of a moment in time. With the rise in scripted reality, *Survivor* could react by emphasising the experimental nature of the format, meaning that a format is not without influence from other shows of its period. Unfortunately, as Drew identifies, despite the potential for rich explorations of culture and class within various ethnic groups, the format returned to random tribes (as far as the text explains) the following season. The ability of a format to pivot in relation to other shows currently on air requires a responsiveness to the trends of the contemporary time period.

The perspective and branding of the participant is considered by Couldry (2011), not only as a necessary component of a show, but as a commodifiable entity in and of itself. Much like Bonner's discussion of the ordinary, Couldry positions participants as judged - not just by experts if that is part of the format - but by viewers. The main line of reasoning here is that Reality Television is a genre that allows the 'ordinary' citizen to be judged, by those who are just as equally, ordinary citizens (the so-called 'democratic' defence of the genre). The implication is that the participant is integral to a text but is not necessarily achieving agency within the creation of the text; Couldry's argument requires us to 'acknowledge the sheer difficulty of 'ordinary' citizens challenging the media process' (Couldry, 2011, p. 37). This 'ordinariness' is constructed via, and through, liveness, as the jeopardy of these shows lies in watching these extraordinary events as they happen to an ordinary contestant within a

certain, proscribed temporal frame. Ultimately, the success of formats within this genre may lie in the ordinary experiences, featuring the ordinary participant, for the ordinary viewer, but that the production, distribution, or ultimately financial benefits do not lie with the ordinary.

In an excellent companion to Couldry's piece Imogen Tyler detailed one participants' attempts to recode their identity as it was presented in a show at the time of broadcast. Utilising the immediacy of Twitter, the participant took the opportunity to challenge what was seen on screen (and said online) live during the episode (Tyler, 2011, p. 219). Referring to Couldry's concept that liveness is 'a special connection to a shared reality' (Couldry, 2011, p. 40), it could be said that the participant here is producing a richer text than could have been presented by the episode alone. While it is excellent to see a participant sharing her voice and story in an unmediated way for her own benefit, the was perhaps only available in the shot window before social media became systematically incorporated into a format's wider advertising plan and thereby no longer under the control of the participant. Particular platforms would either be monitored by producers, or in some instances, owned and run by the company with the intended public perception that this was in fact the participant's unmediated voice. An example here is how the Twitter handle of such a contestant would no longer be simply their name but would also include signifiers of the format, season, or other identifying and limiting data.

4.6   Social media and its potential to increase the effects of liveness

Enquiries into Reality Television and mediated liveness deepened through social media interactions with Ruth Deller's (2011) examination of Twitter as a research tool used by producers. Her findings demonstrate that the platform informs the producer of *what* is being discussed, and that this may or may not be in line with what was intended (or even expected). As June Deery (2014) put it, in the earlier 2010s Twitter changed its tagline from asking 'what are you doing' to 'what's happening?', and this better reflected how the platform was being used. What this slight but significant shift in wording achieves is to capture liveness in a more immediate form. The difference between responding to a

question that requires an objective, critical judgement and reflection (what *am* I doing?) to asking what *is* happening (i.e. *right now*) requires a more emotional, and of course more immediate, answer. The ability for the tweeter to move between direct address and one-to-many directly places Scannell's modes of address within this social media platform. When coordinated with similar modes of address on a Reality Television competition show, it is fascinating to see how the two communication formats can support each other. As Deery noted in 2014, academic enquiry into this connection could include investigating interactions via a television show account, and my own version of this features in the case study of *American Idol* in Chapter Nine of this thesis.

Deller rightly points out that the key factor when considering the integration between the Twitter platform and television viewing is that 'tweeting during television watching …largely requires TV must be watched at the time of broadcast, in the presence of other Twitter users' (Deller, 2011). The concept of 'maximum liveness' (Bourdon, 2000, p. 534, cited in Deller, 2011) can therefore be aimed at and achieved within many television genres and formats, including live finales of reality formats – either announcing the winner live, or the live confrontation in a reunion/aftershow for example. Not only is liveness embedded in the broadcast finale, but through extension into the social media space in real (or at least coeval) time, a viewer can experience the live show via a second screen. This argument further underpins my contention that Reality Television producers have been able to develop a range of potential viewing methods based on the ability to watch 'together' online in keeping with such examples as platforms such as NetflixParty (now named Teleparty), or Facebook's Watch Party.

This intersection of technology, liveness, and digital media continued when Ciulla, Mocanu, and Baronchelli (2012) investigated how it would be possible to forecast the winner of a Reality Television competition based on big data analytics of Twitter during voting periods. Again, the focus was on viewers who chose to vote and thereby were using a second device to communicate during the live broadcast, essentially moving between two layers of liveness. There is the liveness of the show, but also the liveness of following on Twitter, and

both layers reinforce each other, working together to make the other experience stronger. An intriguing anomaly of Ciulla et al's investigation was that by examining the geolocation of tweets, they found that the large amount of support for a Filipino contestant was from viewers who were not eligible to vote in the competition. With the complications of geolocation set aside, it was possible for the researchers to predict the rankings of participants before the live announcement, as well as identify what regions were discussing which participants. With Scannell's assertion that unpredictability is what draws viewers in to live broadcasting, then this ability to know ahead of time which contestants would be safe or eliminated could make the weekly results show quite predictable if it were more widely available. The unpredictability and tension therefore occurs in the period of time *between* the performance and elimination episodes, and not *within* an episode. While the elimination episode / live finale may be promoted (and commodified), as the most important *event* of the season, it may instead be that it is the anticipation during the time between two episodes that can be experienced (if not heightened) by continuing the conversation online. An episode might only utilise 90 minutes of airtime, but the continuing period between shows is ultimately experienced on Twitter.

This line of inquiry surmises that while the temporal structure of the event cannot be missed (Couldry, p. 198), this structure lies not necessarily simply within discrete episodes, but in the period between two episodes. If a viewer could potentially forecast rankings before the time of broadcast, then liveness, eventfulness, and unpredictability are at their peak during the *in-between*. This thought can be aligned with Fabienne Darling-Woolf who, in relation to another music competition show, states 'reality TV's success rests to a much greater extent on its ability to fully capitalize on the hypermediated environment surrounding it' (2011, p. 128). That it is entirely possible to view a Reality Television text on its own, or in conjunction with an online conversation platform such as Twitter, also correlates with Yngvar Kjus' argument that 'live event content like *Idols* thus not only protects television schedules but also accommodates developing online and mobile media services whose strategic importance and revenue are rapidly increasing' (2012, p. 164). What better way to keep viewers from being distracted by burgeoning social media, than to incorporate those media within the wider television show format <u>and</u> by using them to

augment, rather than replace, the existing floes and tensions? In fact, it could be argued that there is no better way to use the otherwise fallow, liminal, temporal space between episodes: it is no coincidence that the key component of early broadcasting, liveness and the concept of talk, are the precise elements of burgeoning social media that are incorporated.

4.7   Liveness as a tool to enhance the commodification of the audience

The ways in which franchised global formats were able to deploy these tools to further the commodification of the audience viewership was considered by Andrea Esser (Esser, 2013) in a study of how the presence of franchised formats escalated worldwide. Light entertainment as an analytical category because of its apparent and real crossover with the Reality Television genre. Esser also notes how the medium of television as a whole is built upon the 'intrinsic tendency towards formulaic regularity' (Oren, 2012, p. 372, cited in Esser, 2013). Together, these two elements of lightness and familiarity combine to create a profitable, and somewhat easily transferable, global product that can be communicated via a format bible. The success of various formats can be evidenced by research into viewing numbers, and how this corresponds with audience appeal. Esser's findings were that during the 2007-2008 broadcast years *American Idol* was only beaten in the ratings by one-off live sporting events such as the Super Bowl or the Academy Awards (Esser, 2013, p. 151). This line of thought could be understood from a production perspective in two ways; first, the unpredictable nature of Reality Television rates higher than scripted content, but that the required elements of production cannot compete with the ultimately fickle predictability of the live event. Second, if the most obvious and characteristic component of other shows that are gaining higher ratings than the genre of Reality Television is liveness, then to incorporate the nature of the one-off event would be highly beneficial. This then is the basis for Reality Television to incorporate more liveness; more live finals, elimination specials, theme weeks, etc. It would make sense then to consider that various Reality Television formats would look to incorporate the successful components from their competition to attract the viewing audience.

June Deery (2014) considers the commodification of viewer conversation, and the realisation by productions of how they can increasingly profit from creating and moderating conversations. The potential to 'generate income by selling back to audiences content created by audiences' (2014, p. 17), is highlighted here with the examples of (a) phone-in voting and (b) personal fan websites. The point here is that television content can 'overflow' via second screen devices, either synchronously or asynchronously with the television text, but these conversations continue at no further cost (advertising or otherwise) to the producers. Furthering this idea, Deery positions various allocations of time within an individual's daily life, presenting television as commodifying 'leisure time' (i.e., being sold to during an ad-break), but in addition, suggesting and influencing how the viewer spends their 'discretionary time', such as shopping (Deery, 2014, p. 22). In this instance, television – and the lifestyle it encourages – impacts more than just the one organisational unit of time, but into other aspects of daily life and achieves a new level of dominance.

In 2014 Albert Moran (2014) added to Chalaby's description of the format bible as flesh and bones, by likening a transnational format to 'the crust of the pie, but the filling changes' (Moran and Malbon, 2006, p. 19, cited by Moran, 2012, p. 76). This cooking metaphor then takes on a construction, even artistic, turn with Andrejevic's point that 'reality television took as its raw material the collection of the details of daily life' (Andrejevic, 2014, p. 41), which is then presented as live. Each show or season is the product of curating this capture of daily life to suit narrative (and ultimately commercial) purposes – finding love, developing vocal talent, etc. Andrejevic considers the logic required by a viewer to navigate what is real, but defers instead for an understanding of Reality Television coinciding with a return to 'cultural life'. In an attempt to break from mass culture and mass media, capturing the 'real' means a return to capturing the 'daily life' of those featured individuals. Although such shows can ultimately become part of the industrial mass media machine, Andrejevic suggests it is not so much *how* content is created (is it real or not), but *what* it is indicating (how individuals spend their time). He notes that *Big Brother* and *Survivor* both promoted documenting daily lives and how an individual engages with their community, which, when positioned with Moran, suggests the 'real' of Reality Television largely exists in the *what*, and the *when* of an individual's temporally defined life choices.

Rachel Dubrofsky (2014) considers how *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* prioritise balancing between career and love through the lens of gender, and while this research is fascinating as an analysis of the show, it is her clarification between 'dating shows' as those that feature a single date of a couple (like, say *Blind Date* (1949 - 1952)), versus a 'serial format' which follow a romantic relationship over time, that is important here. Her observation that *The Bachelor* format overall seems to have lasted more than any other type of Reality Television romance sub-g (Friends, 1994-2004)enre corresponds with her argument that an investment of time from both participant and viewer into an unfolding relationship is what makes this concept successful. The development of the participants 'character' is viewed live: constructed live during filming, and then repackaged as live within the structure of the show and/or season.

This is corroborated by Dubrofsky's observation that the heroine of *The Bachelorette* is more likely to have been a previous participant than her male counterpart, and in that sense, this serial format offers 'recorded evidence of past mistakes' as well as 'proof of their ability to overcome those mistakes' (Dubrofsky, 2014, p. 198). This use of historical footage not only provides a deeper understanding of a lesson currently being learned, but extends the narrative timeframe within the 'current season'. These 'recorded live' moments from what may have been filmed years earlier are now just as relevant within the current season. Ultimately, it is this long-term investment on behalf of the participant and viewer that raises *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* above other formats in terms of their ability to use liveness to further commodify their audiences.

Julie Wilson (2014) considers Reality Television celebrity, and the subtle difference that separates this from film (or scripted television) celebrity. Wilson argues that 'television creates bonds with audiences characterized by intimacy and regularity…entering living rooms on a regularly scheduled basis' (Wilson, 2014, p. 425), suggesting that a reason audiences tune in is similar to the relationship with someone you know well and see often. Knowing when and where you will 'meet up' with someone via a television broadcast is

certainly a reliable method of planning leisure time (notwithstanding broadcasting interruptions or production cancelations). Important to note here is that this relates directly to Dubrofsky and the length of time spent watching someone on screen reflecting a relational connection or investment. While this argument is largely beneficial from a production perspective – the longer a participant appears, the deeper the intimacy, and the potential for the audience being more likely to tune in – this would also have a corresponding impact on the participant's 'celebrity' when seen outside of the format context.

Further, Wilson suggests celebrities such as Jennifer Anniston can craft an image relatively slowly over an extended period, instead of the immediate and large-scale exposure that comes with Reality Television celebrity. The longer Reality Television celebrities appear within a format, the more intimate the relationship with a viewer within that context, and less chance of separating the 'celebrity' from the 'product' that the format has created. While Jennifer Anniston will be forever linked to her work in *Friends* (1994-2004) (as well as receiving never-ending residuals), her *celebrity* is not reliant on the one show as she has established herself in film, brand endorsements, and as a tabloid fixture. The inability to expand into other aspects of 'celebrity' will likely limit the individual concerned. Another example is shown when Dubrofsky analysed how press appearances by previous Bachelorette Deanna were always in centred on her love life, which implies that the longer a participant is involved with a format, the more likely their celebrity will narrow to the window provided only by the format they are associated with. This ultimately leads to a difficult conundrum in that the length of time spent with these participants within a format has directly contributed to their celebrity, but will forever tie them to that format and the more difficult to break free of.

Hollis Griffin (2014) outlines the concept of 'massness' which involves 'the suggestion of large viewing publics' of 'imaginary plenitude' (p. 156). The understanding of time is incorporated within Griffin's concept of massness as different approaches across multiple television eras are utilised within these global Reality Television formats. This work positions

'the masses' in relation to network television, multichannel, and post-network television eras, and conceptual shifts in what the 'mass' audience would potentially be. Although *American Idol* addresses the individual as part of fragmented masses across domestic regions, ultimately the requirement for any *Idol* format is the targeting of a 'mass' of crowds, often during open auditions around the country.

In this respect, Griffin connects directly with Scannell in that the shows are 'mediating public display' (Griffin, 2014, p. 159). 'Massness' is built into every format, and here the aesthetics of massness contribute to the narrative tempo of an episode and an overall season. One example here is how the narration that opens each episode compresses time that has already passed into an easily digestible chunk for the viewer. However, one particular angle that could be explored with this work is the intersection of massness and liveness. Invitations from both the host along with on-screen graphics for viewers to join the audience-as-massness as it happens appear constantly throughout a show, either to directly influence the show (by voting), or to engage in immediate discussion (in the viewing space or online). Griffin also raises the issue of timeliness in relation to a show, in that promotion drops and seasons cease to exist – i.e. lack of reruns, no DVD release. Griffin cites Raphael in that "the genre's topicality and timeliness [make] it less attractive to audiences the second time around"' (2004, p. 132, cited in Griffin, 2014, p. 167). This suggests that the narrative tempo has been reached, the cyclical unit of time is completed.

Taking this idea even further, rewatching an entire season of Reality Television is similar to rewatching an entire game of football, or the original broadcast of a live news event. Highlights are often seen, but not many viewers would watch six hours of the original 9/11 news broadcast, while only devout fans will watch an entire game again. In the same way, sport, live news, and Reality Television contain an essential quality of immediacy and liveness that is singular and cannot be recaptured outside of the original event. But what is possible to see in later years is that these previous seasons do not disappear forever. Not only are there many flashbacks during season 15 of *American Idol,* but the first episode often reiterates that there is a solid history to refer to (explored in more detail in Chapter

Nine). Since 2014, the current era of television has evolved once more to see a prevalence of streaming platforms, including those connected to broadcast channels. Enough time has passed for some formats to continue and refer to their own 'back catalogue' of seasons past, in effect alluding to a *communal history* within the aesthetic of the audience massness. This ability to widen the unit of time to include all seasons affords an even richer narrative tempo.

Stephen Harrington (2014) dedicates an entire volume to the impact Twitter has made on television. In particular, he reiterates that the incorporation of Twitter does not 'interrupt or replace', but instead can 'enhance' the television medium (p. 238). This is directly related to his findings that productions are attempting to create a 'dialogical relationship' with viewers (p. 238), which in turn helps create 'a sense of liveness' (Harrington, 2014, p. 242). By encouraging conversation and directing users back to the source text, Twitter is not a rival to television but a complementary technology that can only benefit the show format and audience engagement.

Harrington also emphasises the advantages that can be made within the scholarly field of Media Studies by including social media platforms within critical analyses. Identifying the difficulties in audience research such as surveys, focus groups, even ethnographies, Harrington being the central limitation that the subject (an audience member) knows they are being researched. By contrast, Harrington argues that although the act of tweeting is a performative activity (broadcast to the world), collecting and analysing these tweets provides an unobtrusive observation of how audiences react <u>in real time</u>. By utilising associated hashtags, geolocation, and time stamps, it is possible to construct an audience viewpoint of a particular text as a non-invasive research method, but yet still gain highly meaningful insights into viewer conversations.

June Deery (2015) provides a thorough analysis of the consistent themes of Reality Television to date but for my purposes the particular relevance of her work is her discussion

of temporality and the creation of the text. Deery looks to understand the difference between the cumulative audience knowledge of the genre as to what is 'live', as opposed to when they recognise situations where non-scripted but perhaps 'planned' action is taking place. An example here may be how a viewer can easily see that a location or set appears to be ready-prepared with camera and lights necessary for a 'spontaneous' argument. The cultural capital learned over the years by the audience as to how Reality Television 'works' is now reflected within format production and audience reception. This ability to move between elements of live by both the production and the viewer contributes to an interesting complication within the Reality Television genre. A sense of self-reflexivity and playing with liveness can be incorporated, received, and understood in a manner that earlier iterations could not imagine.

What becomes clear is that liveness is now a centralising concept and set of techniques; between the spontaneous, the scripted, the unscripted, the prompted, the tightly managed. Without the cultural capital of understanding the different registers of liveness, Reality Television would not necessarily make sense for a viewer. There is no coherent logic or commonality to the many different approaches within Reality Television other than the concept of liveness running throughout.

Deery also considers interaction with a text as an important aspect of liveness. Online platforms encourage live viewing, with developing digital and media technologies reinvigorating the experiential nature of what truly lies at the core of Reality Television. Considering this from a production angle, Deery refers to the creation of Bravo's 'social editions' that are episodes that have already screened repackaged to include social media comments received live scrolling along the screen. This connects with Harrington's observations in which social media can be seen as creating a 'return channel' (Harrington, 2014, p. 242), as the viewer must then watch the show again, either in a bid to see if what they said was included, or to determine what others were saying (which in turn would either confirm or refute their original thoughts). Deery's work here suggests that productions have

identified the potential that live online engagement can provide, both in terms of extending the online conversation for longer, as well as identifying a purpose for repeat viewing.

Alison Hearn (2017) continues the previous line of enquiry into business models and franchising of formats to examine how capitalism is fundamentally deeply embedded within contemporary Reality Television. The inherent ability of the genre to gain revenue while at the same time only offering participants short term contracts and low wages clearly shows how a participant's time (and, in some cases, life) is commodified. With a case study of *The Real Housewives* format, Hearn likens the domestic labour of a housewife to the precarious labour of a 'real housewife'. Much as how Meizel (2009) unpacked the representation of labour required to achieve the 'American dream', the commodification of how a participant spends their time is an underlying factor in the creation of the text. Given that all aspects of a housewife's life have the possibility of inclusion (even if not filmed, anything can be at least referred to), all discretionary and leisure time is effectively labour, for the monetary benefit of the production. In this way, it can be argued that the way(s) in which live and liveness are constructed and deployed to further commodify the experience of audience members <u>and</u> participants into a resolutely and relentlessly commercialised whole.

4.8   Summary

It is here that this taxonomy of liveness presents a contemporary understanding of time and liveness within the Reality Television genre. While scholars have pursued many avenues of interrogation, within all areas, it is possible to identify elements of liveness as an overarching theme. A taxonomy of liveness, then, incorporates the following constituents of liveness as a concept and a tool within Reality Television: talk, units of time, commodifying time, the everyday, and cultural capital. These constituents encapsulate the innovation and invention that is taking place within the Reality Television genre. This leads to my contention that 'liveness', broadly constituted, is the most complete theoretical standpoint from which Reality Television can be analysed <u>as a form of television</u>.

Chapter Five – Methodology and Method

5.0   Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods used to generate data for my research. It begins by outlining the various phases within the research design, including multiple phases of quantitative and qualitative research, followed by a theoretical framework of the research that has influenced and underpinned my understanding of genre analysis. This chapter will end with an overview of what each case study proposes to accomplish.

5.1   Research Structure

The initial approach to the research design began with the literature review and, from that, the taxonomy of liveness. Combined, these provide an in-depth reading of available scholarship in the field of Reality Television and comprise chapters three and four. In this chapter, I will move to outline the methodological research design for this thesis, including the multiple phases that move through quantitative thematic content analysis to qualitative textual analysis, that is from the wider viewing of potential Reality Television formats to the individual case studies selected.

Using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods here could perhaps be labelled as 'bastardised' or a 'fusion' of research methodologies (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 22), as when Neuendorf developed a merged research design that offered an amalgamation of discourse analysis with quantification. For this thesis, the quantitative techniques will be used across the broad genre of "Reality Television", before the qualitative techniques focus more particularly on case study examples. As Gagenpreet Sharma argues, 'qualitative research designs can involve multiple phases, with each phase building on the previous one… different types of sampling techniques may be required at each phase' (Sharma, 2017, p. 751). Details on specific sampling techniques are included throughout this chapter as each phase is expanded. Weber is also appropriate to include here, as this research methodology was designed 'by selecting specific techniques and integrating them with other methods, substantive considerations, and theories' (Weber, 1990, p. 41). This

chapter presents the five phases that construct the research design of this thesis, which includes a review of literature, thematic content analysis, purposive sampling, case studies, and textual analysis.

Phase One: Review of Literature and Taxonomy of Liveness

Phase one contained the initial overview of Reality Television literature and presents one approach towards a taxonomy of liveness within the current field of knowledge. In the process of undertaking this exploration, it was clear that my research depended on determining certain classifications and characteristics. One example is the multiple definitions of Reality Television across various timeframes, waves, or generations. While there was no shortage of formats that contained characteristics of the Reality Television genre within the literature, it became clear that the sheer volume would require some quantitative research. The literature review and taxonomy of liveness therefore provided a sense of scope as to the various (or even, components of) formats that suggested abundant research potential. The three main factors here are (a) included content produced from the early millennium onwards, (b) entertainment-driven – that is, content created not for the purposes of news, information, or public service (Besley, 2006), and (c) commonly involving competition elements. One internet database source retrieved in 2016 listed over 200 currently airing Reality Television formats as potential case studies. To conduct qualitative research at this point and so early in the process would have been far more time consuming than was available for this research project, therefore other parameters were required.

Both the literature review and taxonomy of liveness identified a constant and recurring focus on formats that achieve worldwide viewership, and the importance of regional variations across the globe. As an example, *Big Brother*, *American Idol*, *Survivor*, and *Strictly Come Dancing* were consistently referenced as content worthy of examination, and that examination relied on the social capital / knowledge of the reader having already been exposed to a particular format. In addition, the taxonomy of liveness ascertained that while scholarship would often return to particular formats, it was not necessarily from similar lines of enquiry. Shifts in focus appeared as the number of seasons within a format increased, as well as external factors impacting on the wider television industry, for

example, the writers' strike of 2007-2008 or the creation of Twitter. By the conclusion of phase one of my research I had developed the model of common formats under analysis, from multiple angles, over an extended period of time, and this was the central theme of the overall research design.

Phase Two - Thematic Content Analysis

The second phase of this research design used thematic content analysis. In doing this, content analysis was principally chosen because it is useful in 'transforming qualitative data (i.e. novels, films, comic books, and magazines) into quantitative data that can be analysed using standard statistical techniques… a content analyst codes data that were produced for a different purpose' (Carmody & Collins, 2014, p. 2). For this research, content analysis was appropriate in that Reality Television texts have been produced for a variety of reasons including entertainment, profitability, and of course, the self-proclaimed 'social experiment'. As such, I needed to set a base line for the intricacies of format and genre. Since 'content analysis can be used with a wide variety of data sources, including textual data, visual stimuli (e.g., photographs/videos), and audio data (Stemler, Content analysis, 2015, p. 1), it is useful when needing to filter through the multitudes of potential Reality Television texts. My aim here was to develop 'substantially interesting and theoretically useful generalizations while reducing the amount of information analysed and reported by the investigator' (Weber, 1990, p. 41).

The first important issue raised in my content analysis was it gave me a way to contain the scope to those formats that have high global awareness and significant longevity, as well as regional variants. Here, I focus on (a) Entertainment Reality Television, (b) with competition elements, and (c) with no fewer than three seasons. This number was chosen as it would demonstrate elements of difference from previous seasons, while also indicating sustained (if not increasing), viewership. Obviously, a larger number of seasons make it easier to access content, as it was identified within the literature that discontinued formats, or even past seasons of current formats, can be difficult to source. It was also clear that research findings that aligned with contributing and building on current scholarship of global formats,

rather than in-depth and intricate analysis of, as an example, New Zealand audiences only, would be a significant contribution to the field.

Inclusion criteria for texts to be analysed required the 'selection of an analysis timeframe' (Mao & Richter, 2014, p. 4). For this research I decided on those formats broadcast on New Zealand free-to-air and subscription channels during 2015 to 2018. In addition, the embedded knowledge that I hold as an avid, competition-style, Entertainment Reality Television viewer since the late 1990s means that my prior knowledge of the content was a powerful indicator for the usefulness of a format. For example, season 31 of *Survivor* aired weekly in 2015, while simultaneously seasons 14 onwards were broadcast at the rate of an episode every weekday on New Zealand subscription channels. It was therefore possible to be viewing the current iteration of a format during the same length of time as three prior seasons. Building on this, I had originally viewed some seasons when they were first broadcast since 2000, therefore further viewing could be influenced by this accumulation of format knowledge (such as Boston Rob's multiple appearances).

To initiate the content analysis within this phase, a 'sampling' (Mao & Richter, 2014, p. 4), of Reality Television shows with these criteria were viewed and codified. On first viewing, anything of note was recorded in the categories of either 'expected' or 'unexpected' within the Reality Television genre. As the titles suggest, this aided in positioning a format as either conforming to predictable characteristics of the genre (and therefore identifying the text as a Reality Television show), but also identifying elements that were perhaps disregarding what would be unlikely within the genre (such as a live red-carpet event). Within these two categories, sub-categories like 'liveness' and 'authenticity' were used, which interestingly could be present across both expected (the presence of nervous shaking), and unexpected (acknowledging and speaking directly to the camera). Using an inductive approach from this point, any consistencies could be highlighted for potential further analysis, and parallel themes could be grouped together (for example, references to social media tags).

As a research method, content analysis is appropriate to use here because of its focus on manifest content (Neuendorf, 2017). Reality Television formats, as established earlier, are considered to be an incredibly popular form of entertainment, and as such, this method would provide 'a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text' (Weber, 1990, p. 1). Due to the possible number of formats, seasons, as well as specific episodes within these, some form of analysis to narrow the sample size was required, allowing me to 'sift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion' (GAO, 1996, cited in (Stemler, 2000, p. 1). In applying a quantitative research method from the beginning, this would keep the qualitative research that needed to be conducted within an achievable range, as 'content analysis is a powerful data reduction technique' (Stemler, 2000, p. 5).

Any content analysis relies on stability, often defined as being 'determined when the same content is coded more than once by the same coder' (Weber, 1990, p. 18). In my case with only one coder, a thorough understanding of the coding rules was innate. As Weber notes, 'stability is the weakest form of reliability' (Weber, 1990, p. 18), and because the main purpose of the content analysis was to narrow the potential field of research, the final results of the case studies, and ultimately this research, are not reliant on the results of this particular phase.

Stemler suggests four ways of coding units: first 'physically in terms of their natural or intuitive borders' (2000). For the purposes of this research, these were reality sub-genre (music, romance, survival), and style (competition/observational/scripted reality). Second, there is syntactical in how each format described itself by the participants or hosts themselves; weekly (*American Idol*), Daily (*Survivor* or *The Bachelor* contain on average three days in an episode), or timeless (*Housewives* rarely refers to an overall structure of time). Third is referential units, and how an attitude, value, or preference is represented. Within the Reality Television context this could be evident in personalities or conflict as presented within the format narrative; for example, how would the attitude or character arc of a Housewife be expressed? Fourth, propositional units 'work by breaking down the text in

order to examine underlying assumptions' (Stemler, 2000, p. 2). Here, elements within the formats could be identified and evaluated as a propositional unit, for example, in *Real Housewives* the assumptions and understandings that could be made due to extravagant spending, the location of where homes are, and the establishments that are visited.

Based on the insights of chapters three and four I developed a coding guide which categorised formats, identifying themes, and tabulating every time these were referenced as a theme, across a range of shows (competition, observational, multiple regions within a format). Emergent coding was utilised as the analysis was 'without a particular theory in the first place, but then [I used] the data under investigation to develop a theory' (Stemler, 2015, p. 3). Those formats that resulted in high presence of themes (largely involving references to time, liveness, and the various ways these were expressed such as the requirement to watch live for full social media engagement), were identified as being data-rich with potential for further analysis. The result of this phase meant that some formats I initially considered useful, for example, *America's Next Top Model* which manipulates time when revealing participant makeovers, and incorporates social media and audience judging, could be discarded because these were used in "expected" ways. While time and liveness were a considered characteristic across a majority of formats, my focus was on those that could be cross-referenced as appearing in surprising, unusual, or curious ways because this indicates they were being developed early in the life cycle of the format.

Of the four key aspects of the content analysis process – measurement, indication, representation, and interpretation (Weber, 1990, p. 70) – the first two were most useful in narrowing the wider field of Reality Television to a more manageable number for closer analysis. From here I was in a position that the elements identified within 'allows inferences to be made which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection' (Stemler, 2000, p. 1), based on 'monitoring shifts' over a period, which was a necessary component of this research design.

Induction is the process whereby one generalizes across a number of instances in order to find a description that applies to them all (Tomic & Klauer, 1996, p. 283). Inductive reasoning can be presented as a basic formula in those similarities, differences, or similarities *and* differences that appear in a particular artefact (Klauer & Phye, 2008). My content analysis identified certain similarities of attributes across the Reality Television genre, but also contributed to demonstrating differences across the particular formats. While all the formats may include social media to some degree for instance, the levels to which this was utilised differed, in scope and intention. The inductive approach can be used 'to identify possible alternative explanations for the patterns that emerge from data… wherein theories are formulated by drawing general inferences from particulars or cases of empirical data' (McAbee, Landis , & Burke , 2017), but I am not aiming to analyse the genre as a whole. Rather, since findings here are specific to the formats I analyse in each case study, they are *not* going to be extended to all such formats within the Reality Television genre. To say all Reality Television formats are represented with these four case studies would then be false, and therefore it is important to reiterate that inductive *reasoning*, 'aimed at detecting generalizations, rules, or regularities' (Klauer & Phye, 2008, p. 86), is present, but inductive *inference* is not. The latter would be very useful but would require significantly more time than I have available.

I was very conscious that 'a methodology is always employed in the service of a research question', and that 'validation of the inferences made on the basis of data from one analytic approach demands the use of multiple sources of information' (Stemler, 2000, p. 5). Therefore my research incorporated other methods into the overall design. Using content analysis allowed for elements of triangulation, and the multiple sources of data strengthen the overall research findings (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Qualitative content analysis allowed me to identify "thematic patterns in a text (i.e., message or set of messages). The themes are not imposed upon the text from outside (e.g., via a theoretically informed coding mechanism or past studies) or a priori, but they emerge as the researcher undertakes a close reading of a text" (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 10). I could then look for patterns in the text, as Neuendorf further suggests.

From the data gathered by my content analysis, emergent themes that may have never been considered otherwise could arise (O'Leary, 2007). Given that the overall purpose of my research is to discover why Reality Television is unique, an inductive reasoning approach is the most beneficial for this research design.

Phase Three – Purposive Sampling

> 'Purposeful sampling, otherwise known as judgement or purposive sampling, is designed before the research starts and may be redesigned as the research progresses. It is not driven forward by theoretical categories, but practical and pragmatic considerations' (Emmel, 2013, p. 3).

With the move into the third phase of this research design came purposive sampling to identify the four formats to approach qualitatively: having completed the content analysis, the final four formats were selected by purposive sampling. Although purposive sampling can be criticised as "judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, purposive sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units… that are to be studied" (Rai & Thapa, 2015, p. 5). Here, it is "the experience and judgement of the researcher" (Guarte & Barrios, 2006, p. 277), augmented by the content analysis results from the first phase, that underpinned the selection. One of the most important reasons for using purposive sampling is that there would be limitations to accessing some formats, and as such, it could be used 'to identify and select the information-rich cases for the most proper utilization of available resources' (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016, p. 2). This method was particularly useful when the format was worthy of research, but I needed to modify the specific unit of analysis. For example, the rich information held within *The Real Housewives* was not contained in a single episode or region but was only revealed when the case study could compare across four different regions. In contrast, with so many available seasons (and spinoffs) within *The Bachelor* universe, not all are available legally in the place of research. Season 15 of *The Bachelor* (2015) was chosen as it was airing at the same time as the research was conducted, and the premiere episode was identified as including many of the liveness traits necessary for the case study. The key point was that I focused on reaching data saturation in each case study.

One of the main benefits to using purposive sampling was due to the many thematic options identified within the content analysis. Considering the difficulties that come with defining the Reality Television genre as a whole, as well as the wide range of sub-genres within it, there is so much research potential within these formats that it was necessary to choose a manageable number of case studies that covered a selected range of what was happening. In this sense, the 'purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information rich cases that best provide insight into the research questions and will convince the audience of the research' (Emmel, 2013, p. 33). Using a purposive sample meant that in-depth analysis could be performed on formats that appear rich in information while remaining manageable in size, and the reasoning why each specific format was chosen is covered in the relevant chapter. While it must be acknowledged that a weakness in purposive sampling is that there may exist richer texts that have been overlooked, the benefits of what needs to be achieved for the purposes of this thesis outweighed this criticism.

Phase Four – Case Studies

The structural presentation of this research consists of four case studies, with the aim of answering the following central research questions:

>**Research Question One:** How does a format incorporate conventional characteristics of neighbouring genres?
>**Research Question Two:** How have these inclusions contributed to the longevity of the format?

Case studies afford an in-depth investigation into a chosen phenomenon (in my case a Reality Television format), a method to thereby perform a thorough analysis of a text in line with a related theoretical concept or concepts (Mitchell, 2000, p. 170). Here I am guided by the fact that "all case study research starts from the same compelling feature: the desire to derive a(n) (up-)close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single or small number of 'cases' set in their real-world contexts" (Yin, 2013, p. 4). Obviously, as a qualitative method, case study research cannot provide generalisable results; however, I anticipate that my case studies will demonstrate an up close and in depth understanding of how each Reality Television format I study incorporates structural or textual elements (or elements as a vehicle), to adapt and remain relevant within the genre.

Within the overall structure provided by the multiple case report approach, I designed individual case studies so that each uses the most appropriate analytical guidelines to align with its particular focus (Yin, 2013, p. 16). Specifically, by developing four case studies, each focusing on a different Reality Television format, I will be able to make some broader considerations across the genre, in terms of what is happening in the genre and how. Obviously, therefore, the framework for these individual case studies needs to be well-defined, with clear and specific boundaries in place (Stake, 2000, p. 23). Each data chapter will begin with a section that clearly identifies the boundaries for the case study featured in that chapter and specify how and where they differ from the other data chapters: the aim is to understand *what* developments are taking place, and *how*. Using multiple case studies will mean I can construct a coherent sampling of Reality Television that will allow me to survey as widely as possible across the genre as a whole (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000, p. 107). The case studies will also feature television series across different styles and formats, making the study more 'compelling', 'robust', and 'richer', than it would be by covering one series format in minute detail (Herriott & Firestone, 1983, cited in Yin, 2012). Consequently, then, my thesis will be presented as a multiple case report, with a separate chapter for each case study, after which will follow a chapter devoted to cross-case analysis and results (Yin, 2012).

One most-often cited argument against the efficacy of the case study method is that the object under investigation is large and complex, while data are only collected from a small part of the object and yet are applied across its entirety (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000, p. 103). The counter view is that this 'weakness' is in fact a strength: case studies are also useful <u>because</u> they support the inclusion of supplementary information, 'beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study' (Yin, 2013, p. 8). Including and incorporating such external information from outside the text being analysed, such as participant interviews, is therefore hugely valuable. External information also potentially allows for 'data triangulation' – corroborating the same findings from multiple sources (Yin, 2012, p. 99). In this research, I shall not be using participant interviews (if only because several of my cases are historical and participants therefore difficult, if not impossible, to contact), but published primary sources from the academic and the popular press. This may

include any media interviews that were conducted with participants for magazines, websites, or blogs, and will provide additional context for my overall findings.

A particular strength that has led to using case studies is that it allows for in-depth analysis that can be seen over a length of time. This is why every format in this thesis has been on air for at least ten years. Conducting a case study approach means the analysis undertaken is not so broad that there is no consideration for changes within the format. By contrast, it is important to note that because case studies are qualitative, the results do not speak for the entire genre.

The selection of the formats themselves was integral to the overall findings, and the chosen sample includes three competition formats and one observational. Including the observational format (*The Real Housewives*), allows me to demonstrate what is occurring beyond just the competition formats, and while this research design could have considered one format, with an in-depth interpretation of that one global format, such a design would be incredibly rich in findings for the one format, but extremely limited in respect to how these findings contribute to the wider genre.

Phase Five – Textual Analysis

Following an often-used research design in television studies, my cases will be critically explored and explicated using textual analysis to investigate 'meanings and the construction of those meanings through specific narrative devices and sound/image techniques' (Butler, 2012, p. 390). This critical approach to television studies locates data as presented in the text, rather than looking to data generated through understanding audience reception or the production process. Textual analysis functions as 'a type of qualitative analysis that, beyond the manifest content of media, focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text' (Fursich, 2009, p. 240). I will therefore analyse my purposively chosen samples from four Reality Television formats in terms of their technical elements, narrative structure, and characteristics to identify underlying patterns of meaning (Butler, 2012, p. 390). Since textual analysis looks to 'discern latent meaning, but also implicit

patterns, assumptions and omissions of a text' (Fursich, 2009, p. 241), it is possible to select "texts" from within an episode (for example by focusing on the 'reveal' segment of a makeover show), multiple series of the same show (which might demonstrate the development of particular features within it), or across regional iterations of one particular show (in order to, say, determine which components do – or do not – translate easily from one cultural setting to another). Textual analysis is used here as a way of gathering and analysing texts that can provide a likely interpretation in the context of the format, and *also* format to format.

Although textual analysis can be beneficial within many sites of research, it is specifically useful in genre analysis (Fursich, 2009, p. 241). This is because textual analysis generates data that can be deployed to highlight and interrogate aspects of a show that typify and exemplify a given genre. In addition, as Jason Mittell stresses, a well-designed textual analysis is particularly useful when considering the relationship and dynamism between discrete elements because 'the members of any given category do not create, define, or constitute the category itself... but the category itself emerges from the relationship between the elements it groups together and the cultural context in which it operates' (2001, pp. 5-6). Consequently, textual analysis and case studies complement each other extremely well, in that both incorporate theoretical concepts from which we can critically understand the wider framework from within which a text is required to respond and operate. Each of my case studies will be informed by a theoretical framework developed specifically for that case study in order to highlight and illustrate pertinent issues located within the text. The benefit of this is two-fold: while the theoretical framework contextualises the case study, the case study also provides an original way of exploring the specificities of that framework. And in order to do that, I need to outline the overarching frameworks of genre analysis.

5.2   Genre Analysis – Influential Research Methods

Incorporating external information within these case studies is crucial to developing an approach that will 'locate genres within the complex interrelations among texts, industries, audiences, and historical contexts' (Mittell, 2001, p. 7). Mittell highlights the importance of

examining texts alongside the wider influences of the industry they derive from, particularly with regards to three areas. First, are 'questions of definition' – defining genre by identifying the presence of formal mechanisms. Second, there are 'questions of interpretation' – understanding the text within its social context. Finally, there are 'questions of history' – demonstrating the evolution of the genre under investigation (pp. 4-5). These questions are very important to my research and relevant aspects of social, cultural, and historical influences will be called upon throughout each case study. Further, Mittell's framework is central to my research as a whole and will provide the key focus for identifying and understanding intertextual relations between text, production, and audience of the Entertainment Reality Television sub-genre.

It is important at this point to state clearly that there is no audience analysis conducted for this thesis. For reasons of space and the overwhelming potential options of exploration, my research is not an audience study (or, for that matter, a participant study), and as such, will not involve ethnographic or audience analysis. However, in line with Mittell's genre analysis, it will refer to previous research conducted in parallel genres. One example is the ethnographic research on soap opera conducted in the early 1980s, which offers important insights as to how audiences interact with the genre (Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner, & Warth, 2013). Similarly, there is the case study into Reality Television connectedness among pre-teens and teens for the benefit of the advertising industry (Patino, Kaltcheva, & Smith, 2011). Whereas the qualitative approach of the former study provides direct quotes from the audience, the quantitative approach of the latter demonstrates how a (sub)demographic is interacting with the extra-textual elements of a genre. Given that I will not be conducting my own audience analysis, such findings from prior research can offer an added layer of interpretation and depth to my research. Another method that I am deliberately not including (again, mainly due to lack of space) is in-depth analysis of the production of the text. However, I will include findings from previous production analysis, as they will be extremely valuable in positioning my case studies. Here, insights such as those into the production of *Big Brother Australia* (2001 - 2008), which reveal the influence of soap opera characteristics on that show (Roscoe, 2004), can situate and frame the various textual features my genre analysis may uncover.

Correspondingly, my case studies will also be based on the understanding of the typical viewer's construction of 'space' and 'place' that provides a vocabulary and, indeed, a language with which to discuss the constructions of television (Larson, 1999). Peter Larson focuses on the mental mapping of the intangible space of television channels practiced by the viewer, including 'the formulas of everyday language, the stock phrases we use when we talk about TV, about switching from one channel to another' (1999, p. 109). In this way Larson develops a useful discourse in which the internal dialogue of the viewer defines and labels television in binary contrast to cinema. Examples of this are going "out" to the cinema versus staying "in" to watch television, or the act of viewing television as a passive state - 'receiving something', or 'watching', whereas enjoying a film is seen as an activity (pp. 109 - 110). At its heart, this discourse underlines the importance of television as a <u>domestic</u> media experience, and situates the viewer within their own mental map of their own home space, with home considered 'base', and anywhere outside, 'elsewhere' (p. 110).

What is particularly interesting for my purposes, however, is Larson's question, "what kind of stories does television itself tell us?" (p. 112). A viewer creates their own story when turning on the television, with the channel to appear 'functioning as a base from which you start and to which you usually return after the trip' (p. 115). Narrowing this journey within the scope of a single programme, Larson demonstrates that a news broadcast provides similar journey: the anchor hands over to an overseas reporter, who in turn returns to the studio for the weather (p. 116). His scholarship offers me a method with which I can 'articulate and organize a phenomenon which actually has some spatial features of its own', where 'time becomes a "physical" object we can handle' (pp. 117-119). Ultimately, such terms provide my research with the means to discuss more intangible qualities of the television sphere than those immediately obviously in the text itself (such as how a viewer navigates the genre across multiple series, formats, and media platforms) as well as assisting with the analysis of an individual text (as in the news broadcast example).

I will perform separate textual analyses of a particular example or examples of each Reality Television show within each case study using the overall theoretical framework of Mittell's genre analysis. Using Mittell's framework necessitates analysis of more than just an isolated episode; for example, most case studies will include information regarding to the overall

format, online presence, or newspaper coverage to identify patterns and meanings. I will also utilise supplementary frameworks, such as those by Larson, Roscoe, and Seiter et. al., to provide additional information which, in turn, will add a dimension of triangulation with the aim of strengthening the depth and complexity of my data. My overall aim is to provide a multi-faceted understanding of the contemporary Reality Television genre.

5.3 'What is Reality Television doing, and how'

Following Yin, my research has been deliberately designed to consider the interaction between individual case studies, with 'each case (or experiment) aiming to examine a complementary facet of the main research question' (2013, p. 8). There are four individual case studies, each focusing on a different Reality Television format, and each bound within its own borders and guidelines. For example, my analysis of aspects of "live" within *The Bachelor* will be isolated to a single episode where that feature (the 'liveness' required by the format of the initial episode) is most extensively deployed. By contrast, my analysis of the development of the long-running narrative across the full duration of *Survivor's* time on our screens will focus on four entire seasons across 16 years. These different case designs (and different criteria for sampling) are used so I can highlight the analysis of a specific element relating back, in turn, to my main research question. In other words, analysing a long-running narrative requires multiple series, whereas the deployment of 'liveness' is a specific and isolated component within a specific episode of *The Bachelor*.

Further, three of my four case studies are of shows based on a competition-style format, and each first appeared between 1999 and 2002. The total number of series available for analysis is, therefore, at least fifteen, which is a significant amount of time in which to observe developments in within individual formats. While these three cases are likely to uncover similar themes, the fourth case study - focusing on a non-competition format - is deliberately included as a contrast. By including a series closer to a docu-soap format, it adds further depth and complexity to my genre analysis

I will now briefly outline each of my case studies. The first will develop an analysis of the long-running narrative within *Survivor*. The theoretical framework for this chapter is based

on the narrative concepts and characteristics of soap opera developed by Charlotte Brunsdon (1981), Levine (2014), and Jonathan Bignell (2005). Since the series began in 2000, my textual analysis in this case study is designed around a sample of four complete seasons from 2001 to 2015 – season 2 with *Survivor: The Australian Outback* (2001), season 12 with *Survivor: Panama* (2006), season 22 with *Survivor: Redemption Island* (2010), and season 31 with *Survivor: Cambodia* (2015). Obviously, for my purposes, there is no point including the first season; it does not have any previous narrative to reference. Beginning with season two, however, will provide context for later seasons, particularly in terms of how often references are made to the overall *Survivor* narrative. Each series has between 14 and 16 episodes that I will need to analyse: however, because my focus will be on intra-textual references to the long-running narrative specifically, I will not need to focus on or discuss game minutia. This sample is therefore manageable within the broad context of my research.

In building this case study, it was necessary to consider how the characteristics of soap-opera are easily carried over into the docu-soap sub-genre of Reality Television. There are many docu-soap series that would be appropriate for an analysis into the Reality Television genre (and in some ways, this framework could have provided an alternative lens through which the *Housewives* format could have been performed). I chose not to focus on docu-soaps in this way, however, because such an analysis is relatively easily performed: it would not be difficult, for instance, to locate the influence of melodrama and multi-story narratives in a docu-soap such as *The Real Housewives*; participants have independent lives that are loosely connected, with personal dramas the emotional pull - and major plot points – of the series. Similarly, the deliberate hiding of filming equipment and multi-camera set-ups point to an easy comparative framework between the soap-opera and docu-soap in this context.

Instead, I chose to use the soap-opera template as a way into a critical discussion of a reality competition show. Here, I hypothesized that the competition setting, with new participants being introduced every 39 days (and in spite of the physical deterioration of the participants negating the concept of following beautiful people in a multi-strand, long-running narrative) provided a framework where the need to find a 'sole survivor' appreciably intersects the

with the tropes and themes of a soap-opera narrative where character is destiny. Importantly, I looked to the ways in which *Survivor* demonstrates an ability to construct a long-running narrative which weaves its way through 35 seasons and 17 years of production (and counting), and not just focus on one particular season or episode.

The second case study will develop an analysis of concepts of "live" and "liveness" within *The Bachelor*. The theoretical framework I will use to position for this case study is Paddy Scannell's 'management of liveness' (2014), and I will examine how the series developed to incorporate elements of live television. Here, my textual analysis will focus on one specific individual episode - the premiere episode of Season 19 - as by this stage the format has obviously had more than sufficient time to develop from a constrained and edited format into one which deploys a complex management of liveness.

It was necessary to establish a multiple-layered understanding of live in order to position modes of live within *The Bachelor*. The ability for programme makers to choose between 'broadcast live' versus 'recorded live', while also incorporating pre-prepared graphics, suggests that a live television event requires elements of structure and organisation (Bolin, 2009). A key feature here is the consideration of time - a one-hour broadcast can be segmented into six blocks of ten-minutes each (if airing without commercials). Likewise, a 'rhythm' or 'tempo' of personal time is reminding the viewer of the past, updating to the minute, or guiding towards the future (Scannell, 2014). If there are multiple layers of live, the show must establish their own rules for a 'management of liveness' (Scannell, 2014). While these aspects of live have been investigated within news and sports broadcasts, it was the point of this research to consider these in relation to Reality Television.

The third case study will develop an analysis of the highly-regionalised format *The Real Housewives*. Here, I will be using the theoretical framework provided by Roland Robertson's model of glocalization (1995), with the aim of understanding how expressions of "region" within the television series operate as a method of adaptation (to local cultural and social conditions). This case study will feature textual analysis of the original series *The Real Housewives of Orange County* as a beginning point, followed by season one of *The Real Housewives of Miami* (2011), which will serve both as midpoint between the original season

and the time of this writing and to show how regional difference can be developed across one country, The United States of America. Finally, the 2015 and 2016 seasons of both *The Real Housewives of Melbourne* (2015), and *The Real Housewives of New Zealand* (2016) provide a contemporaneous end point that will also show and highlight regional differences between Australia and New Zealand, as well as the more obvious differences between each country and the USA.

My third case study therefore interrogates the importance of the 'local' and the 'global' in the Reality Television genre. With a high number of regional versions potentially able to be created from a given established format bible, it was important to position 'glocalization' (Straubhaar, 1997) as an integral base for this case study. The use of glocalization within television raises issues of identity: do texts fall in line with national identity, for instance, or do they operate more within non-national cultural frameworks? Especially within larger countries, can one text cater to all ethnicities and languages? And how best to define an imported format that has been regionalised to fit a particular country? Glocalization provides basis for understanding of the different elements at play within a television text, which can be highly useful when applied to the Reality Television genre. Although any of the formats examined in this case study could have been used for this analysis, the *Housewives* format was chosen due to the expressed connection to region in the title of each variation of the show. *The Real Housewives* also offered from the chance to examine a format outside the competition show sub-genre, providing a wider view of the overall Reality Television genre.

The final case study will develop an analysis of a singing competition format that has maintained its original structure while also embracing digital media and encouraging audience involvement. This case study will focus on the first season of *American Idol* (2002) and the show's 'final' season (2016), with the aim of demonstrating the absence of change within its overall structure, but how that format also developed to include both interactive voting and audience involvement systems.

This fourth case study investigated how a Reality Television text can work to encourage methods of interaction between the viewer and the text. The traditional concepts of audience engagement are evolving as there are now multiple modes of viewing and consumption. *American Idol* presented an interesting example here, as the format was created before 'Web 2.0' (O'Reilly, 2017) and social media applications. *American Idol* has incorporated the changing media landscape into the show, highlighting the importance of 'mediated interactivity' (Andrejevic, 2008), and encouraging interaction via the show's preferred methods, no doubt in a drive to remain relevant to its young(er) audience demographic. Television texts in general can encourage engagement diegetically within the text, outside of the text via official websites, or with various multi-media options, including Twitter. For *American Idol*, these methods allow the viewer to eliminate, participate in the online conversation, or message a judge or host directly.

5.4   Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological design of my research, with particular focus on (a) situating it within the wider academic framework of textual analysis and (b) describing the construction of and sampling decisions within my case studies. Overall, my research has been deliberately planned so I can demonstrate the importance of adaptability and hybridity within Reality Television, both with reference to individual formats, and across the genre as a whole.

Chapter Six: Case Study One – The *Survivor* cross-season narrative and its debt to soap opera

6.0   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the long-running intra-textual narrative present in the *Survivor* format to identify its debt to tropes and characteristics of the soap opera genre. It will begin by outlining the rationale for this case study before critically examining the soap opera genre to determine the factors that might best apply as a comparative framework to the *Survivor* format. My analysis will then move to deploying this framework to analyse *Survivor* across a significant range of different versions of the show, and across its entire history on television.

6.1   Developing the case study framework

With roots in the radio era (Levine, 2014), soap opera exemplifies one of the longest histories of storytelling on television. Soap opera has a very well-established set of characteristics, but it is not altogether usual to use these characteristics as a through-point into understanding the Reality Television genre. It is obvious, however, that any attempt to capture 'reality' for mass consumption (as Reality Television is said to do) may very well be done by incorporating characteristics from other genres to 'domesticate and contain the material' (Bignell, 2005, p. 62). My focus in this chapter therefore hinges on Elana Levine's observation that 'daytime television soap-operas often continue their stories over decades, generating thousands of hours of daily programming' (2014, p. 21). It is perhaps commonplace to note that many prime-time Reality Television formats have now been broadcast for over ten years. If such formats are, to a greater or lesser degree, character-driven (and show evidence of other characteristics of soap opera), is it not reasonable to then ask, how would a reality show utilise their 'thousands of hours' to create a more compelling show?

At their core, soap operas explore 'personal life in its everyday realisation through personal relationships' (Brunsdon, 1981, p. 34), with characters and often actors who have transcended the original programme, encouraging audience identification and relatability

(Fiske, 1987, cited in Harrington & Brothers, 2010, p. 21). One often-cited example is when the character Deidre in ITV's *Coronation Street* (1960 -) faced an unjust jail sentence and a range of real-life, otherwise "serious" people (such as the then Prime Minister of the UK, Tony Blair), commented or engaged with her narrative as if it were happening in the "real world" (Coleman, 2008)**.** While such characteristics are necessary to the success of a long-running soap opera such as *EastEnders* (1985 -), is it possible to identify similarities in a reality competition show, such as *Survivor*: a game of survival in an isolated location? This is, at its heart, the focal point of this chapter. At the time of writing there are currently thirty-seven seasons of *Survivor*, and my argument will be that the format frequently calls upon and deploys characteristics typical of soap-opera, and, ultimately, functions to highlight the same underlying component as any soap-opera storyline: 'personal life in its everyday realisation through personal relationships' (Brunsdon, 1981, p. 34).

As one of the initial exemplars of the competition-based prime-time reality format, and one of the longest-running of the genre, *Survivor* provides an excess of content that could be analysed. Admittedly, some of the most obvious features of *Survivor*, such as the picturesque island locations and extreme camera set-ups during challenges are the polar opposite of soap-opera's norm of domestic interiors (Bowles, 2000, p. 119) and limited camera set ups (Brunsdon, 1981, p. 34). Yet despite these differences, identifiable and important similarities arise within the paratextual elements of an episode, the referential nature of the overall narrative, and the characterisation of returning participants. Although there have been several previous academic examinations of *Survivor*, my analysis is somewhat different in that I will focus on the development of the entire format over its entire run to date to show how the format has been influenced by external genres. Here, I am following Bignell's argument that 'genre allows for innovation within and between genres, and programmes gain large audiences by manipulating conventions in new ways' (2005, p. 62). In essence, I will be arguing that the sequential development of the *Survivor* format is heavily indebted to its use and adaptation of soap opera tools and techniques.

In this case study I will be using relevant examples from a full range of seasons of *Survivor*. To provide a framework for examining the development of the format over time, however, I will be particularly focusing on *Survivor*: *The Australian Outback* (2001), *Survivor*: *Panama*

(2006), *Survivor*: *Redemption Island* (2010), and *Survivor*: *Caramoan* (2015). The temporal spacing of these seasons provides a range of 'eras' in which to examine *Survivor* gameplay. And because I am particularly interested in the sequential effect of how watching a previous season(s) has on those competing, I start in-depth analysis here with *Survivor*: *The Australian Outback* rather than *Survivor*: *Borneo* (2000).

The two research questions for this chapter are therefore (1) **what key characteristics of soap opera have transitioned into the reality genre**? and, secondarily, (2), **how are these characteristics expressed in the show *Survivor***? In order to begin to answer them, it is now necessary to critically outline the soap opera genre.

6.2   Characteristics of Soap Opera

The origins of the soap opera – beginning with radio versions in the 1930s – are heavily seated in literature, in particular the romance novel as 'soaps, like romance novels, dwell luxuriously on the formation, evolution, and dissolution of personal entanglements.' (Kosnik, 2010, p. 245). Unsurprisingly, and probably for very similar gender-based reasons, the romance novel and soap opera often face highly critical and often derisive cultural judgement (Johnston, 2006). A prime example here is the exclusion of soap operas from prime-time Emmy consideration, which 'position[s] daytime television (particularly soaps) outside the standards of "quality" television' (Meyers, 2015, pp. 334-335). Despite this, the significant amount of academic research into the genre reinforces its position and importance within the cultural sphere. Academic study of soap opera shows it is 'among the most studied of all television genres' (Levine, 2014, p. 21), and, in turn, shows a growing rise in respectability from the 1970s onwards (Brunsdon, 1981, p. 3). Primarily it is the intricate nature of storytelling that motivates examination of the genre, requiring much patience as 'the text requires extensive, albeit interrupted, engagement on the part of the audience, before it becomes pleasurable' (p. 37). The hours, and eventually years, of time invested in a soap opera is what brings pleasure and enjoyment to the viewer, not 'aesthetic and cultural judgements' (Meyers, 2015, p. 335). Character, domesticity, and the dramatic ins and outs of everyday life are therefore much more important than any perceived "lack" of cultural status one might earn by watching a soap opera.

While locations, occupations, and events may differ between soap operas, the common thread is the underlying approach to storytelling: soap operas are 'fictional serialised narratives that tell multiple stories with ensemble casts and no pre-determined ending' (Levine, 2014, p. 21). This characteristic is found in both daytime and primetime soap operas, as is 'the organization of time, the sense of a future, the interweaving of stories and the presence of an ensemble cast' (Matelski, 1999, p. 2). Narrative content features 'very frequent breaking points in relationships between individuals, families and communities (like divorce, birth, death, gossip and antagonism between characters) which create new storylines' (Bignell, 2005, p. 64) and as a show continues over several seasons, storylines are always progressing, either 'sequential or simultaneous' (Brunsdon, 1981, p. 34), with story resolutions occurring over a variety of time frames, for example, an episode, a week, or six-months. Crucially, however, although individual storylines might end, there is no clear resolution in sight for the series, for 'it is not only that successful soap-operas do not end, it is also that they cannot end' (Modleski, 1979, p. 12). In this sense, any difference between prime-time or day-time soap operas (however well-intentioned or useful they might be in other contexts), is not necessary for my purposes. Both contain the same key, underlying genre components and both provide a platform from which I can critically analyse *Survivor*.

In large part a consequence of the long-running multiple storylines within a show (if only to counteract the consequences of copious amounts of backstory and exposition within any given episode), a key characteristic of soap opera is the use of paratextual information to guide the viewer. This is mainly accomplished with a short recap at the beginning of an episode to provide context and remind the viewer of previous events (Brunsdon, 1981, p. 34). Depending on the importance of a particular plot, this may contain clips from the immediately preceding episode, or the entirety of the series, up to and including the very first episode. A paratext such as this recap shapes and guides a viewer's reading, functioning as 'completing and framing devices that shape the text or elements of it by providing further information' (Bignell, 2005, p. 146). Paratexts also provide a way to explore a multi-story narrative outside of the constraints of the text, which is sometimes necessary because of the complicated nature of characters and plot (Modleski, 1979, p. 12). Additionally, they provide a quick update for a viewer who has missed the previous episode: they are easily

situated to the drama which is to begin. And much like Brunsdon's identification of a target audience based on advertising within and surrounding a text (1981, p. 33), extra information can be gleaned from examining areas such as advertising, tabloid magazines, or social media platforms.

There are arguments against including paratextual information in an analysis such as mine, as they may be considered unnecessary to understanding the original text, and are often not produced by the source creators (Kosnik, 2010, p. 246). Although this point is valid, it is difficult to watch any show in an isolated context – even when viewing within a streaming platform, paratextual elements such as scheduled advertising breaks (even those of only 15-30 seconds), as well as episode recaps and previews are included. For this reason, paratextual information is a key genre characteristic of soap opera, particularly given that the term 'soap' comes from the sponsorship of early radio shows by detergent manufacturers (Brunsdon, 1995, p. 58).

At this point, it is important to consider the predictable intersection of soap opera and reality genres, often identified as observational documentary techniques combined with a character-centered narrative. Meyers labels this junction the 'docu-soap', with the narrative adopting the 'two key features of the [soap opera] genre—the seriality of soap narratives and the emotional pull of personal melodrama' (Meyers, 2015, p. 337). Bignell agrees that the method of 'crosscutting between storylines using parallel montage in docusoap … is one of the distinguishing features that sets it apart from documentary' (2005, pp. 64-65). However, despite the commercial success of shows using these combined characteristics, the docu-soap is still considered with 'dismissive disdain' due to its fictional elements (Allen, 2004, cited in Meyers, 2015, p. 337). There is also perhaps an element of unreality or artifice to the docu-soap. Unlike a soap opera (which is wholly fictional) or a reality format (which is built around a challenge, a competition, or a talent), the docu-soap is not as amenable to being constructed: in the end, however extreme or sympathetic a "character" might be on a docusoap, they remain a "normal" person in an "everyday" situation.

However, another angle in which the reality and soap opera genres can intersect is by providing critical reflections on society. Brunsdon explains that critical engagement with

earlier soap opera texts was 'representative or typical of the Western second-wave feminist engagement with the media and popular culture generally' (1981, p. 4). In the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, 'the social strata found in soap-operas began to expand, as had the racial/ethnic mix and relevant storylines' (Matelski, 1999, p. 23). Likewise, in this period storylines revolving around the female working woman began to take centre stage – an historical issue but one that will always be under consideration – as the idealised viewer experiences similar trials in 'trying to negotiate careers and family life' (Levine, 2014, p. 27). Here, we can see how exploring cultural and societal behaviours within an accessible format has been a successful and historical characteristic of the soap opera. Given that Reality Television is often heralded as a 'social experiment' – a statement reiterated by *Survivor* host Jeff Probst in the opening sequence of *Survivor*: *Panama* – these two genres share the vision of creating a site of reflection on current society. And as the following section will demonstrate, they are able to do so because they deploy the same characteristics, often for exactly the same purpose and effect.

6.3   Soap-Opera and *Survivor*

Although it is true that some characteristics of soap opera made their presence felt within the Reality Television genre in the form of the docu-soap, the following analysis focuses on how these characteristics have been deployed within a perhaps unexpected area, that of the reality competition show. This term refers to the format where ordinary people compete within a given – often unusual or highly realised – location and should not be confused with the talent show format within Reality Television. The competition format primarily follows the process of eliminating participants to find a winner, a process that is repeated with minute variation every season. Yet due to the length of time these shows have now had on air (in many cases up to, or more than, a decade), there appears to be a shift towards making the most of the long-running narratives across multiple seasons.

Survivor, a prime example of the 'gamedoc' (Couldry, 2004), began with sixteen participants stranded in a remote location to 'Outwit, Outlast, and Outplay' and become the ultimate survivor. Despite the goal of becoming 'sole survivor', the season's narrative does not focus

solely throughout on that one participant.[12] The viewer follows the journey of all participants, even for that one participant in every season who is eliminated in the first episode. This alone suggests a soap opera element within the competition format, for 'instead of identifying with a single protagonist through his line of action, the melodrama typically makes us intersect imaginatively with many lives' (Modleski, 1979, p. 12).

An important aspect of the game of *Survivor* involves convincing fellow participants who should be voted out of the game: indeed, one of this format's typifying characteristics is that it is fellow players, and not judges, or viewers, who vote every week. The tension during Tribal Council - the climactic event of each episode - is whether participants can be persuaded by other participants, or ultimately follow their own agenda. This point of tension is a clear link to soap opera: 'it is remarkable how seldom in soaps a character can talk another into changing his/her ways'. (Modleski, 1979, p. 20). The ability to influence other participants proves a *Survivor* contestant's social 'game', and it is often the period between losing tribal immunity and heading to Tribal Council that the most intense interactions take place between participants.

Interestingly, as viewers and participants have become more au fait with the format, in more recent years, the overarching narrative is not confined to an individual season; instead, a long-running, 17 years (and counting) storyline is continually unfolding. While the goal may be to win the one million dollars, at its heart, the game of *Survivor* is a social game; those who make it further in the competition lean heavily towards soap opera themes of 'family, romance and interpersonal relationships' (Levine, 2014, p. 21). These initial observations merely scratch the surface; the following analysis covers three main areas of soap opera characteristics, as evidenced within *Survivor* – paratextuality and the opening/closing sequences, self-reflexivity within the narrative, and the characterisation of participants. It is from these three elements that I will demonstrate the debt *Survivor* owes to soap opera.

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[12] Or as labelled in later seasons, '#solesurvivor'.

6.3.1   Paratextextuality and the opening / closing sequences

I will examine the paratexts of the *Survivor* series because they suggest obvious similarities with the soap opera genre. Among these are technical aspects of the show, mostly within the opening sequence, musical themes, repeated phrases, and the introduction of the participants every season. But first, much like the origins of soaps featuring a laundry detergent sponsor, *Survivor* has always included promotional consideration, despite an often-tenuous link between the format and any featured product. In *Survivor*: *The Australian Outback*, the starving tribes fight for the reward of a 'picnic' back at camp (Episode Six, 'Trial By Fire', 2001). The excitement over what the participants are expecting as 'picnic' food is significantly different to the sponsored products that the eventual winners find at their camp - Mountain Dew and Doritos. Although the tribe still expresses enthusiasm and gratitude for any type of food, corn chips and highly caffeinated drink may not have been the expected 'reward' after nine days without food. These reward challenges happen in nearly every episode, with many highlighting the promotional consideration either as they partake, such as Colby and Probst sharing a Budweiser, or in the closing credits, such as '*Clothing supplied by Nike'* (Episode 12, 'Enough is Enough', 2001). And *Survivor* does not just promote consumer goods: cross-media promotion often features. During the Live Reunion show for *Survivor*: *Panama*, for instance, Probst references the Adam Sandler movie *Click* (Coraci, 2006), the trailer for which has screened during the commercial break, by suggesting that the participants may want the ability to rewind and re-watch certain parts of their gameplay again much like Sandler's character in the film using a remote control for his day-to-day life. These promotional tie-ins can be completely irrelevant to the overall plot and narrative of the *Survivor* gameplay, yet the presence of these products reiterate links to the origins of the soap opera and the importance of paratextuality.

For the opening credit sequence, the *Survivor* theme music has remained the same since the first season, featuring themed embellishments often suggested by the location. This directly corresponds to the soap opera approach to using an established theme song, which is also refreshed every so often (although not as often as *Survivor*). The Australian soap opera *Neighbours* (1985 -) has maintained the original theme from the first episode (although regularly updated by having new vocalists and arrangements), while the iconic drum beats

announcing the *EastEnders* opening immediately transports the viewer to fictional Walford. In much the same way, *Survivor* always opens with a variation on a drum before a horn cry – evoking, in the first few seconds, the world of *Survivor* - with the regional variations a seasonal identifier. As well as the opening sequence theme, a second yet recognisable theme plays during every Tribal Council session as each participant casts their vote. Lastly, the final piece to camera from the eliminated participant at the end of the episode has its own theme, while the credits screen alongside and the paratextual framing device is completed. This use of repetition continues with the same phrases used in every episode, and across every season. Probst is responsible for delivering these lines, most of which take place within the formality and rituals of Tribal Council. Phrases such as 'I'll go tally the votes' and 'the tribe has spoken', spoken by Probst, play into the traditions of the tribe and establishing a recognisable format. At the first 'Tribal' (the casual form of 'Tribal Council'), Probst explains the reasoning for each participant lighting a torch – fire represents life, and in turn, their time in the game. As other tribes attend their first tribal, the phrase is repeated. In the case of *Survivor*: *Caramoan*, because of tribal immunity and multiple merges, contestant Joe's first 'Tribal' was not until episode seven (Episode Seven, 'Tubby Lunchbox', 2013): 21 days into the game, Probst is still required to repeat the phrase.

The opening sequence visuals are also used to inform and guide the viewer with regards to the current storyline and proves an area that has shown much differentiation over the seasons. Every participant is introduced during the opening sequence with a graphic ID displayed over a collection of action shots of a participant during the game. While this was quickly established as the regular style for the format, there is a noticeable difference to introducing participants over the years since *Survivor*: *The Australian Outback*. The show opening features each participant in their natural environment –urban areas or in their professional occupations – as they look directly into the camera while Probst narrates their locations and occupations. What is noteworthy here is that this presentation calls upon stylistic opening sequences of a soap opera – presenting the main characters either in their 'habitat' (i.e. hospital, behind the bar), or a stylised pose while looking into the camera. In particular, the introductions for *Survivor: The Australian Outback* recall the posed aesthetic of *The Young and the Restless* (1973 -) opening sequence at the time. The reason this is striking is because like actors in a soap opera, participants are not supposed to look directly

into the camera. *Survivor* uses an observational documentary approach: participants are obviously instructed to ignore the camera and crew and conduct their gameplay (i.e. backstabbing) as if they are not being filmed. Interviews take place with individuals addressing a crewmember to the side of the camera, rather than into the camera. Like the actors who will never break character during an episode, the participants of *Survivor* – once introduced to the viewer – must not 'break' from the game. It must be noted that in later seasons there are moments where excited participants do talk to directly to the crew and the camera – in *Survivor*: *Caramoan* this happens every time an immunity idol (or clue to the idol) is located. However, these moments are rare, and it would appear capturing the 'real' is acceptable at the expense of breaking the illusion, although breaking the fourth wall is obviously much more permissible when viewers are extremely comfortable with the format. As it stands, *Survivor*: *The Australian Outback* – season two – aligned participants within the style of recognisable soap opera character introductions.

In later seasons of *Survivor*, the show opens with participants in the process of being stranded, whether this is entering a Buddhist temple in China, a helicopter flight, or jumping off a boat to swim towards shore. It is very rare to see participants in their native location, as the focus is on who the participants are right now in the show location. Throughout a season the sequence may be shortened to show only the title over a few seconds, or in some cases, only the location shots are used.[13] These shortened sequences only ever appear in later episodes, once the season is established and there are fewer remaining participants to follow. However, some seasons have used the sequence to set-up momentum into the final tribal council. In *Survivor*: *China* (2007), the first half of the opening sequence retains the locational footage, before introducing only those participants who remain in the game, or those eliminated who are now members of the jury. Here, the opening sequence is not just announcing the beginning of a television show, but breaking down the current game play situation – including listing the jury in order of elimination (and thereby a by-the-play episode guide). While not used every season, *Survivor*: *China* suggests the format is exploring ways in which to present paratextual information, guiding the viewer through past eliminations, as well as setting up the jury for the final episode.

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[13] This may come down to a shortened broadcast time, a different broadcast country, or similar.

6.3.2 Self reflexivity within the narrative

As seasons have progressed, the isolated nature of each initial season gives way to a self-referential style of narrative, often calling upon previous events, challenges, and participants. Footage used in the 'previously on *Survivor*' recap is not limited to the episode previous, or even that specific season. By contrast, the early seasons were limited in this respect, for example, episode four of *Survivor*: *The Australian Outback* includes footage from episode two, while the final episode looks back only upon that season. This is even though Bryant Gumbel – the host of the *Survivor*: *The Australian Outback* Live Reunion show - states that the show intentionally did not refer to or compare participants between seasons one and two (Episode 16, 'The Reunion', 2001). However, season 31, *Survivor*: *Caramoan*, uses footage of Kelly Wigglesworth from her time as a participant in season one, as well as her presence during the previous season's Live Reunion Show for *Survivor*: *Worlds Apart* (Episode 14, 'It's a Fickle, Fickle Game', 2014).

More common are verbal references to previous seasons, such as Shane asking the jury to "pick a number" in season 12 (Episode 15, 'Reunion', 2006): a deliberate re-working of the question put to Wigglesworth in her original final jury of season one (she lost by one vote, essentially because she picked the wrong number) (Episode 13, 'The Final Four', 2000). Wigglesworth herself repeats this reference as a member of the jury in season 31: "pick a number" (Episode 13, 'Second Chances', 2015). This has developed over the years, as there is only one reference during season two, as Kimmi expresses disappointment at not being able to follow '*Survivor* tradition' and walk around naked on her birthday, like *Survivor: Borneo*'s Richard Hatch. By season 31, the interplay of participant relationships outside of the game are addressed, as during *Survivor*: *Cambodia*, Shirin details a 'family tree' of sorts: Vydas (on her tribe), is the brother of Aras of *Survivor*: *Panama*, during which he became friends with Terry, who is also currently competing but is lined up against Shirin in the other tribe. Shirin details how this relationship could cause trouble if a merge occurs, and Vydas and Terry subsequently form an alliance. While this information is not necessarily important to following the current season's gameplay, the inclusion of these discussions helped build the sense of history *Survivor* has created. In *Survivor*: *South Pacific* (2011), first-time participant Brendan Hantz is given the ID tag: 'Russell Hantz's nephew'. Russell, who

appears in three previous seasons, is referred to throughout, despite not appearing until the Live Reunion episode.[14] Such an approach allows intrepid or serious fans of the format to enter into a higher-level relationship with the show: they are able to demonstrate competence and increase their status (if only with themselves) by recognising such links between seasons.

The majority of inter-seasonal references occur during challenges, especially as the show begins to repeat those that have been played previously. In some seasons, Probst delivers statistics from earlier iterations, and in later seasons, references centre on participants reliving their previous attempts. Probst refers to Wigglesworth's chance at redemption for a challenge she first competed in 15 years earlier: "The quote was, 'I lost to the guy who can't swim". Likewise, *Survivor*: *Cambodia* is a chance for vegetarian Kimmi to redeem herself after refusing to eat animal brains in a food challenge 14 years earlier. In what appears as a 'random' twist of fate, she draws another brain, but has now been a vegetarian for even longer than before – "I haven't eaten pig in 30 years", and she fails to complete the challenge again, thus providing drama and jeopardy but also remaining true to her essential character, another staple of the soap opera.

Survivor's amassed history of memorable and quotable moments rewards viewers in the same way as that of the soap-opera. There is a chance for participants to learn from other's mistakes – as well as their own, such as Wigglesworth – "15 years ago I was in Borneo, first season, and I almost won". In the intervening years, multiple references to these participants means they are never fully forgotten, making their return even more satisfying: 'the lack of closure sustains serial longevity, which ensures viewers' long-term daily participation in the soap characters' lives' (Russell & Stern, 2006, p. 136). These seasons highlight participants in their attempt to conquer their previous downfalls, and demonstrate an emphasis similar to a soap-opera's focus on 'the authenticity and emotional resonance with which stories are written and portrayed' (Harrington & Brothers, 2010, p. 23). In *Survivor*: *Cambodia* particularly, the extended time between appearances instigates their passion and drive:

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[14] Brandon's father - Russell's brother - appears during the family visits, and again the narrative revolves around a former participant who is not actually present.

'My exit, it's haunted me for 12 years, and I'm not over it' (Andrew)

'14 years is a long time to finish that last chapter in the book' (Kimmi)

'Having to replay that history over and over for 14 years really does a number on you... I'm not jumping off anything for peanut butter' (Jeff)

Wigglesworth's return is made all the more compelling as she fails at the same challenges, and again falls short of claiming 'sole survivor'. This lack of closure only continues her narrative, especially if she were to return to compete again in a later season.

The potential downfall of relying on long-term viewership lies in participants referring to aspects of gameplay without a full explanation. While unnecessary for the long-term viewer, those who may have missed the season in question and corresponding reference will be confused. This began in the second season, as participants immediately started referring to the expected merge, solely based on having seen season one. Those viewers who begin watching in season two, will be able to follow these conversations, but could raise questions as to how participants know of upcoming events in a game of the unknown. Once the immunity idol has been introduced into *Survivor* gameplay for the first time, any season afterwards contains references of finding this idol. In later seasons this occurs from the very first episode; an immediate subject for discussion, despite no set-up as to what the idol is or does, other than having seen one in play in a previous season. It can become very confusing when references are made to very specific gameplay.

In season 31, references are made regarding 'going to rocks' at Tribal Council: where in the case of a tie, followed by a deadlock, and finally the inability to come to a unanimous decision, only then will participants 'draw rocks' to decide who is eliminated. Obviously, this is a drawn-out process, occurring only three times across all seasons of *Survivor*, and only twice before it is mentioned on *Survivor*: *Cambodia*.[15] As this occurs in a final episode (Episode 14, 'Lie Cheat, and Steal', 2015), Probst can appear in live segments before and after commercial breaks to provide a thorough break down of the multiple votes, revotes, and discussions that take place during this episode. However, viewers are left waiting to understand the reference until Probst appears to explain the context. This demonstrates

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[15] *Survivor*: *Marqueses*, *Survivor*: *Blood vs. Water*, and *Survivor*: *Millennials vs Gen X*. *Survivor*: *Cambodia* did not need to 'go to rocks' in the end.

that the show benefits those who have a long-term relationship with the show, as the chaos surrounding the suggestion of 'drawing rocks' makes sense once the reference is explained. Unfortunately, unlike the merge which happens every season, a viewer may have missed the only two episodes in which participants drew rocks, therefore the show may sometimes rely too much on its self-referential nature.

6.3.3   The characterisation of participants

In much the same way that an actor experiences 'linked lives' - an intertwining of their soap-opera character and true self (Harrington & Brothers, 2010) – this also can be said of recurring participants of *Survivor* become synonymous with the show. This section will explore the characterisation of the most memorable, and influential, participants on the show. Richard Hatch competed in only two seasons, but is still remembered and referenced as the first winner, for walking the beach naked, and going to jail for tax evasion. Most often, those that are 'memorable' are those participants who become linked with the term 'villain'. Revealing the underlying influence of melodrama, *Survivor* follows the soap opera rule that 'the good must be rewarded and the wicked punished' (Modleski, 1979, p. 12). Being the season's 'villain', often appears to be a personal choice: 'But I like having fun, villains have more fun' (Abi-Maria, *Survivor: Caramoan*). For other participants, the characteristics of a villain are vital to their gameplay:

> Early on in the game, I made myself the villain so that everyone in my tribe feels that their best chance of winning against anybody, is me… It's brilliant strategy, and I need to kind of put a little salt on that wound every now and then to make sure folks don't forget that'. (Phil, *Survivor: Panama*).

Most memorable of the 'villains' is Russell Hantz, well-known over three seasons for his notorious gameplay:

> There's nobody that has passion for *Survivor* like I do. Nobody. Nobody that's ever played this game has the passion that I have for that game. I am the ultimate villain, but I'm also the one that loves it the most'(Ross, 2011)

Hantz' presence during a season of *Survivor* can also be read as similar to the 'villainess' of soap-opera, perhaps suggesting that transferring characteristics from soap opera to Reality Television results in a transfer of gender roles:

> although much of the suffering on soap-operas is presented as unavoidable, the surplus suffering is often the fault of the villainess who tries to make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator can' (Modleski, 1979, p. 15).

The ultimate suffering of *Survivor* will always be the physical challenge of being stranded in a jungle or island and having to fend for oneself. The malnutrition, threats from predators and weather exposure is the unavoidable suffering that dominates every season. However there is always one participant – in this case, Hantz in any of his three seasons – who will go out of their way to make their way easier, at the expense of others. Hantz will often assert that he controls the game, and has even made suggestions to Probst and creator Mark Burnett to increase audience voting powers to improve the show format (Episode 15, 'Reunion', 2011).

One of the most-established participants is Boston Rob, one of only two contestants who has appeared in four seasons, the highest so far.[16] Even when not competing, contestants will refer to their gameplay as following by 'Boston Rob rules' (Phil, *Survivor*: *Caramoan*). He repeatedly states his love for the game, as Probst sums up his final appearance: '10 years, four times on *Survivor*, 116 days, 1 challenge, for one million bucks. That's what it comes down to, pretty big stakes' (Probst, *Survivor: Redemption Island*). From his first appearance, Rob's gameplay embodies the dichotomy of issues of the soap-opera: 'The concerns of soaps have traditionally been based on the commonly perceived split between the public and the personal, between work and leisure, reason and emotion, action and contemplation' (Geraghty, 1991, p. 40). Rob clearly positions himself as a competitor, that he will do whatever he takes to win the game, and that will not necessarily echo what he is like in his personal life:

> If you draw a line in the sand and say 'I will not cross this line' then you get out there on the island and start playing the game, then you're going to be constantly flirting with 'am I gonna go over this

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[16] *Survivor*: Marqueses, *Survivor*: All Stars, *Survivor*: Heroes vs Villains, and *Survivor*: *Redemption Island*.

line, am I not going to go over this line'. It's a lot easier to say, I'm playing a game, and I'm gonna do whatever it takes to win (Rob, *Survivor: Redemption Island*).

Rob sees his time in this public game as work, defined by reason, and he is in control of his actions. He is not there for the experience, to merely 'participate', he is there to compete, and win. This then suggests that in the characterisation of participants, those who choose between that split of gameplay until the end, without being driven by emotion or personal attachments to other participants, may be the ones who come across as the villains in the show. Much like Hantz, who chooses a similar path in his gameplay, driven by a way to win rather than personal connections, not only are those who put gameplay first the most memorable, but also characterised as 'villains'.

Established in his first season as the 'villain', Rob continued this persona in his second season alongside one of the ultimate characterisations in soap-opera: 'the stories that took up the most airtime, and that inspired the biggest viewer response, were about characters falling in love, facing obstacles along the way' (Levine, 2014, p. 29). Although *Survivor* thrives on the grittiness of living in nature, this has not stopped potential romantic couples across the seasons. In some seasons, these 'couplings' of contestants use flirtation and companionship as a form of 'alliance' to get further in the game. Legitimate couples do form as a result of participating in *Survivor*, notably Ethan Zohn (Survivor: Africa, 2001) and Jenna Morasca (Survivor: Amazon, 2003) both winners of their respective seasons, who dated for ten years. Likewise, David, who competed in *Survivor*: *Redemption Island*, proposed to Christine of *Survivor*: *Tocantins* (2009) during his live reunion show. These romantic alliances reinforce the self-referential nature of the show, as participants interact romantically with those from other seasons.

The advent of the 'supercouple' is very specific to the soap opera: couplings with indefinite timeframes and continuous conflict, that become the defining romance of a programme and surpass the text of the soap-opera into the real world (Levine, 2014, p. 35). In the case of *Survivor*, the super-couple is evident in Rob and Amber, a love story originally appearing on screen, and breaking out into tabloid coverage and crossover Reality Television appearances. Rob and Amber met and fell in love on the during *Survivor*: *All Stars* (2004),

the first season which comprised previous contestants. Their budding relationship is a major part of the season narrative, as they make it to the final two together, with Amber ultimately winning and Rob recognising the power of their connection: 'I know how strong a pair can be in this game. Like Amber and I' (Rob, *Survivor: Redemption Island*). Their wedding was covered in a CBS special and featured on tabloid magazine covers, demonstrating that their romance is more than the confines of the *Survivor* show. The couple competed twice as a team on *The Amazing Race (*Season Seven, 2005 and Season 14, 2014), calling to mind soap opera characters who have crossed into other shows, for example, the character cross-over from *Another World* (1964 - 1999) to *As the World Turns* (1956 - 2010) from 1999 to 2003. That Rob and Amber remain married with four children demonstrates the longevity of this supercouple long after the show.

Although the supercouple must defy all odds to be together, the long-running narrative requires their happy ending to forever be plagued with new dramas and complications. In the case of Rob and Amber, most of these should have taken place in their first 39 days of meeting on the show. But their story does not end with *Survivor*: *All Stars*, as Rob leaves his family multiple times for his biggest desire: to conquer the game and prove himself as 'sole survivor'. Rob challenges himself repeatedly, but these struggles are not only for his own personal achievement, but for his wife and children:

> I feel like right now, I'm playing my best game. But even everything that's happened, up until right now, means nothing unless I can finish it. I need this to make a better life for my wife and my kids (Rob, *Redemption Island*).

As someone who helped lead Amber to victory as the final two during their season together, Rob has born the consequences of not winning the game himself but as part of the supercouple, and must repeatedly return to conquer this challenge again as an individual. This relationship often affects his ability to succeed in the game, as his connection with Amber is referenced throughout tribal councils, presenting him in a bad light:

> 'I'll remind the girls of a season past – Boston Rob asked a guy to save his girlfriend Amber, then cut him loose the first chance he had, so it will get brutal' (Steve, *Survivor: Redemption Island*).

As host and ultimate bridge across all season narratives, Probst confirms Rob's former betrayal, but also reiterates the enduring alliance that he has with Amber:

> 'The other side of the coin is that he didn't betray Amber, in fact, he hasn't betrayed her since' (Jeff, *Survivor: Redemption Island*).

In his defence, Rob reinforces the strength of his true, supercouple, alliance with Amber: 'The one I <u>still</u> have to this day' (Rob, *Survivor: Redemption Island*). This is eventually repeated in their wedding, a televised event after Rob's proposal before Amber's announcement as winner, that the pair 'stayed true to each other, even though they came up short' *(Rob and Amber: Get Married*, 2005). The complications and dramas of their first 39 days of their relationship are repeatedly referenced to threaten his attempts at personal success in this game. However, the enduring love of this supercouple sees Rob repeatedly stand up for his relationship, to win the game and money for his family, and personal pride. Ultimately, Rob's character arc becomes anchored as coming full circle:

> Even though we're at a point now where some people might be taking a break from the fame and thinking about going home, it just makes me focus. I wanna win so bad. This is something I've been trying to do for 10 years now. I'm 8 days away. So there's nothing that's gonna stop me'. (Boston Rob, *Survivor: Redemption Island*)

Rob's narrative arc on *Survivor* is completed during the eponymously-themed *Redemption Island*, as the final tribal council name him 'sole survivor'. But as in all soap opera, although one narrative ends there remain other narratives at different stages. While Rob found 'redemption', his biggest rival in the series, Russell Hantz, did not. Despite his talk of being the 'Daddy', and 'King', Russell was placed 17th in his final attempt (so far). Hantz ends the live reunion show debating whether to compete again or not, and when asked whether they should lose his phone number, he begrudgingly instructs Probst to "keep it" (Episode 15, 'Reunion'). Unfortunately for Hantz, 'everyone cannot be happy at the same time, no matter how deserving they are' (Modleski, 1979, p. 12).

6.4   Conclusion

Although on first appearance the *Survivor* format is 'world's apart' from the soap opera genre, there are many instances where the influence upon this format is quite visible. The same technical and referential techniques are used, while the characterisation follows the same narrative context. At its heart, *Survivor* presents itself as, and is, a social experiment, and in this way it demonstrates that which is key to the soap opera: it is 'the site of personal relationships. It is always emotionally significant personal interaction, often reported in dialogue, which is narratively foregrounded' (Brunsdon, 1981, p. 34). In the same way that a viewer remains in suspense as to what will happen next in their favourite soap opera,

Survivor replicates this melodramatic, long-running, self-referential narrative, to present compelling characters and weekly drama.

While there is a history to soap opera that cannot be disputed, the *Survivor* format suggests a 21st century adaptation that demonstrates a playful sense of growth. The format of the soap opera is 'constructed of multiple short segments, with continual repetition of narrative information, but no overall dramatic coherence in any episode' (Paterson, cited in Brunsdon, 1981, p. 33). When placed within the context of *Survivor*, however, it is clear that these characteristics of the soap opera are being guided by a very clear episodic structure. Each episode of *Survivor* can be viewed on its own – characters are established, challenges are won, and a participant will be eliminated. But in addition to this, it may be possible to engage with an episode as one just small portion of the overarching long-running narrative of an entire series format. In this way, *Survivor* is not only utilising the characteristics of soap opera to establish a successful format, but it does so in an accessible and self-regenerating way.

In line with Scannell's 'dailiness' and the perceived duality of *Coronation Street's* Ken Barlow and the actor William Roache, the visible effects of over 35 years confirms 'the movement of time in the tale as corresponding with the movement of lifetime and its passing away' (Radio, Television & Modern Life, 1996, p. 158). While Scannell praises the incredible work and attention to detail required to achieve this seamlessly, it should perhaps be noted that a valuable characteristic of the reality show that does not need a reliance on such skills and expertise. Instead of the 'considerable art to bring off this artless effect' (Scannell P. , Radio, Television & Modern Life, 1996, p. 158), the 'art' in this sense is not needed within this genre at all. If the value in art lies in the ability to make the art invisible, surely not requiring the art in the first place could be considered the echelon of achievement. The visible passage of time (via age, body weight, cosmetic surgery), is further compounded in that these participants are fundamentally real people who literally do not stop existing once their season ends. These participants continue to exist outside of their season's conventions, their 'dailiness' has continued despite not being filmed, and is the perhaps the ultimate expression of 'what is to come can be anticipated in the light of a remembered past that reverberates in the future-facing present' (Scannell P. , 1996, p. 159).

Chapter Seven: Case Study Two - *The Bachelor* and the dynamic representation of 'live'

7.0   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the presence and deployment of *television-as-live* within the format of *The Bachelor*. It will begin with by presenting a rationale for this case study and then critically examine the notions of "live" and "liveness" within contemporary television. My analysis will then move to critically identifying and explicating the ways in which "live" and "liveness", previously central to television programming but in decline in recent years (Barker, 2012, p. 40), have been deliberately positioned within the format of *The Bachelor*.

7.1   Developing the case study framework

Arguably on its most basic level, television is built on being "live". Obviously, as I will argue later in the chapter, there is a strong historical element here: the first broadcasts had to be live because the available technology prohibited any alternatives. Yet, despite myriad options that are now available to producers and viewers to record, delay, repeat, time-shift or even control broadcast timings, those television events that incorporate elements of liveness are most often those that result in record audience-numbers (Tuggle, Huffman, & Rosengard, 2007, p. 60). This, in turn, demonstrates that 'live TV transmissions and the notion of liveness have always been central to the proposition and aesthetics of television' (Sørensen, 2016, p. 383). Similarly, the capacity for 'liveness' is highly valuable for television to be distinguished from some other media (for example non-digitalised print media) (Barker, 2012, p. 45). The other key reference point for my consideration of Reality Television and 'liveness' is that each 'transgresses both entertainment and factual genres' (Bolin, 2009, p. 38). In this way, there is a conceptual or stylistic link between them, and one that, as I will argue, provides a significant opportunity for producers to revitalise and refresh otherwise potentially stale and tired formats.

The methodological frameworks for this case study are an intersection of several definitions of liveness. The central importance of exploring this within the genre lies in Paddy Scannell's argument that 'the latest reincarnation of [everyday life] is reality television' (2014, p. 37).

Importantly, however, Scannell chooses not to investigate how this reincarnation manifests in his own work on liveness here, despite his previous article on *Big Brother* as a Television Event (Scannell, 2002). The article details an understanding of time in relation to the specific format and season of *Big Brother*, however in the intervening years Scannell has not investigated further this impact of liveness (or perhaps 'life'-ness) in other formats within the sub-genres. Instead, although published 12 years after his work on *Big Brother*, Scannell remains focused on news and sports events. Likewise, Andrew Crissell also points to the fact that liveness increasingly features in 'certain kinds of reality tv' (2012, p. 31). Again, however, he does not take it upon himself to extend this idea further.

Perhaps this is understandable: examinations of liveness often focus on more mainstream everyday genres (such as sports coverage and news), or a one-off media event (such as catastrophes, disasters, and, increasingly, war). Indeed, this is the manner in which Scannell viewed the first season of *Big Brother* in the United Kingdom. That there is such little focus on 'liveness' within the wider realm of study of Reality Television is nonetheless odd; at the most basic level 'real life' (as depicted on Reality Television format) and 'real time' (as constructed by live television) would appear to be extremely closely linked. Of course, there are formats that are built around having as little time as possible between reality (on the show) and broadcast: *Big Brother*, for example, successfully and seamlessly integrates an edited daily show with live eviction nights. Similarly, talent competition formats such as *American Idol* and *The X Factor* are built around a week of preparation for twice-weekly live shows (and of course highlights – or lowlights – from the week's preparation are deployed to increase tension and jeopardy within the live shows).

In such formats, not knowing the outcome captures the audience as the tension builds and their vicarious participation in the narrative of the format and the individual character arcs builds to a crescendo; in this way eliminations become an 'indeterminate experience' (Vosgerau, Wertenbroch, & Carmen, 2006, p. 487). Equally, however, building a show around live acts is absolutely no surprise in these formats: a live performance is at the heart of the talent show format from its inception. Crucially for my argument in this chapter, however, this does not mean that the advantages of a live element in the show are unavailable to producers of other Reality Television formats. Admittedly, in almost all cases

their 'reality' is mostly pre-recorded, usually months before the eventual broadcast, and the winner is already chosen but only announced in the final show of the season. Including a sense of immediacy and situating the unfolding drama as close as possible to the temporal lives of the viewers means that the producers of such formats might very well look to incorporate elements of live and liveness into a pre-recorded telecast. For this chapter I have selected the format of *The Bachelor* as the focus of my analysis, and I will be examining elements of liveness that feature within the pre-recorded format (remembering that in this format the winner has been chosen before the first episode of the season even airs).[17]

The two research questions for this chapter are therefore (1) '**how can time and liveness factor into the structure of a show format?'** and, subsequently, (2) **'what is the dynamic deployment of 'live' in *The Bachelor*?**'.

7.2   Defining Liveness

A definition of liveness must consider multiple areas, including what is 'live', the construction of time, and, in the contemporary world more than ever, the influence of time-shifting technologies. Any definition of 'live' then will be dynamic and open for debate. For the purposes of my research, however, the definition of 'live' has three components. First 'action' is 'transmitted and received in the same moment as it is produced' (Ellis, 1982, p. 132). Second, 'messages are received at the instant they are sent' (Crissell, 2012, p. 5). Third, 'the *live broadcast* of an event that is transmitted to viewers and users [is] *in real time as it unfolds*' (Sørensen, 2016, p. 383, my emphasis). On the surface, of course, this appears to be absolutely straightforward. Deploying 'live' within a television broadcast nevertheless involves a significant amount of construction not easily noticeable by the average viewer to the effect that 'live television … is very seldom entirely live' (Bolin, 2009, p. 41). Here, Bolin's argument is not that the concept of liveness is somehow incorrectly applied but rather that it is manufactured according to pre-existing televisual techniques and standards and then, employed within an overarching show format. For example, a studio-based morning television show may cut to pre-recorded infomercial segments, a live news broadcast will

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[17] Obviously, contestants, crew and so on are required to sign Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) that prevent them from disclosing the 'plot' of the show. This is relatively standard industry practice and does not appreciably impact on my study of the televisual features within the format itself, as broadcast to the viewer.

often refer to pre-prepared charts and statistics, and a talent contest will display the number to call on screen (Bolin, 2009, p. 41). From this position, following Bolin, it is then relatively straightforward to argue that producers of every format can construct a peculiar deployment of liveness that optimises the benefits (and minimises the disbenefits) for their particular show.

It must also be mentioned that the 'live' event can have a 'broadcast delay': an example here is the 'live' Super Bowl event, with the pre-game and half-time coverage employing a five-second delay in the event of 'wardrobe malfunctions', or unacceptable political statements (McCarthy, 2017). Noticeably, the sports event itself is broadcast live but still contains replays and pre-prepared graphics and statistics, so within the overall structure of Super Bowl coverage, there are various elements of live at play. Another concept used is that of 'recorded live', or live-on-tape: where programmes or segments are 'created before they are transmitted' (Crissell, 2012, p. 1), or 'recorded and broadcast as if they were live' (Bolin, 2009, pp. 40 - 41). 'Recorded live' exhibits all the characteristics of the live event – in essence, filming an event in real time in front of a live audience with no retakes – but is broadcast later. This is slightly different to a regular 'pre-recorded' element, as there should be a seamless transition between the two concepts (Bolin, 2009, pp. 40 - 41). An example here is Katy Perry's appearance on Australia's *Sunrise* (2017), a Monday morning show which included 'live' footage recorded on the Saturday night (Coy, 2017) inserted within the Monday broadcast. Unfortunately for *Sunrise*, such media reports alerted viewers to the fact Perry had left the country the night before, which drew attention to the delayed nature of her appearance on the show and the deception, or at least inauthenticity, of the programme. These examples highlight the complications of liveness, and that unfortunately, Perry's appearance on *Sunrise* was not as 'seamless' as intended.

Underpinning this definition of live is a set of considerations of 'time'. Even when referring to a live event, Bolin suggests 'time' is multidimensional with 'different temporal categories: schedule time, transmission time, programme time, advertising time' (2009, p. 46). While these categories focus on different aspects of production, they uncover the underlying complexity taking place within the same one-hour live broadcast. The overall programme time can be fragmented into blocks, for example, 'the time between two commercials…

often contains several segments' (p. 47). Segments, or a 'small sequential unities of images and sounds whose maximum duration seems to be about five minutes' (Ellis 1992 p. 112), repeat a familiar, circular, structure (Bolin, 2009, p. 51). A one-hour programme can be measured as five 10-minute segments when deconstructed, and this ability to break down a live broadcast suggests how important the consideration of time has on the technicalities of a live production. Such considerations also allow for programmes to be compared, as their similarities and differences when using segments, or groups of segments, provides a framework within which one can analyse.

Likewise, Scannell suggests that a text can be viewed in relation to human experience. This 'structure, rhythm and tempo' of life comprises of an 'historical' and 'future present', intersecting with the 'immediate' present (Scannell, 2014, p. 48). In this interpretation, the unfolding of time throughout a broadcast is centred on the viewer's lived experience. In Scannell's example, the immediate present unfolds as the morning news broadcast, while the future present is established in regular updates as to what is appearing later in the show. The historical present appears in recaps at the end of the show, orienting the viewer and assessing the up-to-date situation of either major stories or, in some cases, the action within an unfolding news story. In this way, Scannell argues that the broadcast uses an established routine to guide the viewer through the format. This relates somewhat to Bolin's concept that broadcast time comprises of circular and repetitive segments, as Scannell also focuses on how deliberate choices in the construction and production of a show centre on familiarity for the viewer.

Another approach to the correlation of liveness and time is the ability of the live broadcast to remove itself from a specific space: a broadcast can be experienced at 'the same time', but the viewer does not have to inhabit 'the same space' (Thompson, 1995, p. 32, cited in Crissell, 2012, p. 4). Despite their displacement, the viewer is experiencing the same 'time' as those who are in a separate space. An example here is the broadcast of a Rugby World Cup final – the event may be taking place on the other side of the world, yet every viewer in New Zealand can experience the match at the same time. Live offers a 'shared experience', but can be separated from space: 'The crucial element of liveness is temporal: co-presence in time...co-presence in space is merely optional' (p. 14). Isolating time as the most

important part of the broadcast experience emphasises that various concepts of time are necessary in understanding the live broadcast. For those outside the Anglo-American world, this can have interesting consequences. On the one hand, a ritual of early summer in the UK, like the F.A. Cup final, will have connotations of a cold dark early morning for a New Zealand viewer. On the other, and more importantly, major sporting events, like the Summer Olympics, may never be granted to cities (like Sydney) where the time difference means live broadcasts do not align with the expectations and habits of American audiences.

If viewers can experience the 'same time', the varying layers of time must be considered. Scannell's definition of experiencing the 'transmission and recording of events and performances as they happen "live and in real time", is used to describe a news programme, or a sports event' (Scannell, 2014, p. 43). Crissell presents a succinct demonstration of the inhabiting layers for a viewer, using Scannell's analysis of a football match:

> First, there is the time of the transmission – the time at which she is watching. Second, there is the current time within the match – that is, the time of the commentary which accompanies the instant replay and of the continuing events in the match that are not presently viable to the viewer. And third, there is the past time within the match – that of the event now being reviewed in the instant replay (2012, p. 49).

It is also possible to add a fourth layer to this collection of time with the ability to 'time-shift' and watch at a more convenient time: 'the time of the viewing, the time of the transmission, the time of the replay and the time of the goal' (p. 49). The ability to traverse and comprehend these multiple layers of time within the single broadcast culminates in Scannell's 'management of liveness', a seamless continuity between different moments of 'live' (Scannell, 2014, p. 168). In a similar vein, Crissell calls this fluidity 'contemporariness', or a 'zone of liveness' (Crissell, 2012, p. 93). The viewer is able to comprehend as the broadcast manoeuvres between these 'zones', even though 'the moment becomes increasingly plastic, a text which can be worked upon, squeezed, expanded, over-written, re-written' (Marriott, 2007, p. 74). As a result, 'live' does not involve a simple, one-off definition, and crucially 'live' is not simply a matter of placing a camera in front of an unfolding event and adding an audio track (whether that of a journalist or a commentator). Instead, because 'live' is constructed as much – if not more so – than recorded television,

the viewer is often moving between various states, or zones, of live, within an evening, a programme, or even within a programme segment, and usually without any critical awareness or even knowledge of these layers.

Combined, these elements define the 'management of liveness', the 'contemporariness' of structuring time in a broadcast. But do these structures appear in other genres outside of those most analysed (that is news and sport)? In particular, how does Reality Television utilise these structures in order to 'represent reality' to the viewer? Or, more pertinently, how does Reality Television present multiple layers of 'live'? How does it construct a 'management of liveness'?

7.3   Liveness and *The Bachelor*

The framework within which I will explore answers to these questions is provided by *The Bachelor* and how this format manoeuvres within these definitions to construct a dynamic, multi-tiered approach to 'live'. I will begin by establishing the significance of the romance reality genre within Reality Television, critically analyse the importance of *The Bachelor*, and then demonstrate how its viewers are guided through a 'management of liveness'.

7.3.1   The Reality Romance Sub-Genre

Following the established definition of Entertainment Reality Television (see Chapter Three), the 'reality romance competition' sub-genre contains 'real' participants, almost always in a competition setting, with the included element of 'romance'. Here, 'romance' can be defined as a 'literary genre with romantic love, or highly imaginative unrealistic episodes forming the central theme' (Allen, 1990, p. 1045) - real people who fall in romantic love in an unrealistic situation. Arguably, the main attraction for the viewer is the quasi-voyeurism of watching a romance unfold coupled with the potential for schadenfreude. Either one or another participant acts – or is perceived to act – outside the permissible boundaries of behaviour, or when one participant is more invested in the relationship with the other. In any case, the opportunities for vicarious engagement in a highly emotional format are legion.

'Reality romance' has been a continuous presence in American broadcasting since 1949. One of the first examples is *Blind Date* (1949 - 1952), originally a radio show, which was successful enough to be adapted for television. Other shows attempted to capitalise on this popularity in the early 1950s, such as *With This Ring* (1951), *Gamble on Love* (1954), and *It Pays to be Married* (1955). Such programmes fed into long-running series such as *Who Do You Trust*? (1956 - 1963), a focus on the dissolution of romance in *Divorce Court* (1957 - 1969); *The Newlywed Game* (1966 - 1974), and *The Dating Game* (1965 - 1973). These shows continued with successful runs in syndication, alongside new arrivals *Love Connection* (1983 - 1994, 1998 - 1999), and *Change of Heart* (1998 - 2003), and the rise of Reality Television in the new millennium coincided with many new shows within this sub-genre. While there are not many variations between the reality romance shows (just as there was little variation between *Blind Date*, *The Dating Game* and *Love Connection* for example), these formats were both extremely popular within the USA and travelled extensively into international markets.

By contrast to the American experience, the uptake of 'reality romance' in the UK during this same 50-year period is not as marked. The only major television series (although it was very popular) was *Blind Date* (1985 – 2003), hosted by Cilla Black. This show is, however, based on the earlier radio and television shows from the United States, and it becomes noticeable that most formats in the UK originated in other countries; for example, *Man O Man* (1996-1999) was a licenced German format. It appears that it is only after 1999, crucially when the Reality Television genre as a whole was becoming so pervasive, did the UK focus on creating original series ideas, such as *The Villa* (1999-2003), or *Farmer Wants a Wife* (2001-2009). The reason for this may be due to the cultural differences between the US and the UK, with different expectations of dating - in the US, for example, it may be quite normal to date more than one person at a time. The reality staple of one individual making choices between a succession of different potential partners would therefore make sense in a variety of shows intended for an American audience; it would almost certainly not be as immediately accessible for twentieth century audience in the UK, living in a society with very different social mores.

Since the turn of the millennium, however the romance competition format has become prominent in prime-time television in many countries, especially with the introduction of *The Bachelor* in 2002. I have chosen to analyse *The Bachelor* because of the length of time it has been on air and the high number of series that have been broadcast. The formula of the show is that one man is introduced to multiple women, who he dates and eliminates week-by-week, until ultimately finding his one true love. *The Bachelor* format has sold internationally, with at least twenty regional versions to date. The 'Bachelor Universe'[18] has developed multiple spin-off series, such as the woman-led *The Bachelorette* where a young woman is presented with multiple potential male partners. Interestingly, and perhaps as a way to both link to other series and capitalise on the pre-existing narrative and emotional connection the audience may have, the bachelorette is often the second-place getter in the most recent series of *The Bachelor*. Further, *Bachelor Pad* (2010-2012), featured previous contestants living in the same mansion, using romance as a method in which to win prize money, and *Bachelor in Paradise* (2014 -), is also a romance competition, pairing up couples made up of participants from previous series to win prize money but is no longer set in the mansion but in a tropical, swimsuit-friendly island location.

The nineteenth season of *The Bachelor* (in which the titular 'hero' was Chris Soules) demonstrates multiple versions of 'live', and had the obvious aim of enticing viewers for the upcoming season. Series 19 aired over eleven weeks and featured many 'television events' – including the first ever three-hour red-carpet premiere, which aired January 5, 2015. There was also a *Chris Tells All* special event, over two nights, in week seven, and the live-to-air *After the Final Rose* wrap-up and analysis immediately after the final episode. Throughout the season host Chris Harrison narrates on the future present with regards to upcoming 'dramatic events' and the 'shocking conclusion', while, from the very beginning, Soules declares that 'my future wife could be here' (Episode One, 'Limo Arrivals', 2015). Statements like these launch straight into multiple aspects of live – the present versus the future present as constructed within the narrative of the programme – to build and reinforce the overall series narrative.

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[18] The colloquial term for the format and related shows.

There is also a major shift in in *The Bachelor* Series 19, as audiences were presented with a format that moved from the pre-recorded familiarity of the standard format. Instead new elements of liveness were added, in what could be viewed as Scannell's description of the time/event horizon as 'resolved in such a way as to generate, by that resolution, a momentum that caried forward into the next week's event horizon' (2002, p. 273). This shift in the format appears to combine with Scannell's earlier definition of 'eventful television' (Scannell, 1995). The expectations of the format are maintained, but the added elements of 'live' red-carpets, specials, and guests hosts (Jimmy Kimmel, a live late-night comedian), position the show as must-see television happening in the immediate present and as an unfolding week-by-week self-referential text. This 'eventful television' is constructed through the use and deployment of a variety of techniques, including narrative and technical aspects, which I will analyse below.

The overarching narrative of *The Bachelor* is that the normal routine of life for all the participants has been suspended for the pursuit of love. It is repeated often throughout the season that Soules has left his farm, his hometown, and moved all the way to Los Angeles to find love. In the constructed narrative of the programme, the desired result by the end of the season is to establish a normal routine for the bachelor and his future wife on a small farm in Iowa. Here we can see how, as Scannell argues the 'television event', is built on tension and the contrast between 'experience', versus 'an experience' (Scannell, 2014, p. 182). *The Bachelor* does not focus on just one aspect of this, but a combination of both, as the result (experiencing love) contradicts the method (in an extreme setting). The viewer watches Soules learning about each contestant over the course of the season. However, this 'experience' of finding love is through having 'an experience' on various dates. Whether it be with extreme sports, or a romantic excursion to a waterfall, the connection for Soules lies in the enjoyment of 'an experience' with each woman. It goes without saying that each of these dates is built around the televisual requirements of seeing the couple engage with an activity of some description while also getting to know each other better. In this sense, the premise of *The Bachelor* straddles two conflicting positions within the overall narrative arc.

Within the programme format, viewers can see how Bolin's block structure of several segments in combination gives the show a repetitive character (2009, p. 48). Every season of *The Bachelor* follows a familiar structure, rhythm, and tempo for the viewer. Even the location becomes familiar, as the same Los Angeles mansion is used every season (as well as in the spinoff *Bachelor Pad*). The first episode introduces the bachelor in his natural environment, before he travels to Los Angeles – the height of American pop culture fantasy – and meets the female contestants. By the middle of the season, the 'lucky' remaining women and Chris go on dates outside of LA, exploring various regions within the United States, followed by an overseas journey, before returning to the women's hometowns. In the final episode, the two remaining women meet the bachelor's family with the expectation of a proposal in the closing minutes.

Within every single episode, the bachelor reiterates that he is on a journey for love, and the women are interviewed expressing their unfolding and sometimes conflictual feelings about the bachelor and the other contestants. There is always a 'group' date, a 'one-on-one' date, a 'cocktail party' and a 'rose ceremony', in which one 'unlucky' lady is eliminated. Every episode then concludes with the eliminated contestant's comments on the bachelor himself and the overall experience; these obviously get more emotional and increasingly fraught as the season unfolds. Importantly for my purposes, throughout each episode the host Harrison's voiceover updates the viewer on previous episodes, the upcoming episode, and the season overall: for example he regularly sets the scene with phrases such as 'Last week on *The Bachelor*...Coming up on *The Bachelor*....This season on *The Bachelor'* (*Episode Two, 'Week Two – Tractor Race', 2005). Retrospective interviews describe episode events: although costume, make-up, and hair imply only one interview session, the temporal nature of the comments cover an entire date experience, from "I have no idea where we're going today", to "I had a magical evening" (Episode Three, 'Week Three – Guest Host Jimmy Kimmel', 2005). Viewers of *The Bachelor* are guided through a familiar format and rule structure within each episode and overall season, with the immediate present highlighted by the voiceover constantly referring to the historical present and the future present.

7.3.2 *The Bachelor* and constructing a dynamic 'management of liveness'

For this case study, I will analyse the first 'television event' of the season, the three-hour premiere episode. The structure comprises three elements, with the first hour a 'Live Red Carpet', in which Harrison hosts what is similar to an Academy Awards broadcast. Second, transitioning into *The Bachelor Live*, the show moves indoors to a live studio audience. Here Harrison interviews previous contestants and introduces blocks of the pre-recorded and regular format episode (comprised of recorded-live and performed elements), which are the third element. Harrison often highlights that they are 'live' in moments outside of just the title, for 'when something happens that is time-sensitive, television must revert to its core competency and reaffirm its literal liveness' (Crissell, 2012, p. 93). In this case, the countdown to the first episode of a brand-new season is 'eventful television'. That this is a special presentation in celebration of an episode which is entirely pre-recorded requires different levels of navigation for the viewer, as I will describe below.[19]

Signifiers of live television appear from the very beginning in the use of graphic ID tags, starting with the title, the 'Live Red Carpet'. A one hour long 'Countdown to 1st limo' tag is displayed in the top right corner, and a 'Live Eastern/Central Time' tag on return from commercial breaks. During this first hour Harrison interviews previous shows' contestants on the red carpet, reflects on their previous history in the show and updates the audience as to where they are in the (broadcast) present. Successful couples from previous seasons are interviewed together with engagement and wedding updates, and the camera often returns to show the latest 'Bachelor Baby' (the most tangible outcome of a successful season). There is also a strong focus on the most recent, and therefore most memorable, narratives; for instance, Nikki from Season 18 discusses the outcome of the last aired episode, the previous season finale, stating that she and Juan Pablo "real life tried, not just TV tried" and their failure to stay together is thereby put into a particular ideological context (Episode One, 'Limo Arrivals', 2015). The energy of the live event is conveyed effectively within this section as Harrison, although in control of the event, stumbles over his words, or is made to wait for interviewees. However, the frantic pace of the first hour is most effectively shown

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[19] Other specials include *The Women Tell All* which is recorded-live, and the final episode of the season, beginning with a recorded-live introduction, to a pre-recorded episode, followed by the live *After the Final Rose* immediately after.

through the technical elements of live – the cut to show a limo arrival, while the audio remains on Harrison and his interview subject. Moments like these demonstrate the need to showcase the live moment of a given participant emerging from the car to the detriment of an unfolding interview - which is, of course, subsequently cut short to discuss the limo arrival.

As I mentioned previously, the 'Live Red Carpet' calls upon elements of the Academy Awards, another 'television event' in which the closest the viewer can partake is by watching the live event, which is itself a preamble to the main live event. In this sense, Crissell argues

> We value liveness not just for the instantaneous nature of its messages but for the sense it gives us of being part of a larger community... watching television has become much less of a communal activity than it used to be... [a] dwindling sense of community' (2012, p. 16).

Liveness encourages a specific function that the audience may perform, namely, a way in which they can be closely involved. Harrison constantly references the viewer at home partaking in the event and reinforces a preferred ideal viewer "doing what others will be doing around the country – having live viewing parties". The 'Bachelor Nation' – the official title for fans of the show – are invited to celebrate alongside Harrison and those in attendance, with inclusive comments like "in the Bachelor fantasy league, the wine is poured". This continues throughout the broadcast, as Harrison correlates the viewer with the live studio audience – "I don't know about your party at home, but everyone here approved". This speaks to an obvious desire to deliberately construct a sense of community with and between the viewer and the wider world within the programme itself.

Here we can see the importance of Scannell's concept of the 'For-Anyone-As-Someone' structure, which can be understood as a mode of address intended for an entire audience, yet understood individually (2014, p. 29). A 'For Anyone' structure (like, in Scannell's example, a toaster) is beneficial precisely because of its lack of individuation, while a 'For Someone' structure (for Scannell, Michael Schumacher's Formula One racecar) is specifically tailored for a specific individual. Scannell positions the 'For-Anyone-As-Someone' structure as 'an intermediary structure that mediates between the utterly impersonal for-anyone

structure and the utterly personal for-someone structure'. (p. 32) An example of this is direct address to the camera with a large broadcasting audience, but focusing in on the individual viewer at home. Much like Bolin's assertion that 'the prime instrument in creating liveness that the host has at his or her disposal is direct address into the camera' (2009, p. 44), Harrison is able to actively engage the 'Bachelor Nation' as a part of the television event. Just as technical attributes support the presence of live, the repeated connection to the viewer at home reinforces that these two audiences are experiencing the same time, just not the same space: 'we value liveness not just for the instantaneous nature of its messages but for the sense it gives us of being part of a larger community – all listening, or viewing and listening, at the same time' (Bourdon, 2000, p. 552, cited in Crissell, 2012, p.16).

During the live and recorded-live shows, Harrison oscillates between different modes of address with his interviewee, the audience, and the viewer at home. For example, Harrison interviews Kelsey during *Chris Tells All* (another 'live special event'), yet throughout the interview he requests feedback from the studio audience and addresses the viewer at home through the camera (Episode Seven, 2015). This is taken a step further in the similar 'live special event' *The Women Tell All (*Episode 11, 2015). Here, while interviewing Britt, Harrison finishes the interview with her, looks to the studio audience for vocal support, before looking direct to camera to announce the commercial break to the viewer. Harrison negotiates multiple bodies within this group conversation. On return from the break, the shot encompasses the entire studio, currently 'off-air', with artful coverage of stagehands crossing the set. Moving closer to the stage, the shot reveals a private discussion between Harrison and Britt, which the studio audience would not have heard. Eventually, Britt is guided to the participant seating area by an assistant, while another gives Harrison his countdown cue. At this point the 'live' show returns and Harrison welcomes the viewer back. Although Vosgerau, Wertenbroch, & Carmen may consider this television event as a 'scripted talk show', with a 'determinate viewing experience' (2006, p. 488), including these apparently-unscripted 'backstage' moments prove that the show values indeterminacy. To include the viewer in this 'private' conversation between Harrison and Britt suggests the sacrifice of a 'recorded-live' edit for the benefit of live and authentic emotion. Breaking this wall between viewer and production allows *The Bachelor* to become a show that obviously

and purposefully values liveness more than the slick, production-free, show that it originated as.

7.3.3   Liveness and Authenticity

The concept of authentic emotion appears throughout the pre-recorded first episode and is, I argue, key to understanding the ideology and internal logic of *The Bachelor.* Although these segments are within a constructed and edited show, there are still elements of liveness seeping through. These take place with 'flickers of authenticity': the moment 'when the performance breaks down', (Roscoe & Hight, 2001, p. 14) analogous to breaking the fourth wall in theatre, film, or television drama. There are very few examples of this from Chris Soules, perhaps because he is the masculine 'hero' but one has him realising he's been standing alone with his eyes closed and talking to himself. By contrast, examples are much more likely to come from the bachelorettes: extreme close-ups on shaky hands while reading a note aloud, or the struggle to maintain control over the performance of femininity as required within the world of the show (such as appearing to 'eager' or 'clingy' or 'not a good sport').[20] For example, although she is shown getting increasingly inebriated as the night continues, Tara breaks her performance often when she flubs her sentences and instead reaches for a drink almost as cover. That these moments have been chosen within the edited show, demonstrates how focus is not on the 'perfect take', but a dropped performance, allowing the 'live', and as such, 'real', character to come forward. Deliberately choosing these takes over more polished performances confirms that even in a controlled programme, 'it is not surprising that we also value the liveness of broadcasting for its truthfulness and authenticity' (Gripsrud, 1998, p. 20, cited in Crissell, 2012, p. 13).

In the following example, the desire for this authenticity is at the expense of revealing production of the show, as camera crew are heard during Ashley S's explanation of a metaphorical onion. As Ashley's eye is caught by a large fruit off-camera, she instructs the crew to film off to the side. When the camera does not move, her performance drops as she looks directly into the lens, before forcing the camera to follow her out of frame, engaging in dialogue with the operator.

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[20] There is a line of enquiry here as to why women are more likely to be positioned as unable to maintain their composure, and whether this is reversed in *The Bachelorette*.

The conversation about the fruit becomes the focus of the scene, with the viewer hearing the crew member responding. The contrast between her interview performance and forcing the camera to move demonstrates a dropped performance and the flicker of authenticity: 'Liveness is broadcasting's unique advantage: this is what audiences want from it' (Crissell, 2012, p. 29). But this moment also reveals the value of the live moment. Elements of production (such as cameras, microphones, and crew members) are normally hidden; therefore showing this dropped performance at the expense of production 'rules' demonstrates its value. There are moments like this throughout the season, even including audio from crew members, showing that footage that captures what is happening 'live' is more important than the staged. Even within the pre-recorded programme, therefore, segments continue to focus on 'liveness'.

In fact, season 19 is noteworthy for including many examples of revealing production for the benefit of liveness. Every participant is interviewed making observations to an invisible crew member on one side of the camera. This method is employed by many Reality Television shows, such as *America's Next Top Model's* confessional, or *Big Brother's* 'diary room' (Blackmon, 2017). Within the format of *The Bachelor*, the participant is not addressing or in dialogue with a specific person, but relaying information indirectly to the viewer. For many years, the format has deliberately hidden this interviewer, but for season 19, transitions into personal dialogue with the crew member are included for the benefit of live-ness.[21] In episode six, for example, Ashley I reacts to the person behind the camera and shifts from disseminating personal thoughts into a dialogue: she questions whether Kasey is faking a 'dead husband', before reacting to someone off-camera, and joking whether the crew has viewed the death certificate. The joke reveals Ashley I's character and true feelings towards Kelsey in a moment of authenticity, in a way which is valuable enough to permit the reveal of the presence of the crew.

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[21] The ability to address either the crew or the audience within the pre-recorded show has only ever belonged to the host.

7.4   Conclusion

My analysis in this case study has shown that, although *The Bachelor* relies on a pre-recorded show format, the inclusion of different aspects of 'live' has developed over the years to construct an evolving understanding of dynamic 'live' Reality Television. Season 19 opens with a live event featuring technical signifiers of live, recorded-live segments, flickers of authenticity, and interaction with the viewer both in the studio and at home. Couched within this is the edited, pre-recorded, principal show format. Multiple representations of 'live' within the three-hour premiere could suggest confusion for the viewer. Instead, however, *The Bachelor* manifests a 'management of liveness', guiding the viewer through the established structure and format of the show. What is interesting however, is that in the pursuit of liveness, the format is willing to reveal the production behind the show, presenting an interesting dichotomy. Using an observational documentary style (as discussed in Chapter Three), heightens the impression of 'reality', yet at the same time these glimpses of production heighten the sense of 'liveness'. After thirteen years, Season 19 of *The Bachelor* demonstrates how this particular format can illustrate the manipulation of Reality Television characteristics to aid and maintain primetime success.

Chapter Eight: Case Study Three - The Expression of Region in *The Real Housewives*

8.0 Introduction

> It has become a commonplace assumption that television is shrinking the world, homogenising its cultures, evening out differences… [there is] instead a diversity of smaller 'villages'… there is no single, homogenised, global audience (Dowmunt, 1993, p. 1).

Dowmunt's statement contextualises the basis for using glocalization as a lens to investigate the Reality Television genre. While it could be argued that successive iterations of one format playing year after year homogenises the content available (in that the format occupies a place within the schedule that could be devoted to newer shows), it can also be argued that such iterations are beneficial in increasing diversity within 'smaller villages'. This section and case study is based on glocalization, in which 'the "American" model has been generalized and adapted in a global model for commercial media [and is typified by] the oftentimes deliberate adaptation of a foreign or global model to fit national circumstances' (Straubhaar, 1997, p. 290).

Glocalization can be read from within a television text, producing an idea of region, identity, and most importantly, an expression of "cultural capital" within the wider television medium. Straubhaar theorises 'cultural capital' as a 'complex' global interaction, focusing 'on the sources of knowledge that permit people to make choices among media and other sources of information and culture' (2003, pp. 85 - 87). The term cultural capital extends to the creation of the television show, in that 'cultural producers use forms and genres that have spread globally to express ideas of what home is like' (Straubhaar, 1997, p. 88). As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the Reality Television genre is one obvious location where this dynamic can play out. Here, it is important to note that it is the national production of particular international formats that include regionally focussed material which is of paramount significance to the local programme-makers and viewers (Moran, 1998, p. 5).

This chapter is structured in two parts, each of which is focussed on a research question. The texts to be analysed are selections from four *The Real Housewives* series: *Orange County* (2006)*, Miami* (2011), *Melbourne* (2015), and *Auckland* (2016).[22] This selection is transnational (four regions across three countries) and is based on Alessandra Stanley's observation that 'American spinoffs of "*Real Housewives*" take regional diversity into account… each pays lip service to local sensibilities and stereotypes' (2013). For this purpose, *Orange County* and *Miami* represent the West and East coasts of the United States, while *Melbourne* and *Auckland* provide examples from Australia and New Zealand that, hopefully, will confirm a regional approach (both within each city and, perhaps, across both countries). Taken together, as a case study, the aim here is to demonstrate 'there is a subtle interplay between the global and local in television form and content' (Straubhaar, 1997, p. 288).

My first research question for this case study is, using Moran's term of the format bible (1998, p. 23), **how is a developing format bible evident within the *Housewives* format?** I will be using the definitions and history of the concept of glocalization as the basis of my analysis of the programmes.[23]

My second research question is **how is each region represented within each programme?** I will be using James Hay's (2001) and Geoffrey Newell-Smith's (2001) conceptions of the role of the city within visual texts to interpret and analyse the obvious elements of the local within each particular iteration of the format.

Taken together, the findings will demonstrate how a global format bible can be flexible enough to incorporate a unique regional identity while still retaining the overall narrative drive, ideological positioning, and production aesthetic of the format.

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[22] Series One, Episode One, for each region is selected for analysis, as these episodes establish what can be expected for the rest of the season.

[23] As a part of this analysis I will also need to account for production and technological developments between 2006 and 2016.

8.1   Glocalization and a glocal format bible for the *Housewives* franchise

The initial concept of glocalization was introduced by Roland Robertson in 1995, as 'the oftentimes deliberate adaptation of a foreign or global model to fit national circumstances' (Straubhaar, 1997, p. 290). Although an element of the 'local' is included, this is a one-way model where the 'local' benefits from a global movement (p. 287). In the years following, the desire for businesses (including television broadcasters working with 'products') to differentiate markets and define borders increased focus on the local. This resulted in more of a two-way relationship, with 'the 'regionalization' of television into multi-country markets linked by geography, language and culture' (p. 285). Glocalization develops similarly to a business model, with business terminology discourse, regarding the political/economical utilisation of the global reach (Negus, 1997, p. 271). As Keith Negus argues, glocalized media is 'targeting and actively constructing consumers in multiple regions on the basis of demographics and lifestyles, rather than national identities' (1997, p. 271).

Although still based within Robertson's model, this shift lends itself to the acquisition of "markets": 'region' is the creation of a product tailored towards a distinct locale identity, represented not by position or nation, but by global concepts of 'culture and language'. This leads into areas of further enquiry – does a move towards highlighting region result in less importance for nation? Within the medium of television, this relationship between region and nation can be quite dynamic. Television texts can be aired 'as is' from another country, or the same content but with a nationalised voiceover, for example, the Olympics. In larger countries, such as America and Australia, live broadcasts must take time zones into consideration as the same content airs simultaneously in two different regions. The glocalization movement created new challenges for the television medium, allowing for a dynamic relationship between texts, national, and regional, identity.

By the new millennium, at a time when Reality Television experiences prime-time success, discussion arises regarding media's appropriation of the glocalization model. If international television is produced for an audience in one country and then 'exported' to another (Elasmar & Bennett, 2003, p. 1), then what to make of the regional offshoots generated by Reality Television formats? Conceived in one country, but then produced by a second, these

shows are not 'exported' television, despite the original production embedded within each regional iteration. Subsequently, labels traditionally used to define television texts are now influenced by the cultural capital that has been produced. An example here would be the difficulties in defining the 'scripted reality' drama series as a combination of multiple elements, as discussed in Chapter Three. These shows constantly push viewer expectations as to how to view the text, much like the dynamic relationship between global and local. As Raphael contends, Reality Television has the ability 'to transcend vestigial national difference and to create standardized global markets and differentiated consumer segments. Reali-tv has participated in this 'glocalization' strategy' (Aksoy and Robins, as cited in Raphael, 2009, p. 139). At this point from the new millennium, it could also be argued that the genre is not just participating, but in some ways demanding a new understanding of local productions of a global format.

The current discussion around glocalization and the television medium acknowledges the success of 'adaptation, transfer and recycling of narrative and other kinds of content' (Moran, 1998, p. 11). Over time, the medium has demonstrated that a successful programme in one country does not necessarily translate to success in another, as viewers struggle to identify with the content (Hoskins & Mirus, 1988, pp. 500 - 501). One such factor is a difference in culture, for example, dating multiple women at one time in America may be more 'culturally acceptable' than it is in New Zealand. This may explain why *The Bachelor* is prime-time viewing in the US, but the same series will air in New Zealand either during the weekend or online only. By contrast, the locally made version of New Zealand occupies two and half hours of prime-time television hours over two nights, a television event not afforded to the 'imported' version.[24] This example effectively illustrates the global format produced within a local setting. The success of such productions leads Moran to argue that glocalization has become an important facet of contemporary television:

> a new global type of television programme has emerged in the form of the format adaptation. This is truly a global form. Drawing upon but transforming older practices of transnational adaptation, the format is simultaneously international in its dispersal and local and concrete in its manifestation (Moran & Malbon, 2006, p. 144).

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[24] This is not a case of the local show replacing the imported version, or the broadcast of American and New Zealand series on competing networks, as the weekend/online only time slots were used before New Zealand's first series in 2015.

Despite Reality Television's prominent fixture in today's produced television content, it is not always included in discussion around glocalization, despite requests for further study of 'transnational media' and 'local contexts' (McMillin & Fisherkeller, 2009, p. 238). Therefore, I lead into the first research question of this case study, 'how is a developing format bible evident in *The Real Housewives* format?'

8.2   Decoding a *Housewives* Glocal Format Bible

The Real Housewives format focuses on 'elite feminine identities' within a specific region (Squires, 2014, p. 33). The original series location, *Orange Country*, showcases four women living in a gated community and one former resident who has moved to a smaller townhouse after her divorce (Derenzo, 2011, p. 4). The format has been very successful for its home network Bravo, in terms of both an affluent audience (those earning more than six figures annually), and overall audience reach (Cox & Proffitt, 2012, p. 297). For example, the 2011 season of *Orange County* had an audience rating of 2.87 million (Nemetz, 2016). By 2016, the global format spans 15 local regions, with more in pre-production. The global presence of this show, with its focus on the expression of local region, makes *Housewives* a perfect candidate for this case study.

First, this analysis will consider narrative elements of *The Real Housewives* format. The 2006 storylines of *Orange County* are quite dramatically different to the seasons produced in 2016. While the original series focused on the housewives within the context of their family, the focus is now *between* the housewives: 'a large share of the "drama" involves contestation about talk: who said what, and who heard what, about whom' (Squires, 2014, p. 37). This movement from 2006 to 2016 demonstrates the narrative focus as an essential part of *The Real Housewives* format bible, which I will detail below.

Even though the 2006 setting for *Orange County* has the smallest size and population of the four series, the narrative links between the women are largely absent.[25] The relationship between Lauri and Vicki is established (as Lauri now works for Vicki), but mainly as a vehicle

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[25] The population sizes for the cities featured are: Orange County – 3 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), Miami - 396,069 (Open Data Network, 2011); Melbourne - 4.5 million (Population Australia, 2017), and Auckland – 1.4 million (Statistics New Zealand (4), 2017).

for Lauri to be included in the show as a non-resident. The only other instance in which two housewives interact is between Jo and Kimberley: "A woman approached us and asked if we lived in Coto, she was new to Coto and she wanted to meet other women" (Kimberly, *Orange County*). Couched between scenes that appear a lot less "staged" this meeting suggests an attempt to link the housewives' storylines in a 'natural' way.

Added to this lack of connectivity, despite the prominence of Jo throughout the season (with more screen time than other housewives), her narrative revolves around her fiancé, Slade. Her interviews and the conversation with Kimberly are all in relation to Slade's business, income, and children with an ex-partner. Slade is also interviewed and features in storylines independent of Jo, as he attempts to broker a big business deal. This is not the only storyline where the housewife is usurped by her family. Housewife Jeana is a prominent local realtor; however, her career is not mentioned again after her first introduction. Jeana's entire narrative is centered on her family, mainly her son Shane and the upcoming college baseball draft. Shane, husband Matt, and daughter Kara, are all featured in scenes independent of Jeana, including their own interview sessions. After her first introductory piece, Jeana's interviews are solely about Shane and Kara. With a series title of *Housewives*, it is evident in this 2006 season that the husbands and families are not necessarily placed in a 'supporting role' (Derenzo, 2011, p. 15). Instead, the role of 'housewife' is defined against roles as represented by other people: Jeanna is Matt's wife, Shane's mother, etc. These 'isolated' narratives, where the housewives rarely interact with each other, obviously became a point of focus for the format bible, as there is a pointed change when *Miami* airs in 2011.

What is seen in the format five years later, is that it has developed to foreground the individual, rather than the role. After the requisite introductory sequences of the *Miami* participants, housewife Lea hosts a dinner party with everyone in attendance. As each housewife arrives, the connection to another is established. The relationship links are announced; their sons attend school together, or that two housewives knew each other from 15 years ago when they dated best friends. While perhaps demonstrating that they are more acquaintances than close friends, this focus reinforces the housewives as a group. Husbands and partners are not interviewed in the first episode; it is first and foremost about

the women. For example, Adriana's partner only receives the ID tag 'fiancé', with no name in the graphic or personal interview. Significantly, the season preview closing the first episode highlights personality-based drama occurring within the housewives group, not isolated events within their lives or partnerships.

Five years after *Miami*, the art of establishing the housewives clique has been perfected. In 2011's *Melbourne*, each new face is presented during the preceding housewife's introduction. For example, Janet introduces Jackie, even though the relationship is based on one psychic reading. In a change from *Miami*, husbands are interviewed and participate in the introductory sequences, but now they talk about their wives instead of themselves. *Auckland's* first episode in 2016 features more than one occasion where the housewives gather, with the final group occasion launching into verbal assaults and tears. This occurs a lot faster than *Miami*, where disagreements took place later in the season, and *Orange County*, where there were none. In this way, the format has developed to reinforce connectivity between housewives, to maintain narrative focus on the housewives, and to escalate the drama to begin from the very first episode. Together, these characteristics deliver shocking and dramatic personal interactions, resulting in higher ratings over the years.

Technical characteristics of the format have also progressed since 2006, including camera set up and editing. *Orange County* exhibits a hand-held method, during a period when a 'sense of authenticity was important to the continued success and usage of documentary film aesthetics in reality television' (Hawley, 2014, p. 17). *Miami* continues the trend to some degree, as scene set ups prioritise in-the-moment authenticity over pre-prepared locked camera angles. By 2015/16, *Melbourne* and *Auckland* use a mostly pre-prepared multi-camera set-up, with cameras locked on tripods and shot-reverse shot editing. The influence of editing is unmistakeable in the *Orange County* narrative, although the result is obvious and unnatural. For example, a scene pauses on a still frame of Matt as his voiceover continues, before an abrupt cut, continuing his sentence which is clearly from a separate interview. Editing also instructs the viewer how to view the relationship imbalance between Jo and Slade. While Jo is out drinking and partying with girlfriends the footage is grainy and stilted. This is intercut with contrasting footage of Slade and his son; bright lighting and a

lullaby soundtrack while brushing his son's teeth. Cut to Jo, the camera zooms in on the drink and cigarette in her hands, before returning to Slade, establishing just who is performing the parental duties in this household. The previously mentioned issue of isolated storylines is instead visually linked between the children's events; Kimberly's 13-year-old daughter Bianca poses for her first prom photo, cutting to Vicki's 18-year-old daughter Briana posing for her final prom photo. Likewise, Shane's decision to not graduate shows him relaxing in the pool, cut with a graduation ceremony and Briana's graduation party. These comparisons are framed and presented in a manner based around their children, once again defining the role of housewives by other family members. Although this method of editing links Kimberley, Vicki, and Jeana together via their children, it is still noticeable that the housewives are not interacting.

The presence of the camera is often felt in *Orange County*, as most footage is handheld with very few stationary camera set-ups. The crew are acknowledged, as Kara addresses and responds to (unheard) prompts from the cameraman while sitting alone in her new car. In a dramatic scene, Lauri worries about her daughter moving back home over drinks with a friend (who is not a housewife). The camera physically moves between the two women throughout the conversation, pans across when the other begins to speak, and zooms in on facial reactions. This is only slightly different with *Miami*, as although a dinner party features multiple cameras angles from around the table, handheld footage is still dominant. The camera style of the 2006 and 2011 series demonstrate the value of documentary aesthetics, as 'lower production values function as a truth effect, registering as more gritty, authentic, and believable to most viewers' (Schlotterbeck, 2008, p. 1). To contrast this, by 2015 with *Melbourne* and later *Auckland*, stationary cameras capture the drama as it unfolds in pre-selected scene locations (calling upon techniques of "scripted reality"). With more cameras comes more coverage of the drama taking place, lessening the impact of the constructed editing. Much like the developed narrative to introduce housewives as pre-established groups, with drama between housewives, not family, the format focuses on more reactions and more drama from those at the centre on the conflict.

Between 2006 and 2016, the original concept of observing five 'elite' women, has grown into a glossy presentation of dynamic housewife relationships. The documentary leanings in

2006's *Orange County* now lends itself closer in *Melbourne* and *Auckland* to scripted reality docu-soaps. The housewives identify themselves with regards to their own personality within the collective group, rather than being defined by their spouse or children. Likewise, the format has developed methods to narratively connect the housewives, and production now covers the drama from more angles in an unobtrusive manner. The fact that *Orange County* is still in production 10 years on exemplifies the power in establishing a format bible. Instead of remaining stagnant, it has incorporated elements as tested by each new region, and is now closer in style to *Auckland* than the first 2006 season. In this sense, glocalization and the creation of multiple regional formats allows for an element of trial and error rarely afforded to other genres or mediums. But this raises the question that if multiple series are following the same format bible, what is the point of difference? Here, the analysis turns towards the second part of the research question: how is region represented within each programme?

8.3   The City as represented in *Housewives*

The *Housewives* format is characterised by setting each successive iteration in a geographical region which, although conspicuously inhabited by an 'elite' class, must still be identifiable to those viewers who have not had the experience of the physical location (Squires, 2014, p. 34). For the purposes of this research, this section considers two approaches of examining the city. Although both relate to cinema, these concepts are relevant as that medium is often more explored than television. However, it is the combination of these two concepts that suggests there is a unique expression of the city within the *Housewives* format.

The first concept is the textually constructed identity of the city *within* the film, rather than as an isolated aspect (Hay, 2001, p. 75). Specifically, according to this argument, a film is not simply located within a city, but the city is incorporated within the identity of a film. An example is *The Town* (Affleck, 2010), where the narrative could only take place in Boston, with local actors and extras, a climactic finale at Fenway Park, and the tagline 'Welcome to the bank robbery capital of America' (although that may or may not be true). The second concept is the act of calling attention to the named city, at times incorporating the name of

the region in the name of the text (Newell-Smith, 2001, p. 101). An example is *The Wolf of Wall Street* (Scorcese, 2013)*,* where the narrative is isolated to a very specific location. Wall Street – both the location, and other films about the location - implies money, greed, and a specific profession (trades/stocks). Combined, these concepts provide a thorough perspective on the relationship between the city and cinema. Each *Housewives* series is set in an identifiable and named region, with the resulting series creating a cultural artefact within the television medium. This calls upon Raymond Williams' concept of the 'structure of feelings, each series 'characterize[s] the lived experience of the quality of life at a particular time and place' (Williams, cited in Taylor, 2010, p. 670). Therefore, the first research question for this section 'how is region represented?', naturally leads onto the second question, 'how is region uniquely identifiable when couched within a familiar series format?'

Further, these ideas can be usefully combined with Donald Read's concept of the inward/outward looking approach to regionalism must be considered:

> almost all the programmes made for the regions, and especially by the BBC, were only intended for the people living in these areas and not for the whole country in general… with this practice known as 'inward-looking' regionalism. Read argued that it could and should be possible for a region to broadcast either to another region or to the whole country, a phenomenon which he referred to as 'outward-looking' regionalism' (Read, 1964, as cited in Wallace, 2004, p. 149).

Here, Read seems to offer these approaches as a binary. This adds a final layer to this research - how does a television text present both an inward-looking *and* outward-looking approach to regionalism? This section will answer these three areas: how region is represented?, how does the *Housewives* format present a unique representation of the city?, and how is this representation deployed for those living within the region and those living outside it?

8.3.1   City Imagery

There are two methods in which region unfolds in the *Housewives* format – establishing the imagery of the city and emphasising the uniqueness of the city. The way the format is branded allows iconic imagery to perform the initial location identification, 'blending fidelity to the official Bravo prototype with idiomatic riffs that weave in local customs and cultural

allusions' (Stanley, 2013). Here, an icon set within the *Housewives* logo is used to encapsulate the region – an orange for *Orange County*, *Miami* the flamingo, *Melbourne* the iconic tram that runs through the city, and *Auckland* with the gold kiwi.[26] However, after this opening logo, the scenery of the cities are visually similar (with, for example, a focus on glamour), relying on the buildings of a city to construct a 'symbolic landscape' (Meinig, 1979, as cited in McLoone, 2010, p. 136). Each 'city' begins to look the same, with only small visual divergences to reinforce the regional differences. Although the opening logo is used to establish the location, it is not enough to reinforce the region on its own.

The scenic opening shots above the cities are strikingly similar. All images are placing the housewives as part of a 'global elite' – living in affluent and beautiful settings, afforded options in how they choose to live, and taking part in an aspirational lifestyle. To counteract these, aerial shots lead the viewer into the city, where differentiation begins to be shown. *Melbourne* features both buildings and greenery alongside the iconic Yarra river. The pier, railway station square, and the shopping district feature alongside the tram, while joggers, rowers, and boats on the river suggest residents should lead an active lifestyle. Aerial shots of *Miami* also feature buildings and a lush green city; however these shots always lead to the beach, with palm trees, bright sand, and many close-up shots of bikini-clad, multi-ethnic, female bottoms. While *Auckland* follows the imagery of buildings and greenery, there is a very heavy focus on city icons the Sky Tower and Harbour Bridge, once again demonstrating the natural world converging with the commerce and capitalism of the city (Harper & Rayner, 2010, p. 20). While the format has developed a methodology in representing region (aerial views of city and scenery), each location emphasises at least one unique city icon (*Melbourne's* tram, *Miami's* beach, *Auckland's* Sky Tower). It is the reliance on specific imagery within the city that differentiates the region.

This visual exploration of the region has developed between *Orange County* (first broadcast in 2006) and before *Miami* (first broadcast in 2011), as the former is predominantly visualised within the gated community. Instead of aerial shots over the city, *Orange County*

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[26] While three of these images are specific to the city, the golden kiwi Is a national symbol and not directly related to Auckland. This suggests that Auckland is the only city that could support a *The Real Housewives…* series, and that perhaps there is no intention of other cities being produced?

focuses on the "neighbourhood" – homes, pools, garages - or general activities like golf, drinking wine, or horse-back riding (none of which feature the participants of the show). Although moving imagery from the community to that of the city emphasises the overall region, this change loses the aura of exclusivity connoted by the gated community. The Sky Tower is recognisable and can be seen from many communities in the greater Auckland area, encompassing many socioeconomic classes. In contrast, it is impossible to be a part of the Coto de Caza Country Club experience unless you are one of the very 'elite' inhabitants, demonstrating the fine balance between the inward/outward-looking binary.[27] Beginning with a broad iconography through to the similar establishing aerial shots, the region may be recognised by outward-looking viewers. However, it is the individual locations within the city that establish the unique identity, offering a glimpse into the lives of the elite of those inward-looking viewers, and a sense of recognition for the inward-looking viewers.

8.3.2   Opening Sequences

For the analysis of each series, focus turns towards the opening sequence; a combination of both the housewife's perspective and that of production (Hughes, 2012, p. 30). There are two movements occurring here over the ten-year period – an emphasis on the housewife independent of her family, and integration of the region. *Orange County* has a unique opening to the others, as it leans closer towards a documentary approach. Each housewife is positioned front and centre of the frame in front of a white background, yet always within the context of family – partners and children are placed behind or around the housewife. Calling upon the "family portrait" seen in many homes, this is a real family just like the viewer's, only these ones live in a gated community. The housewives are not that different, it is the location that is unique and glamourous; it is the location that the viewer should aspire to. However, as mentioned above, none of the housewives are pictured in these location images. Instead, these encapsulate a "stock image" impression: the horse riders and swimmers are seemingly unknown to the viewer. While these activities do take place within the region, it is not the housewives participating, making the location independent of the housewife (and family).

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[27] Although 'staff' at the Country Club would be admitted, the true 'experience' of the Club does not involve labour: such occupations are not part of the aspirational world the show aims to project, therefore rarely seen.

Moving to later seasons, the opening sequence to *Miami* is vastly different. The blank canvas "family portrait" look has been replaced with animated graphics, bright colours, and a scrapbook/family album style, with gaudy palm trees and fluorescent colours to accentuate city locations. While husbands and children are shown as one aspect of her life, the housewife is the largest feature and positioned front and centre. Emphasising the housewife proves to have become the opening sequence style guide, as it continues in both *Melbourne* and *Auckland*. Although the Cuban-influenced design of *Miami* is not continued, animated backdrops of buildings and icons are used for each housewife's "hero" pose, intercut with sleek and modern transitions of city imagery. Most importantly, these location images often feature the housewives in their habitat, which were not present during the sequence for *Orange County*. The only stylistic difference between *Melbourne* and *Auckland* is the location images used, as the method remains the same. In this sense, the opening sequence has moved from a housewife and family separated from their location, to a prominent housewife (with small references to family), truly inhabiting her city; striding through (elite) city streets, partying in exclusive function rooms, and acknowledging staff in her employ.

Tracking the variations from *Orange County* onwards demonstrates how the opening sequence is defined by a production bible structure. This risk here is that the formula makes it difficult to differentiate the series regions. As Alessandra Stanley writes:

> all the foreign housewives look alike and it's almost impossible to distinguish Annita of *Athens* from Christina of *Vancouver* or Brandi of *Beverly Hills*: They all have blond, blown out hair, silicone-puffed lips, gym-honed figures and brows that never crease (2013).

When isolating and comparing participant interviews, this is true, as each of the series analysed has at least one housewife with 'blond, blown out hair'. But what is important to note is that the opening sequence establishes exactly what does make these women individuals. Couched within their regional context, these participants offer the viewer a local flavour as shown within the global format. Intrinsically, what separates Lauri in *Orange County*, Alexa in *Miami*, Janet in *Melbourne* and Julia in *Auckland*, is how they inhabit their specific region; the dynamic between a housewife and 'her' city.

8.3.3 Narrative

The final level of locating expression of region is within each series narrative. Descriptions of unique regional identity are delivered by participants within the text and exemplify how each series is crafted for both an inward and outward-looking focus. *Orange County* follows four housewives in the gated community of Coto de Caza, and Lauri in her "itty bitty" townhouse (Lauri, *Orange County*). Now an outsider, Lauri is granted access to her previous community, but only as an employee of fellow housewife Vicki. Her narrative reinforces that there is a form of maintenance in living as one of the elite, for although Lauri had an aspirational life it can be lost. Lauri's introductory sequence has her contemplating her previous life as she walks through her old neighbourhood, leading her to the home she can no longer afford. "I really miss my old house a lot. I miss this place. I miss this whole community" (Lauri, *Orange County*). Lauri's narrative establishes that it is size and space that illustrates a successful housewife; "I just downsized from 45 hundred square feet to less than two thousand, and now I've got another body walking in the door. And a dog!" (Lauri, *Orange County*). In contrast, the narrative of housewife Jo is whether the role of "housewife" is right for her. Her introductory sequence frames her within wide open spaces as she potters about her mansion, in direct contrast to the framing of Lauri within her "cramped" townhouse. Jo is new to the area and does not work, and she discusses what is required of her after meeting another housewife, Kimberly, at the Coto Country Club. The narrative arcs of Jo and Lauri provide two ways of looking at the aspirational Coto de Caza community - Jo is an outsider looking inward, and Lauri is a previous insider now forced to look from the outside (the status of a housewife is a precarious position), suggesting a nuanced expression of region.

Miami illustrates the importance of analysing more than one American region, for 'very few nations are ethnically homogenous' (Schlesinger, 1987, as cited in Straubhaar, 1997, p. 286). Shifting from the largely Caucasian ethnicity of *Orange County*, *Miami* celebrates the cultural diversity of the region. Each housewife expresses a feeling of acceptance in their introductory sequence, for example:

> 'Miami is the first city I've felt welcome. Here I am the queen. Here I am gorgeous, people appreciate my type of look, I'm sexy and confident and I don't feel like I'm lesser because I'm not blonde with blue eyes. So I really feel at home here' (Adriana, *Miami*).

Housewife Marysol explains her Miami parenting style:

> 'I've raised my kids differently because being that we're here in Miami, and it's more like an international city, we see drinking like with our children as something you know, social, cultural, special occasions… to him it might be a little bit more normal than maybe somebody from Minnesota' (Marysol, *Miami*).

Housewife Cristy explains it is their history that makes Miami so unique, for 'Most of my friends, also being Cuban American, we're like happy, we're proud, Cubans started this town. We built this city, Cuba's brought so much – so much flavour, so much everything' (Cristy, *Miami*). Although this city is still couched within the *Housewives* format and is very much an 'American' city, these introductory sequences place an emphasis on the social history and exoticism of Miami, differentiating the region from the rest of the American nation. At times subtitles are used within these introductions, highlighting the multilingual nature of the city. Housewife Adriana is given subtitles when conversing with her children and maid in Spanish, as well as aiding the viewer to interpret the heavily accented English of Marysol's mother. Given that this is the only episode in this study that references a second language, this addition adds a point of difference. The Cuban-inspired soundtrack, references to the cultural history, and multilingual participants, create a series that is recognisable for those within the community. In the same way, the show does not exclude those who cannot speak the language or understand social customs. It is the celebration of being unique that is emphasised in this region, and showcases a method in which to incorporate diversity within a structured series format. This point of difference for the *Miami* series instigates a change in which all series begin to find their uniqueness. For *Miami*, it is the cultural ethnicity of the region that is what draws the viewer to this series, much like Black and biracial participants in *Atlanta*, or the political context of *DC*.[28]

By contrast, multiculturalism does not imply exclusivity within the *Melbourne* region. Despite references to multiple ethnic groups adding to the 'cultural proximity of a program', these are merely passing references rather than explanation of character (Straubhaar, 2003, p. 87). For example, housewife Jackie is born in Croatia, but it is the fact she has moved from New South Wales only two weeks earlier that sets her apart from the housewives. As

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[28] *DC* was cancelled after one season, supposedly because viewers did not want to see a politics point of difference.

housewife Lydia states, "it does make a difference… where they're from" (Lydia, *Melbourne*). Although housewife Gina explains she has raised her children in "the Greek way" (Gina, *Melbourne*), this is not a focus as the children have physically spent this time in Melbourne. The argument here is that to be a part of the elite in Melbourne means the length of time living in the region. The reason why is perhaps due to the interstate rivalry that is quite specific to Australia. Note that there are no other negative remarks regarding other locations in Australia, and later in the season, a housewives' jaunt away in Queensland. Yet it is the Victoria / New South Wales rivalry that appears to set Jackie apart – more so than her being originally from Croatia. Although there are many ways in which Jackie could be 'othered' by the housewives; she is younger, does not believe she needs plastic surgery, and her career is that of a psychic, it is that she has moved from Melbourne, that is the focus of her othering (Robins, 2005, p. 251). True to this, Jackie, as an outsider, is often the voice of reason: "the Liberty Belle event for me, was fucking boring… throwing a party for fat-sucking machines? I really have landed on Planet Toorak" (Jackie, *Melbourne*). *Melbourne* places priority on the inward-looking audience, yet viewers from across Australia and the globe are represented by Jackie's outward-looking entry into the social elite.

During *Auckland*'s introductory sequences, three of the six Auckland housewives position the city as a land of opportunity. Housewife Gilda moved to Auckland after eight years of war in Iran, and housewife Michelle relocated from Britain after meeting a "Kiwi" who promised her a better life in New Zealand (what 'better' means is not explained and is assumed to be known by the audience – perhaps this means becoming one of the 'elite'). For the last five years housewife Angela has commuted between Christchurch and Auckland in order to take her business nationwide. Christchurch is positioned as distinctly not-Auckland, as Angela is asked to compare women's style between the two cities, and told to "Get that good Christchurch spirit, okay?" (Louise, *Auckland)*. Auckland is described as a city that affords opportunity and is distinctly different from the rest of the nation. However, there is a noticeable lack of culture included within this depiction of region, despite New Zealand television 'allowing the two cultures to occupy different spaces within the same land… New Zealand (Pakeha) / Aotearoa (Māori)'. In *Auckland*, the lifestyle shown does not include a lot of "Aotearoa" (Blythe, 2010, p. 257). This lack is highlighted even more when compared to *Miami*, where the unique Hispanic culture is addressed and celebrated.

Marysol has raised her children in a specifically Miami way, which may seem odd to other national regions. Likewise, Gina's acknowledgement that although her children have been raised multicultural, they are truly raised in Melbourne, stresses the importance of the location. The descriptions of Auckland as a safe, and opportunistic city to live emphasise the lack of cultural regard of living within the city.

8.4   Summary

Much like Benedict Anderson's concept of the "imagined community", the expression of region within the television medium could be a difficult undertaking. Similarly, Andrew Higson's argument of the 'suppression of cultural difference and minority discourse' for a sense of coherency demonstrates how unfavourably previous attempts have been received (Hjorte and MacKenzie, 2000, as cited in (D'Lugo, 2010, p. 120). What this case study reveals is how a series can express region, not only within the television medium, but with the added constraint of a format bible. By showcasing each city with iconic imagery and narrative discussion, each series does maintain a separate identity. Despite the absence of multiculturalism in *Melbourne* and *Auckland*, the participants are still situated within a recognisable region. However, it is *Miami* that best accomplishes the diverse expression of region while restrained by format limitations. This is due to a real focus on the exoticism of the Hispanic Miami Culture, showcasing the city as different in many ways – language, culture, history. It is an American city, although not like the rest of the country; it is not like other regions in the south, but also different again from that of Florida state. These elements are all included within the series, while still adhering to a *Housewives* format bible. The success of these series confirms that 'globalized forms co-exist and even promote local adaptations and the expression of unique local content… globalization is not equal to global homogenization' (Straubhaar, 1997, p. 288). From the initial concept of *Orange County*, the format bible seems to have developed each series to focus on not just housewives and a city, but housewives *inhabiting* the city.

What this ultimately implies is that the location and region a housewife resides is intrinsically linked to her level of status within the elite. The imagery of each location positions the housewives within the 'elite' class of the region, which still considering Squires

(2014) assertion that it still needs to be identifiable to viewers who do not have access to such areas. The narrative affords a glocalized approach in 'targeting and actively constructing consumers in multiple regions on the basis of demographics and lifestyles (Negus, 1997, p. 271), with cultural consumption at excessive levels. Lastly, while Straubhaar argues that 'cultural capital… permit people to make choices among media' (2003, pp. 85 - 87), what could be considered outside of the audience, is that these housewives have made the choice to be a *part* of this particular media, Reality Television. The ability to view and acknowledge the elite within the Reality Television genre is a demonstration of Bourdieu's symbolic power over the lower class. Yet it is the ability to partake and be the subject of this form that indicates the privilege that comes with the elite class. While Reality Television has often been the locus for the 'ordinary' person, this format has quickly infiltrated and taken ownership within this genre. No genre is safe from the symbolic violence of the ruling class.

Chapter Nine: Case Study Four – Encouraging Audience Engagement in *American Idol*

9.0   Introduction

Centrally located in statements that the concept of 'audience' is 'outdated' and 'evolving' (Astigarraga Agirre, Pavon Arrizabalaga, & Zuberogoitia Espilla, 2016, pp. 133 - 134), this chapter examines how a Reality Television text uses developing technology to encourage audience engagement – particularly over a significant length of time, such as multiple seasons. Given that this thesis covers a period of 18 years, it would be fair to argue that every format within it would have needed to consider how any social or technological changes may impact on their show. It would be up to the format's producers, of course, to decide to which degree they would respond. In the case of some formats – *Survivor*, *The Bachelor*, *The Real Housewives* – the incorporation of social media has been at a level that will encourage conversation between viewers, and between viewers and representatives of the show, yet not at a level to directly influence the show. Such formats promote hashtags onscreen during a show, for example, but the show itself remains largely unaffected by advancements in digital media. By contrast, there are formats that have actively incorporated advancements into their show design, demonstrating a willingness to embrace new options, most probably in order to maintain relevance to their viewership.

The changing dynamic of television viewing and the viewer has instigated deliberation as to what a more 'engaged' audience should be named. As individuals are no longer passively 'receiving' the text, terms such as 'prosumer' (Toffler, 1980) as a consumer who also produces, or 'produser' (Bruns, 2008), as producer/user, were coined to reflect their more participative role. These sit alongside 'prosumption' (Tapscott & Williams, 2006) as production and consumption, or 'those whose activities involve simultaneously using/consuming and producing content on/for digital sites' (Wee, 2016, p. 308). There are also a variety of titles for the now web-interacting public: 'spectators, fans, consumers, citizens, education receptors and web surfers' (García-Avilés, 2012, p. 432). P. David Marshall cycles through possible terms such as lurker, individual, surfer, or browser, before settling on 'user', to reinforce the agency between both product and person (2004, p. 27).

The common thread amongst these labels are the complexity with which the audience must now be considered; the emphasis that dominated the twentieth century where broadcasting operated on the 'one-to-many' approach (Scannell, 2014), has now developed into a more sophisticated view where individual viewers are seen as engaging with the content they choose to access in their own way.

While there are multiple terms and concepts that discuss the contemporary 'audience', the aim of this chapter is to follow what Mark Andrejevic labels 'mediated interactivity', in that the methods of engagement are guided or manipulated by the show format (2008, p. 25). In this respect, this case study does not analyse how, or when, the audience engages with the text, but reinforces how it is the text itself that is suggesting the performance of these actions. This chapter will centre on textual analysis of the first and penultimate episodes – the final performances - of the first and final seasons of *American Idol* (this means four episodes in total). The *Idol* format is one of the first reality music competition formats (later examples include *The X Factor* (2004 -), *The Voice* (2011 -), etc.), began in 2002, and continued successfully for fifteen years. This provides the impetus for the first research question, **how does the text encourage audience engagement?** To examine this, this chapter begins by unpacking the different methods of engagement that can be used both within, and in addition to, the show. This is followed by an examination of the reality music competition show, including the elements of the show that have remained, and those that have changed, across the fifteen seasons on air. Given that the show was created well before the variety of media platforms now available, the ability to stay relevant within a changing media landscape raises the second research question, **how does the text encourage engagement in a real and immediate way via social media?**

9.1 Methods of Engagement

When considering the different appearances of audience engagement, one key area of analysis is the various definitions as to the level of participation individual members can perform. It is suggested that 'to understand viewing behavior, it may be more accurate to think of "watching television" not as a binary condition but as a continuum' (Lee & Lee, 1995, p. 12). At one end, there is simple 'viewing', with physical conversations but no

technical interaction. The next level would be 'sharing', with online 'commenting, sharing, labelling, criticizing and reacting to different pieces of news or entertainment' (García-Avilés, 2012, p. 431). The next level after that is creating content – either in written or video form – to share online (Astigarraga Agirre, Pavon Arrizabalaga, & Zuberogoitia Espilla, 2016, p. 137). Creating content 'requires the greatest media engagement by the audience' (Astigarraga Agirre, Pavon Arrizabalaga, & Zuberogoitia Espilla, 2016, p. 135), but because of this increased engagement, greatly increases the viewer's pleasure (Andrejevic, 2008, p. 30).

At the opposite end to 'viewing' is the concept 'participating'. This mode is rather contentious, as it would imply 'having the power to make decisions, both with respect to content, and at the institutional or organizational level' (Astigarraga Agirre, Pavon Arrizabalaga, & Zuberogoitia Espilla, 2016, p. 134). The audience may believe they have influence (either with story feedback, voting, etc.), yet this still takes place within established structures instituted and demarcated by the production (and the wider televisual landscape such as the limits placed by morality and legality), limiting 'audience engagement to a determined spectrum of choices' (Baltruschat 2009, 131). A very simple example of this are talent show eliminations – in *X Factor*, for instance, the audience determines the bottom two participants, of which the judges choose who leaves the show. Of course, there is a sense in which true 'participation' is only possible by physically participating in the show. As Laura Grindstaff argues reality show 'participants' could be considered producers, as it is their life that creates the content (2009, p. 74). This is, however, too simplistic; every Reality Television format shapes, limits, and controls a participant's story in a myriad of ways (every contest has rules, every interaction is filmed, every word and gesture edited for presentation). Therefore, although there is an interesting issue to be unpacked as to how individual participants negotiate this tension, for my purposes, when it comes to 'engagement' we can proceed on the basis that viewers are ultimately guided by the intention of the producers of the text. Consequently, I am interested in how engagement is deployed and encouraged within the text, rather than in investigating from the perspective of the viewer (which research might form a future project).

9.1.1 Diegesis

The first method of encouraging viewer engagement is diegetically within the text itself, and this, of course, is constantly changing. As Annette Hill argues, 'as ways of participating in live events, televised live shows, and multimedia environments develop, audiences evolve' (2011, p. 486). As technology changes, audiences can take part in new ways, allowing for new 'relationships' between viewer and text. These texts focus on the 'call-to-action', often used for live entertainment or shopping networks, inciting the viewer to interact. This 'teleparticipation' has evolved over the years from calling through to the studio (and perhaps being broadcast live), followed by SMS/texting (Currás-Pérez, Ruiz-Mafé, & Sanz-Blas, 2011, p. 537). The use of teleparticipation in the Reality Television genre is often employed as a way in which to vote for support (or elimination). In this way, the text is encouraging the audience to 'co-produce the outcome of the show through their votes' (Hill, 2011, p. 485). The viewer's ability to affect the show's outcome either by phone or online builds 'viewer loyalty' and challenges the 'passive forms of media consumption associated with mass society' (Andrejevic, 2008, pp. 24 - 25). Ultimately, the viewer receives the information required within the show, to influence what will take place on the next show.

As mentioned previously in relation to *The Bachelor*, Crissell states that television is not so much of a 'communal activity' as it once was, with the suggestion that voting (and thereby influencing a text) counteracts a 'dwindling sense of community' (2012, p. 16). Audience voting is an effective way of encouraging audience participation, particularly with the suspense and excitement of live result shows that allows 'public participate in an extraordinary way' (Hill, 2011, p. 485). A good example here is *Strictly Come Dancing*, where the disparity between the judges' scores (based on dancing ability) and the audience votes (as largely non-professionals, more likely based on entertainment value) increasingly underlies the tension and jeopardy as the series approaches the final.

9.1.2 Outside of the Text

The other method in which a text can encourage audience engagement is via external media resources. These include official websites, a multiplatform approach, and social media.

One of the first methods for online audience interaction was creating an official website to accompany a text, with behind-the-scenes information and interviews available for the more dedicated viewer (Marshall 2004, 97). While greater access to such loyal fans would encourage greater commitment from the viewer, this interaction is merely at face-value – although seemingly giving viewers the 'sense of at least partial entry into an inner circle of producers' (Andrejevic, 2008, p. 31), ultimately the official website still provides a one-way method of interaction.

However, over the years these websites have evolved, particularly for the youth demographic, or those more likely to engage 'in the participatory, community-oriented, interactive experiences commonly found online and on social networks' (Wee, 2016, p. 307). Now, these 'highly structured' websites are designed to provide 'an entirely constructed environment where the possibilities are mapped out into patterns of engagement quite completely' (Marshall 2004, 16 - 17). Website design provides a space for a more intensive interaction for the viewer, 'sharing their experiences and participating with a large number of applications' (García-Avilés, 2012, p. 430). Meanwhile, the production can still maintain an element of direction – or 'gatekeeping'. In this sense, the production of a scripted or non-scripted show can be developed with a focus on potential online interactivity.

Unofficial fan websites, or Twitter and Facebook pages run by fans, provide another way for viewers around the world to connect with each other in their shared interest. Furthermore, 'stars' can run their own personal pages on social networking sites, allowing the viewer to 'follow them constantly' (Lueck, 2015, p. 92). These may be independent of the production company or, more commonly, are part of a multi-platform strategy, where every participant is branded as belonging to the show, and their content is managed by marketing staff. Whatever the genesis of the uploaded content, however, here, the viewer moves from 'consuming' or 'participating' in conversations in an official, production-guided capacity, to potentially bypassing traditional media to interact directly with those on-screen (Hull & Lewis, 2014, p. 18). In this sense, while a production may manage their own communicative space on the internet, engagement is not confined to this space, and will never be under complete control by a production.

9.1.3   Multimedia

The collaboration between old and new media has led to the emergence of 'something significantly different' to the ways of the past (Marshall, 2004, p. 4). A study into viewing habits found '54% of viewers in the United Kingdom watch audiovisual content on a laptop, 49% on a tablet and 39% on a mobile phone at least once a week' (Sørensen, 2016, p. 382). The high usage of alternative viewing methods to the standard television demonstrates the need for a production to consider how to utilise new techniques and include second-screen applications (Chalaby, 2016, p. 41).

In this sense, a television show can no longer be considered as an isolated text; instead consideration must include 'the entire multiplatform and interactive mediascape that it is part of, and evolving around, as well as in relation to the dynamics between devices, platforms and content providers' (Sørensen, 2016, p. 396). By incorporating media outside of the standard television episode, the multi-platform approach may be used as an attempt to negate the 'passivity' of television (Astigarraga Agirre, Pavon Arrizabalaga, & Zuberogoitia Espilla, 2016, p. 135). This can be done by creating supplementary texts either on television, online, or interactive applications for the viewer's device, and as such, intensifies the relationship between the viewers and the programme (Quail, 2015, p. 196).

For example, a previous study of *The Apprentice UK* (2005 -) focused on the BBC's '360-degree programming', which included the show, a spinoff show, and an official website, all of which provided easy navigation from television to mobile device (Boyle 2009, 107). Similarly, a more recent study on the public service broadcaster VRT in Belgium focused on the use of multimedia support for each programme, including official websites, Facebook fan pages, and twitter accounts, with dedicated hashtags are promoted with on-screen graphics (D'heer & Verdegem, 2015, p. 222).[29]

Extending a weekly show outside of the television platform leads to an increase in the 'anticipation and follow-on discussion of television shows. It may also be used to maintain a

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[29] This study points out that responding tweets were not displayed during the programme, even though this is an option, a point covered later in this chapter.

show's momentum in between weekly screenings or between the seasons' (Harrington, Highfield, & Bruns, 2013, p. 407). Jonathan Bignell argues that while such services may have been viewed as 'supplementary' to the central television text, his example of *Big Brother UK* demonstrates that this has now shifted to 'being one component in a wider mediascape whose title becomes a familiar brand' (Bignell, 2005, p. 146). With this, the television text is no longer the only way to experience, or even engage, with the overall brand.

Social media applications such as Twitter are becoming a common method of encouraging audience engagement outside of the television text. The use of social media applications has been more popular than email interaction since 2009 (Lueck, 2015, p. 92), most probably because, although the viewer has always held an opinion on a show, 'it is the possibility of making this production public that is truly novel' (Astigarraga Agirre, Pavon Arrizabalaga, & Zuberogoitia Espilla, 2016, p. 135). Here, reactions on platforms such as Twitter immediately provide 'instant feedback to television executives about the level of acceptance of the programs as they are broadcast, also becoming a thermometer to measure the level of audience engagement' (García-Avilés, 2012, p. 437). Twitter or live discussions (such as those on Facebook, for example) directly after a show can also encourage 'appointment television' (Wee, 2016, p. 314), requiring a viewer to watch the show as it is broadcast in order to partake fully in a live discussion online with those actors or journalists in the show (Hill, 2011, p. 484).[30]

The use of social media platforms directly encourages 'parasocial' interaction - 'the illusion of intimacy with the celebrity and the emotional attachment that is created' (Lueck, 2015, p. 94). In particular, 'digital media tools such as Twitter have enabled the rise of "ambient intimacy" by offering a sense of interaction, closeness, and connection between individuals' (Wee, 2016, p. 314). As such, parasocial interaction may be used by production to forge a bond between the viewer and those individuals that appear in the show. In particular, it is highly likely that viewers of the Reality Television genre may be more likely to pursue parasocial relationships due to the emotional and unscripted pieces to camera from the participants (Tian & Yoo, 2015, p. 1), and the ease of access that social media platforms

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[30] Some scripted shows may go one step further, for example, a 'live twitter event' of a repeat episode, during which live tweets are displayed onscreen (Wee, 2016, p. 315)

bring for a viewer to communicate this to a personality directly (Currás-Pérez, Ruiz-Mafé, & Sanz-Blas, 2011, p. 537). While the extended conversations on these platforms may lead to more of a 'social relationship' (Hull & Lewis, 2014, p. 23), these interactions are ultimately for the benefit of whatever production the celebrity is currently involved with.

While it is now common for young people to view a programme while multitasking between two or more screens (Astigarraga Agirre, Pavon Arrizabalaga, & Zuberogoitia Espilla, 2016, p. 134), this also raises the problematic of viewer attention, which may vary from full attention on the television set, to divided attention, to watching the show as a peripheral activity, to the extreme of background noise (Lee & Lee, 1995, p. 11). While the importance of a multi-platform 'mediascape' is integral in the contemporary broadcasting world, this mediasape must be elaborately designed and delivered in a way that encourages engagement, without distracting from the central televisual experience.

It is also possible for a live show to incorporate 'tweets' directly into the show (Harrington, Highfield, & Bruns, 2013, p. 406), with the ability to respond immediately, within the text. This development allows for multiple levels of control – the text encourages the audience to interact, those whose tweets are chosen may strengthen their parasocial relationship to those on the show, and the text reinforces the potential influence a viewer can have on the show. Ultimately, however, tweeting provides the opportunity for a show to respond and have the 'final say' instead of the viewer and completes the communication loop. Nevertheless, such interactivity allows for a carefully managed extratextual mediascape which can then be utilised diegetically within the text.

9.2 The Reality Music Competition

The musical talent show is not a new formula; two examples are the *Original Amateur Hour* (1948 – 1970), which had origins in radio before moving to television, and in later years, *Star Search* (1983 – 1995). This format contains live audience and competition elements, with a focus on finding unsigned talent who are destined for 'super-stardom'. As the Reality Television genre expanded in the late 1990s, the reality music format was one area of early experimentation, particularly in New Zealand. As discussed in Chapter Two, *Popstars*

followed the creation of the female-band TruBliss, from auditions through to live performances and the release of their first single. The show was closer in style to *The Real World*, with observational footage, and although covering the audition stage, there was no 'competition' or audience involvement as such (this mostly occurred after the show aired in buying merchandise, attending the subsequent tour performances, etc.). Instead, the drama was found within the anxiety of auditioning, the stress of recording an album, and the resulting 'stardom'. The rights to the format were sold to an Australian company as *Popstars* (resulting in the band Bardot), followed by the UK (and the creation of Hear'Say). As mentioned earlier, *Popstars* 'DNA defines the world's most successful TV formats, including *The X Factor*, *American Idol* and *Britain's Got Talent'* (Shaps, 2009).

Only two years after the introduction of *PopStars*, *Pop Idol* launched in the UK, highlighting the audition process, a focus on what 'sells' in the industry, and eventually, superstardom. Additionally, the competition aspect involved the viewer in the judging process, and entire episodes were dedicated to the elimination of an act. In some ways, the elimination process is the ultimate lure for the show, just as the 'voting ritual has actually been a routine 'money shot' of reality game shows' (Njus 2009, 124). Further, the live shows are what raised these music competition shows apart:

> '*Idol* or *X Factor* outperform their rivals because they capture the feeling of being in the moment at a live performance. The studio audience is a stand-in for the public, and their reactions are important to the televised event; but they cannot vote, and that power is reserved for the audience at large, participating via their telephones, TVs, computers, and mobiles' (Hill, 2011, p. 485).

Those who can vote choose to do so in large numbers, which increased dramatically: 'in the 2003 *American Idol* series, the votes for the finalists rivalled national elections: 24 million votes were cast on websites, by phone or through text messaging (Marshall 2004, 97). By 2009, more than 600 million votes were received by text message for the season (Zhang, Weare, Koh, & Chen, 2016, p. 199). Ultimately, the success of *American Idol* is that it provides the audience with the choice to interact with this format: 'audiences are lead to feel they can interact with contestants in tangible ways. Reality Television shows in general rely on audience participation, recognizing audiences as indispensable elements for predicting final winners' (Zhang, Weare, Koh, & Chen, 2016, p. 199). *American Idol* was

certainly not the first musical competition show, but it did capture the important elements of those shows that were successful and deployed them on a national scale.

9.2.1   American Idol

From the very beginning, *American Idol* aimed to be a show different to any other: in "the biggest talent search ever"… "three months from now, live on this very stage, an as yet unknown talent will be launched into superstardom" (Dunkleman). Judge Simon Cowell prepares the audience with what to expect:

> We are going to tell people who cannot sing and have no talent, that they have no talent… We're going to show the audition process as it really is, because shows in the past have not shown the brutality of auditions. Auditions are horrible places to go' (Simon).

Here the show addresses the fact that they will take the viewer behind the scenes for a true representation of the music industry (in line with *Popstars* rather than *The Gong Show* (1976 - 1980)), and at the same time as giving a 'reality check' to those who believe they have 'it' but are deluded, untalented, or, better yet, both.

Throughout *American Idol's* series premiere, there is a large focus on the established format of *Pop Idol* (although whether any American viewers had seen *Pop Idol* is never mentioned). Simon references his previous judging experience: "When we did the show in London it was a huge success and I really believe that when I came to America we would find an extraordinary talent" (Simon), as well as praising the country as a whole: "and this is when I'm going to admit the American talent is probably better than the English talent" (Simon). As host, Seacrest's repeats the UK history often: "Now we made no secret that the idol show is a British idea", "but just like the UK shows", and culminating in "starting next week, as in the British show, our finalists will perform live, and you at home will vote for who will become the next *American Idol*" (Seacrest). The many references to *Pop Idol* are often accompanied with footage of the live finale. UK winner Will Young features prominently, with a focus on his industry success: "it is hoped that the eventual US winner will be as successful as the British *Pop Idol*, who went on to make over a million dollars and have two number one hit records within three months of his victory" (Seacrest). This 'success' is also established by the amount of 'stardom' that came with winning the show: "in the UK, the winner and the runner up became the most famous people in the United Kingdom" (Simon).

Young's involvement with the show culminates with a filmed interview, a short live interview and a performance of his new single release in America. This focus on the history of a show that is being attempted for the first time in America is quite contradictory – statements that this will be the biggest search ever, that it will bring massive success, and that the viewer is the most important are all based around a show having never attempted this before. But at the same time, the constant references to the success of the UK format suggests the only reason that it will be different is because this show is taking place in America. In some respects, *American Idol* has modelled itself with aspects of innovation as well as reliability. Overall, however, the central message of taking something from the UK and making it bigger, better, and more spectacular is culturally appropriate within American popular culture.

9.2.2   What remains the same?

Despite the fact that there has been real and obvious change within the format over its fifteen seasons, it must be noted that some aspects of *American Idol* have remained the same. First, the title sequence maintains the same theme throughout, with only minor stylistic updates. The theme music remains largely the same, while the blue/white style guide and logo has remained constant, with only revisions to graphics as technology has improved. Episode one, season fifteen, highlights this with an opening sequence comprising of every logo iteration across the series, emphasising the staple image with subtle changes each year.

American Idol confesses to the format's love of a contestant's misfortune, although repackaged in a palatable way as "incredible individuals who've shared their remarkable and touching stories" (Seacrest). This is accompanied with a montage of contestants who talk about being homeless, have a stutter, or Tourette's Syndrome (importantly, all are positioned as individual problems that can be 'overcome' with the success and fame consequent to winning the show). In the opening episodes of the first and final seasons, sequences highlight these personal tragedies in contestant's audition sequences. In season one, AJ wants to be an *American Idol* "because I want to help out my Mom" (AJ), James shares his wish that his deaf parents could one day, magically, hear him sing, and Trinity shows the judges a photo of her father, a singer and her inspiration, who passed away when

she was eight. In season two, Lee Jean's family "faced the devastating loss" of his older brother: "he believed in me… I lost part of myself". Kerry's mother passed away from cancer, "when I play, I do play for her" (Kerry), and has only Seacrest to share his success/golden ticket with, and relays conversations with his mother: "I know my mum would be super supportive of this, you know we've even talked about it in the past. She's always like what if you did a show lke *American Idol*?"[31] These stories have become a part of the show format, present from the very beginning, and celebrated until the very end.

9.2.3   How has *American Idol* changed

Although *American Idol* has deliberately maintained a steady format over the years, there are some noticeable changes between seasons one and fifteen. The most obvious example of what has changed is connected to production values. As highlighted in the retrospective *American Idol: American Dream*, the original season was a summer season filler with no budget. The sets were built of large swathes of material and cardboard, with small holding areas for those auditioning. By contrast by season fifteen, the holding rooms have become massive gymnasiums or studios; while during auditions, the judges are framed with beautiful scenic backdrops. Further, multiple camera setups allow for tracking shots from behind the judges, and if a contestant indicates timing to an unseen pianist, the following cut shifts to a wide to include both pianist and contestant. Go-pro cameras are rigged to guitar necks, put to great use during an audition with an off-duty police officer. Placing her guitar on the ground, she demonstrates an arrest on judge Harry Connick Jr. The corresponding angle from the guitar calls upon the dash-cam footage from *COPS*, one of 'first wave' reality shows identified by Annette Hill (see Chapter Two). As the show has achieved success, it is predictable for the production standards to increase accordingly.

Alternatively, there are specific phrases used in season one that would be obviously missing by season fifteen. Despite used often within the music industry, the repeated comments as to what sets the participant apart have had to be reworded:

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[31] Note that despite very chopping editing for this soundbite, it acknowledges the fact there are other musical talent competitions that he could have entered – 'a show like American Idol', not specifically, Idol.

> "We were still looking for the X Factor" (Seacrest)
>
> "We talk about the x factor… you have a capital X" (Simon)
>
> "This girl might have just started the z factor because she goes beyond x it was superb" (Simon)

These comments are obviously due to the introduction of *The X Factor UK* in 2004 and the US in 2011. Although often used to describe that indefinable 'something' that sets a participant apart from the rest, the show now needs to reinforce their own branding and separate themselves from competitors (particularly with Simon Cowell as judge for both).

Lastly, by season fifteen the concept of the participant's narrative journey is now taken into consideration. During the final performances of season one, there are no recaps as to how the finalists progressed to the end stage of the competition. Instead, the focus is on an event the participants have attended – which are still common during the weekly live shows of the *American Idol* format – but in later seasons, the final performances focus on the narrative journey. This is confirmed by Charles Boyd, the co-executive producer, that "early on the shows were more about the story of finding the people and the whole show going on the road, then, season four, there was a more conscious decision to tell more of that person's stories" (Boyd, Season fifteen, Episode 22).

The final performance episode for season fifteen opens with a scripted segment of families grouped together in their living room, or in a diner, watching announcements of the winners over the years. Those who we are about to see audition (and go to Hollywood) have rehearsed dialogue with siblings, and tracking shots of participants performing vocal exercises, or practising in front of a mirror. Ultimately, these clips show members of the audience being accepted as participants for the coming season. An introduction like this, combined with following a participant's journey from auditioning to the final shows demonstrates the format's ability to place importance on the viewer/participant relationship and further drive home the ideological message that 'anyone' can will if they have sufficient talent.

Ultimately, *American Idol* has developed over the years to focus on the elements that work, and change those that do not. Although comprising of simple competition phases (auditions, going to Hollywood, live stage shows, finale), the format has deliberately improved in ways

that deliberately draw the viewer in (higher production values, following a particular contestant), while distancing and differentiating itself from similar competition formats. One of the most important themes to arise in season fifteen – the 'Farewell Season' – is that of the overwhelming history and alleged cultural impact of *American Idol*. Following the scripted opening of season fifteen, Seacrest appears holding a green-screen poster board which features footage of himself and Brian Dunkleman opening the show 14 years earlier. The judges do the same while giving their thoughts on the show. Jennifer in particular states '*American Idol* changed people's lives. Not just the contestants, not just me, but the people watching it' (Jennifer), highlighting that this show is for the viewer at home, just as much as it those who participate on the show.

These references to history feature throughout the show, starting from the first contestant to feature prominently within the audition context. Prompted by her mother, Michelle Marie recites the past 14 *Idol* winners in order, testing (and thereby demonstrating) her knowledge and dedication, as well as rehashing the previous 14 years to the viewer. Michelle Marie embodies a true 'Idol' fan – at only fifteen years old, she has grown up watching every season of the show, and told her mother at four years old that she would be on the show. Her family reminisce about Michelle's reactions as a viewer, with home video of Michelle crying over her favourite contestant being voted off accompanying footage from the 2009 show. Her characterisation of the lifelong fan who, in going to Hollywood, feels "like I just accomplished my life-long goal, which I did!", is entirely plausible, given that she has watched the show more than two-thirds of her life. *American Idol*, literally, has affected viewer's lives.

Kelly Clarkson is a major focus in season fifteen, not only as the winner of season one, but as one of the more successful *Idol* alumni.[32] For the final performances, Seacrest announces that of the finalists, 'one of them will officially bookend Kelly Clarkson as the fifteenth *American Idol*, it is a huge honour' (Seacrest). Seacrest directly asks La'Porsha about her connection to Kelly's experience: "So you watched Kelly in this spot, huh? What's it like to

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[32] The 'most successful Idol' is often debated between Kelly Clarkson and Carrie Underwood, winner of season four. Both are miles ahead of other winners (or place-getters), however the consensus often comes down to Carrie being more successful in America, while Kelly is more successful globally (Hutchinson, 2016).

be in this spot?" (Seacrest), and La'Porsha addresses Kelly herself, stating "So, Kelly? A woman started it, and a woman's gonna finish it" (La'Porsha).[33] Despite this emphasis on such a successful and popular alumna, it is interesting to note that in original broadcasts of season one, there is no footage of Kelly Clarkson or her first audition (although it is available to find online via various *American Idol* specials).

Previous winners and place getters have always been displayed on banners in the audition room, but in season fifteen they also feature on the pre-audition panel, for example Clay Aitken, Ruben Studdard, and Taylor Hicks. Taylor talks with a contestant signing in about her cello, and on receiving her ticket to Hollywood, and he celebrates her success with an 'impromptu' jam with his harmonica. A segment is devoted to the participants who have previously auditioned: Shevonne, in her sixth audition, is shown auditioning in season 12, and now feels ready. Kory is shown auditioning the previous season, and footage of Lauren from season 13 is played as she explained she "wasn't very confident" that year (Lauren). This segment accomplishes more than just a simple audition sequence – it reminds viewers of the history of the show, maintains viewer identification with former winners, and a sense of redemption for those viewers at home who have persevered, and finally received that golden ticket.

This section has considered how the *American Idol* format has encouraged audience engagement, given that it was created before social media was invented. It is important to consider separately how the show has developed over the years and then to answer how social media has been incorporated. As I have demonstrated, the format does use elements outside of social media – most notably narrative, and with a focus on history – that calls for a level of identification from the viewer with the participant. Building from this base, my analysis turns towards the second research area: how does a format established before the invention of social media incorporate developing digital technologies?

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[33] La'Porsha did not win season 15, and therefore a woman did not 'finish it'.

9.3   Social Media Engagement

Following the analyses on the format development over fifteen seasons, the following section will consider how the format changed to specifically encourage viewers to interact digitally with the show, beginning with a brief overview of 'digital improvements' across the seasons. This will be followed by a continued analysis of series one and fifteen, including the repetition of voting reminders, methods of voting, and the utilisation of multiple social media platforms.

Apart from the introduction of text voting in season two, most digital development focuses around the increasing opportunity for the viewer's multiplatform experience. Digital downloads were introduced from season six, with songs available for purchase at Americanidol.com during the finale episode. MySpace and iTunes were also utilised during the sixth season, with a MySpace Profile Page for the charity event 'Idol Gives Back', and contestant EPs were released on iTunes after the finale. The relationship with iTunes was increased for season seven, as iTunes released exclusive performance videos, featuring live performances and studio recordings of individual shows. The large volume of text messages made throughout season eight – 178 million messages - was not only because of voting, but also because viewers were 'answering weekly trivia questions, opting in to receive voting number reminders, submitting questions to AT&T-hosted chat sessions with outgoing contestants, and participating in AT&T's sweepstakes' (AT&T Announces the Eighth Season of 'American Idol' Smashes All-Time Record for Fan Engagement through Text Messaging, 2009). It goes without saying, of course, that every text message cost the viewer, and the producers received a proportion of this fee.

However, from season 10 onwards, various methods of digital voting were initiated. First, *American Idol* provided voting opportunities through Facebook:

> "We have been wanting to do online voting for several years, and now Facebook has offered us a secure solution and we are ready to go," said Simon Fuller, Creator and Executive Producer, *American Idol*. "The show has always involved a high level of engagement with its viewers through texting and phone voting, and it's great to expand on this tradition" ("American Idol" Offers Online Voting for First Time Ever at AmericanIdol.com, 2011)

Season 12 introduced the 'SuperVote', where a viewer can cast multiple votes at one time through americanidol.com, the *American Idol* mobile app, and Facebook:

> To SuperVote, fans can allocate any number of votes for one contestant or multiple contestants, for a total of 50 votes (across all online voting destinations), and in a unique interactive experience, they can adjust their vote selections as performances happen during the show. When the voting window officially opens, fans can submit their final votes – all at once' ('American Idol' introduces SuperVote, 2013).

Season 13 offered viewers the chance to vote using Google Search, where '"Google Voting" will pop up on the Google search page whenever fans search Idol-related terms, allowing them to place up to 50 votes with the click of a mouse' (Slezak, 2014). For season 14, a new feature during eliminations - the "Fan Save" - was introduced via Twitter. During a five-minute voting window, viewers use the hashtag #Save(ContestantName)', with one vote per account (Weatherby, 2015). Those outside of the East Coast or Central time broadcasts could still take part by following the Twitter account @AmericanIdol (which announces the bottom two and that voting is open/closed) as well as following the live stream from the studio on AmericanIdol.com (Walker, 2015).

By analysing the mechanisms of interaction across all fifteen seasons, there is a sense of direction across three broadly identifiable blocks. Seasons one to five were devoted to introducing the show and establishing the format. Seasons six to nine focused on external methods of engaging with the show, but remained intrinsically tied to the content and narrative of the show (for example, downloading a performance on iTunes because the viewer enjoyed it during the show). During the final third of its run, *American Idol* utilised the rise in social media platforms, particularly Google, Facebook, and Twitter, demonstrating Barker's concept of 'intermediality', that 'we live in a world of increasingly interpenetrative media which constantly cross-refer' (Barker, 2012, p. 43). Although the *American Idol* show broadcasts on the Fox Network – and remains core to the brand, a viewer does not necessarily need to watch the show to engage (particularly if Tweeting their vote from a delayed time zone).

To get a full sense of the development between seasons one and fifteen, the next section analyses how *American Idol* encourages the viewer to participate and engage with the possible options from within the text itself.

9.3.1   Voting

The method of telephone voting is stressed often in the first ever episode, despite a noticeable absence of the specifics, i.e. weekly eliminations of the lowest voted performances. The instructions that "you at home will decide who will become the next *American Idol"* (Seacrest), are explained as "You'll vote using this [old mobile] and this [finger] for who goes on and who's dreams are shattered" (Seacrest). For the final performances, Seacrest is persistent with his encouragement to vote, "If you want to vote for Justin, his number is 1866-IDOLS-01. That's 1866 43657 01" (Seacrest). This mantra is repeated, as is Kelly's (IDOLS-02), after every performance, demonstrating a 'rhetoric which intends to spark off voting motivation and to influence the show's outcome' (García-Avilés, 2012, p. 437). Further, there are constant comments after every short segment, such as "if she's your idol, there's your number", "Hey if you can see this hair on a CD cover call this number…" (Seacrest), "Hey now don't vote until the end of the show, but keep trying if you get a busy signal" (Dunkleman).[34] The familiarity of the process is referenced, with "you know when to call, at the end of the show", and "well we'll be opening the lines in just a moment so you know the drill. Enjoy the recap and take down those digits". The intensity increases throughout the show, even including a reference to the contested outcome of the 2000 Presidential Election, as Dunkleman reminds, "That's right, remember each and every vote is vital, you people in Florida know what I'm talking about. You've got two hours to vote. Keep trying" (Dunkleman). Such constant repetition of voting demonstrates the argument that 'most voting shows should be regarded as commercial transactions, where presenters behave like "sellers" who exhibit a persuasive rhetoric which seeks to engage viewers en masse' (García-Avilés, 2012, p. 430). The main contrast here between seasons one and fifteen is that the judges now reinforce the importance of voting. Where the judges barely spoke in season one, they now proclaim, "I gotta remind everybody at home to please vote, Trent you are giving her a run for the money like I've ever seen, this is gonna be

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[34] By the end of season one, there is a clear difference between Seacrest and Dunkleman and their level of contribution to 'hosting' the show. Dunkleman did not return for season two of American Idol.

the closest race in idol history I bet" (Keith), or as Jennifer declares, "it is up to America now" (Jennifer).

The multiple ways of engaging are highlighted when comparing seasons one and fifteen. The graphic display for voting is comparatively simple in season one. In season fifteen, each info graphic of voting options appears for 20 seconds of each performance, with the top row the contestant's name, the second row one of four voting options (SuperVote, GoogleVote, Text, or Call) and the bottom row the terms and conditions (for example, voting is now open, and a limit of 10 votes per method per contestant. The result of four methods of voting leads to more intense descriptions from Seacrest:

> "if you want to vote for Trent start voting right now. Supervote for Trent at Americanidol.com or by the Fox Now App. Voting is open right now toll free text voting closes two hour after the show, Supervote, googlesearch closes 9am pacific tomorrow. There's a limit of 10 votes per contestant per method" (Seacrest).
> "To vote for La'Porsha, search American Idol vote on google or go to AmeircanIdol.com for information on all voting methods. Text voting is available to subscribers of all wireless carriers" (Seacrest)

By contrast to the first season, during which the only important condition to reiterate was that voting did not open until the end of the show, the focus shifts from insisting on voting or reminding the viewer they have the power to the many different ways they can engage and influence / participate in the show.

9.3.2   Multiplatform

Although becoming a staple show for the Fox network, *American Idol* has always referenced other programmes and platforms. The very first episode features helicopter footage from Fox Morning news, as they show the queue to audition crowding the pavement. Just like the announcement in 2016 that the winner will appear on Seacrest's KissFM show the following morning, Justin and Kelly presented (alongside the show judges) at the MTV music video awards, as well as appearing on MTV Total Request Live. The 'CD singles' of 2016, are now audio files available to download during final performances. This extends to the judges, as Jennifer Lopez is announced as performing for the final show, with her new single, also available on iTunes. Clearly, cross-promotion strategies were central to the format as it grew and developed.

The first mention of an official website was in episode one, with Seacrest reminding viewers "Don't forget to check out IdolonFox.com on MSN. Learn about the contestants, talk to the judges and of course check us out as well" (Seacrest). The website is mentioned again in the final performances: "Remember, if you wanna check into the website for details on the tour or maybe win a Ford Focus CX5, log on to idolonfox.com on MSN. It's all there for you" (Dunkleman). With season fifteen comes a new website that acts as an *American Idol* compendium, with Seacrest's introduction: "Thank you for inviting us into your homes for the past fifteen years. And if you wanna keep reliving idol history then check out this really cool site musicisidol.com. Tomorrow it's with a heavy heart we say goodbye" (Seacrest). The official websites are promoted as one-stop locations for multiple methods of engagement – voting, competitions, background information, or as repeatedly scrolls across the screen, "for official American Idol merchandise log onto our website".

9.3.3 Twitter

Twitter launched in 2006, and although initially labelled as a 'back channel' for television (see: D'heer & Verdegem, 2015; Harrington, Highfield, & Bruns, 2013), the medium has become a 'metaphorical "watercooler" in the cloud, but one where the watercooler conversations take place instantly, rather than at work the following morning' (Harrington, Highfield, & Bruns, 2013, p. 406). Twitter appears to be the preferred social media platform for season fifteen of *American Idol*, as it is the only one directly referenced within the show (i.e. no mention of Facebook, or Instagram etc.). Hashtags are encouraged from the first episode, with #idolpremiere appearing briefly – encouraging what D'heer & Verdegem (2015) label 'macro-level' interactions. Although this is the only graphic hashtag, it is part of the lexicon used, with one couple and their child verbalising 'hashtagreallife' and 'hashtagbabies'. For the final performances, #idolfinale is displayed, particularly on return from ad breaks (in bold as part of the *American Idol* logo), but also constantly throughout the show, in smaller and lighter print above the Fox network identifier in the bottom right corner. Important to note is the immediacy these hashtags encourage, the potential to distract the viewer, and the subsequent lack of attention afforded important moments in the show. Immediately on Dalton being named as the eliminated participant, the hashtag #idoltop2 appears. With Dalton still onstage and giving his goodbyes and good luck to the

final two participants, the viewer may be on a second device, publishing their thoughts on the elimination, taking the attention away from Dalton, and already considering the chances for the final two. Although encouraging online discussion of Dalton's elimination (which does have the option to continue over a longer period of time), this drive to capture the immediate reactions of the audience leads to a somewhat inappropriate (or at least time-shortened) send-off for those not using a second-screen, as well as the unfortunate participant who places third.

As Seacrest enters the stage to open the show, his twitter handle, @ryanseacrest, appears for viewers wanting to message him directly. Similarly, as the judges take their seats, their names and twitter handles appear, @keithurban @jlo @harryconnickjr. This is the only time that the direct handles appear for Seacrest and the judges, a method that identifies and encourages communication with a specific user (Larsson, 2013, p. 138). Instead, the focus moves to the contestants, and twitter handles appear during every performance, @trentwharmon @daltonrapattoni and @laporsharenae. At first, as a contestant begins their performance, a song and artist graphic are displayed, for example, 'Falling, Trent Harmon', much like what would be seen for a music video. This is followed up by a standard graphic ID, which lists both artist, their age, occupation, location, which changes to show their twitter handle. What is interesting to note is that *American Idol* deliberately uses Twitter to guide viewers in their engagement. The twitter handles of the judges and host are displayed, but are quickly forgotten with the focus on the contestants. Likewise, the decision to use the participant's twitter handle encourages direct communication with the participant, rather than promoting their name as a hashtag. This guides viewer engagement from talking about the participant, to communicating directly with the participant, and conveniently leaves only one hashtag for the entire show, #idolfinale.

9.4   Summary

This chapter aimed to understand how an Entertainment Reality Television competition show can encourage audience engagement in a real and immediate way. Kilborn states that 'the arrival of *Big Brother Netherlands* (1999) presented 'a new form of **engagement** with television' (Kilborn, 2003, pp. 7-9), and clearly how this is taking place within a text –

Andrejevic's 'mediated interactivity' - is constantly changing as digital technologies evolve. By examining the methods used within a single text, this case study explored the mechanisms through which the *American Idol* format encourages audience engagement. These were identified as taking place within the text diegetically (encouraging the audience to vote), outside of the text (visiting the official website), or via multimedia platforms such as Twitter, and associated issues such as multi-screening.

Second, this chapter explored what changes occurred to those mechanisms with the introduction of social media platforms. As the show was introduced during a time without social media (or even texting, which Seacrest himself 'taught' the audience to do in season two), *American Idol* has demonstrated an ability to adapt the format within a changing media landscape. Providing a point of comparison between what the format has maintained or improved from season one to fifteen, outside of social media platforms, is necessary to understand the common thread throughout the show. This base can then be expanded with the inclusion of social media, specifically voting across multiple official multi-platforms (text, website, Google), and encouraging conversations on Twitter. There is, of course, the need for further study, particularly with audience analysis as well as content analysis of the show's promoted hashtags, but ultimately these changes are providing avenues for a viewer to engage in a real and immediate way.

American Idol's ability to identify and rework aspects of the show, as well as incorporating a multi-platform mode of engagement, proves why it remains one of the more successful Reality Television formats. The show focuses on encouraging the viewer to engage, while constantly reinforcing the vital impact the viewer has on the show. Simon Cowell states that *American Idol* 'showed the TV industry that you can trust your audience' (Cowell, Season 15, Episode 22), and every season, every winner, every elimination, is instructed by how 'America' voted. The importance of America's voice and the ability to vote is even endorsed by President Obama, who declares that the 'show transformed television' (Season 15, Episode 22). In a personal message that opens (what was then) the final episode ever, President Obama praises the show's ability to engage:

> Voting is the most fundamental and sacred right of our democracy. I believe it should be almost as easy as voting on *American Idol*. And we're working on that... Not all of us can sing like Kelly Clarkson,

but, all of our voices matter. This show reached historic highs not only because America watched it, but because you participated in its success. And the same is true of America. We reach our full potential when every American participates.' (President Obama).

Although tied in with a Government promotion to register to vote in the upcoming Presidential Election, it is telling in that the American Government believed it was worth the time and effort in presenting this message to *American Idol* viewers – via a show that encourages audiences to engage at an enormous level (even if lower than previous Idol seasons) – of 12.94 million American viewers (Patten, 2016).

Chapter Ten – Findings

10.0   Introduction

Each of the preceding four chapters outlines a case study where I have critically examined one particular Entertainment Reality Television format through the use of a purposively chosen theoretical framework. Although each is therefore necessarily different to the others, the four case studies offer a particular critical engagement, when taken together. For this reason, the place to begin a discussion of this research is located within the case studies themselves.

10.1   Revisiting the case studies

The first case study examined the characteristics of soap-opera as located within 35 seasons of *Survivor*, in large part because it is a 'game-doc' (Bignell, 2005) format. Beginning with an overview of the origins of soap-opera, the study unpacks various elements of the genre, including the relevance of the concept of 'low culture' (Meyers, 2015), the multiple-narrative storyline typical to soap opera (Levine, 2014), and how that genre works by interlinking character narratives within a community (Matelski, 1999). Additionally, soap opera's use of paratextual information surrounding the text, such as the use of the episode recap or 'next time on…', to guide the viewer through the complex narrative was also discussed. Finally, because advertising often surrounds or appears within the show, is it perhaps difficult for a soap-opera text to be seen as truly isolated from its wider televisual context. What made this even more interesting is that the soap opera narrative structure was not expected, and, as stated within the show itself, was deliberately avoided in the earlier seasons. The ability to maintain a long-running narrative is only possible in a format that can expect to have the same "characters" across an extended length of time, whereas *Survivor* was initially a competition format that introduces new participants every season.

Survivor showcases multiple soap opera characteristics in a variety of ways. First, all the participants have their own story arc, even if they are eliminated quickly. For instance, in

season two Deb's journey moves from being an initial leader, then to a loud and domineering personality, before her almost inevitable elimination in the first episode. Second, interpersonal relationships drive each episode through the reward/immunity/tribal council format, as participant's performance, potential, and alliances are discussed throughout. Third, advertising promotions appear within and around each episode, as well as paratextual information regarding previous and upcoming episodes. Fourth, the opening sequence especially calls upon the traditions of soap-opera opening sequences, with familiar theme music, the establishing of tribal relationships, and the direct to camera participant introductions begun in season two. Finally, and perhaps most important, every season is treated as part of the overall *Survivor* 'universe', with references to previous seasons and, for example, previous footage of returning participants. Here we see the "character is destiny" trope of the soap opera format, with heroes, villains and romances, moments of conflict and drama (for example, fighting over mouldy rice), and an emphasis on potential redemption, for example as participants relive their personal failures from fourteen years earlier.

As the show is "real life", there is supposedly no ability to plan how the long-term narrative will unfold. From Boston Rob's first appearance in Season Four, production could not have foreseen his participation in three more seasons or his eventual win and "redemption", let alone finding a rival in Russel Hantz or the Rob and Amber "super-couple". Further, *Survivor* continues the soap opera tradition of deliberately addressing social issues, including feminism (Brunsdon, 1981), race, and ethnicity (Matelski, 1999). Founded as a 'social experiment' (Probst, *Survivor: Panama*), *Survivor* continuously explores such issues by dividing tribes by race or by age, or in maintaining that male and female participants must compete as equals. While episodes are structured to the show's format, each season and overall series incorporates soap-opera characteristics which elevates *Survivor* from a simple Reality Television competition show.

The second case study critically examined the live event and 'liveness' with regards to the Reality Television genre. This case study sought to understand how liveness is incorporated into the Reality Television genre, particularly within an already-established format. Some

reality formats, namely *Big Brother* or a talent competition show such as *American Idol* produce a live show at least once a week. Other shows, like *Survivor* or *The Bachelor*, have created an established format with little to no live elements apart from reunion shows. My case study here analysed how *The Bachelor* could be said to become live, 'eventful television' (Scannell, 1995) despite the format initially involving very little live interaction.

The Bachelor presented an excellent example of a 'closed' text, as it was initially constructed without a need for timeliness or audience involvement (i.e. voting or live performances). What was noticeable from this case study is that the show structure has not been accommodated to a shorter filming/airing overlap. Instead, the format has positioned elements of liveness around the show, with special events of red-carpets or a talk-show format, performing as bookends for premiere episodes. This suggests two points: that the show values the initial structure as originally designed, while also acknowledging that today's audience is different to that of 2002. These added elements of live move the focus from the season climax of choosing a "winner", to a management of liveness as it appears within each episode. Within the one episode analysed, the viewer is artfully guided through various instances of live; the show as originally filmed, pre-recorded segments, and the live event. There are signifiers of liveness (graphics), as well as linking to live feeds from various viewing parties around the country. Alongside these technical signifiers, the three-hour premiere contains many 'flickers of authenticity' (Roscoe & Hight, 2001) from the host and guests, all of which work to confirm the presence of 'live'. These 'flickers', as well as the inclusion of behind the scenes conversations and reactions to off-screen responses from the crew, demonstrate that the show values liveness above all else. At the expense of slick production values that hide the filming process, these departures are considered worthy when reinforcing the authenticity of live-ness.

The third case study examined the glocalization of a format (*The Real Housewives*) and the expression of region which resulted. Distinct narrative and technical styles can be located within all four *Housewives* texts examined, whether Australia, New Zealand, or America. These four texts I chose also demonstrate how the show has developed over the past 10

years, both technically (with, for example, the move to multi-camera set-ups), and narratively. While family members still appeared during more recent seasons, they are very much relegated to supporting status within the narrative focus on the individual woman as "Real Housewife" (a self-constructed identity that itself develops over the seasons). This development towards a female-dominant narrative has the flow-on effect of a market niche in showcasing the 'mature' woman during prime time (as an aspirational role model in contemporary capitalist society). While doing so, each series also emphasises and promotes its unique locale. Representing the West and East coasts of the USA, *Orange County* and *Miami* feature diverse landscapes, and demonstrate differences in priorities and relationships. Likewise, although the nations of New Zealand and Australia may be confused by those in the Northern Hemisphere, the *Auckland* and *Melbourne* iterations of the format also showcase separate and unique regions, with contrasting cityscapes and attitudes to work and family. Region is also expressed within the narrative, as each Housewife discusses the unique aspect of their city – be it the size of their property (*Orange County*), ethnic diversity (*Miami*), State divisions (*Melbourne*), or lifestyle and business opportunities (*Auckland*).

Each regional format must also consider how to represent an 'elite' group of women within a familiar city. The domestic or international viewer is not considered one of the 'elite', yet they must be able to identify with the imagery within the show. One of the ways this is done is by showing the women interacting with the city, for example walking into familiar landmarks, but decked out in expensive clothes and addressing the doorman by name. While the viewer may not identify with the person, they can recognise the backdrop in which these elite lifestyles take place. What these different iterations of the *Housewives* format represent is that glocalization does not represent 'homogenisation' (Dowmunt, 1993). Instead, *Housewives* allows each region to shine while situated within a global format, where multiple series air simultaneously.

It is important to examine the development of the show format over fifteen seasons before considering the incorporated elements of social media. *American Idol* began with constant references to the original British show, as well as reiterating that it uses the same format (despite not stating how many Americans watched, and were aware of, the *Pop Idol* format). Core elements of the format have remained the same, such as the theme song, logo, and the narrative focus on a participant's adversities and 'back story'. However, there are also immense improvements over the decade and a half - particularly in terms of production - with elaborate staging and camera set-ups offering a distinct contrast to the original curtains and cardboard backdrop for the auditions. Additionally, the participant's journey on the show has become a narrative focus, as viewers are encouraged to support the participants they can relate to. Lastly, the show focuses on history and the sense of family now that the show has been a part of American homes for the past fifteen years.

Multi-platform additions to the show include digital downloads of songs performed by both contestants and judges, and cross-promotions like the reminders to listen to the winner on host Ryan Seacrest's radio show. At the time of writing Twitter is the preferred method of communicating with the show, as the text continually promotes the hashtag #idolfinale, and relentlessly features the Twitter handles of the judges, host, and participants. Importantly, the show directs viewers towards discussing the acts rather than focussing on the judges and host, as their handles are shown only once during the opening of the final performances, while the participant's handles are displayed throughout. The text is encouraging para-social engagement (Lueck, 2015), and more importantly, guiding it towards specific people who play specific narrative roles within the text.

American Idol began with only toll-free voting numbers and an official website providing background information on the show. By the final season, there were five different interactive methods of voting: phone, text, Americanidol.com (by signing in with Facebook), Google vote, and the *American Idol* app. The importance of voting is repeated often in both the first and final seasons, demonstrating that no matter the method of voting, it is the *act* of voting that is encouraged (and provides the raison d'etre of the format). Overall, this case

study demonstrated that a show with an established format bible can develop to take best advantage of various technical changes in the wider media-scape without losing its intrinsic characteristics.

The final case study, in Chapter Nine, considers how the singing competition show *American Idol* has focused on developing methods of audience engagement. These methods are found diegetically within the show, or outside of the text. A third method is via multimedia applications, either by voting or giving space for viewers to take part in social media conversations with participants or other viewers. The show preserved the general structure of the format itself (auditions, live shows), and maintained consistent branding but nonetheless deployed various audience interaction modes as technology improved and viewer preferences changed. There were also major changes, for example a huge increase in the narrative focus on a participant's "journey" through the competition, and a drastic improvement in production values. Identifying these similarities and changes aided in isolating the audience engagement aspects of voting and multiplatform crossovers. Examining the introduction of each voting method (and side products such as the relatively unsuccessful use of *iTunes*), demonstrates how *American Idol* continuously embraced new and emerging technologies to pursue an immediate connection to the audience.

Every separate case study demonstrates that it is possible to possess a strong ability to develop and adapt. Every format analysed can be seen to focus on a particular element that is successful within a different genre – *Survivor* and soap-opera, or *The Bachelor* and a news broadcast - and adapts it to fit. Not all genre characteristics are applicable for every format, but the willingness of those analysed to identify and incorporate those that do work confirms these Entertainment Reality Television formats are (1) **constantly developing as adaptable hybrids**, by (2) **incorporating the defining characteristics of adjacent genres**. Within this answer, there are five important points to consider:

10.2 Subsequent seasons can no longer feign innocence

During the late 1990s and into the new millennium, the Reality Television genre often emphasised its putative social experiment aspect. At the time, viewers – and even producers – did not know what to expect as they stranded 16 castaways, or pitted 25 women against each other to win the heart of one man. These early seasons thrived on a sense of unknowing and the hope of finding an audience (in no small part because they were produced relatively cheaply), viewing participants who were also somehow unknowing of the genre and its expectations, tropes, and narrative devices However, despite improvements and innovations in following seasons, innocence and sense of unknowing cannot be recaptured. Mostly because of producer, participant, and audience knowledge from creating or viewing previous seasons, the idea that an established format will be able to present something 'new' and completely unknown is no longer tenable.

In terms of the 'social experiment', after the initial season the production is no longer working from a hypothesis, but tweaking an existing case study. With *Survivor*, for instance, it is possible for an audience to compare various gameplay strategies, while participants can vary theirs accordingly to their own "literacy' with what has gone before. Earlier seasons of *Survivor* includes participants who state they had never seen an episode, although they must have had an awareness of the game, or know those who did watch the show. From the first episode of season two, participants openly discuss their knowledge of the game and their intended strategy, a concept that is completely missing from season one (and can, of course, never happen more than once). To play *Survivor* now means playing the 'game'. With the increased exposure to these texts, participants were exposed to previous seasons and expected "character" tropes which may have affected their ability to "be natural". Likewise, the cultivation of an image is now integral to participant success on *American Idol*, a learned behaviour that has derived from the embedding of certain tropes across multiple seasons. Season fifteen for instance featured a large number of tear-jerking storylines, demonstrating that participants were by that stage perfectly aware of their role as part of an established trope to elicit votes (i.e. the country girl, the single mother). This inability to erase the knowledge of previous seasons and participant/audience knowledge of previous gameplay means a format cannot truly claim the 'unexpected'.

Here, it is vital to stress that the idea of a non-referential, isolated, text is no longer possible. Because of this, *The Bachelor* has done the exact opposite to create interest in subsequent seasons and spinoffs. The concept of many women fighting for the affections of one man could have become stale after season one. Instead, the format embraces the losing participants from previous seasons, and casts them in future seasons (with the genders reversed from season to season). With the end of a season comes the much-anticipated conversation about who will become the next 'hero' - audience members are able to apply specifically for a chance with someone they have watched on the previous season. Spinoffs *Bachelor Pad* and *Bachelor in Paradise* rely heavily on the viewer's insider knowledge of the many seasons and conflicts between participants; these prior relationships now create the drama, rather than 'finding love' in and of itself. *The Bachelor* format celebrates the dense history it has created instead of suggesting that participants have never heard of the show and exist in an unreal universe separate from its viewers. Regional iterations of the format may try to maintain a non-referential approach: for example, *The Bachelor New Zealand* season two removed all references from participants to the previous season. However, it cannot be denied that participants and viewers have pre-existing knowledge, and an attempt to cater towards a non-existent, 'inexperienced' audience, is impossible.

From cheap and relatively simple beginnings, these formats now frequently boast quite expensive sets and production values. But with these impressive multi-camera camera setups, it is difficult for a format to maintain that drama is occurring naturally. With the *Housewives* format in particular, it is noticeable how the narrative of the show moved away from an observational style of documenting a family. Now, women talk viciously behind each other's backs, and highly-dramatic verbal (sometimes physical) fights occur – conveniently – with full shot by shot coverage as if the show were a multi-camera studio drama. Obviously, this points to increasing degrees of artifice and manipulation: the ability to conveniently obtain perfect video and audio of drama can no longer be claimed as 'natural'.

Despite being unable to replicate the sense of the unknown that dominated the early rush of Reality Television shows, these formats are neither moribund nor irrelevant. The

advantage now is that the audience have the option to follow the development of specific formats. It is no longer possible to deliver a Reality Television show under the illusion that the audience does not know what Reality Television is: its rules, tropes, high and low points are well worn and easily identifiable planks of normal media literacy for the majority of viewers of popular television. But because of this, the formats can be more innovative, precisely because the audience has this accumulated knowledge. The pleasure is not necessarily in seeing the same experiment replicated season to season, but to see and consider the various methods of gameplay unfold. The viewer can finally celebrate as Boston Rob wins a million dollars for his wife and children, or Bachelor Nick Viall finds love after three previous attempts. Those who watch *Housewives* in later seasons may enjoy the drama and conflict between the women, no doubt meaning a return to the simpler dynamics of family relationships as in the first season could be fatal to the format. To ignore this accumulated knowledge and return to a non-referential text does not work with an audience who have decades of accumulated knowledge of the genre and of specific formats within it.

10.3   The format bible is a living document

In creating an established set of rules for a show, the format bible demands rigidity but also affords flexibility. An extraordinary amount of planning takes place for an original production to be conceptualised and designed. Putting these production rules into a documented format bible means that once in production, every aspect of the show has been honed and refined and, crucially, the format bible is the vehicle through which the show is monetized. From before the first episode of an inaugural season, therefore, its format bible allows a cohesive text to be produced. What is evident across these case studies is that as each format develops, the format bible would in turn require constant updating. Any major conceptual changes would be added to the format bible, and followed as the format rolls onto its next iteration.

Having a format bible lends credibility to a show. In particular, the competition (or game-doc) formats require an established set of rules in order to begin their first season. As a

show like *Survivor* continues over the years, tactics change, and participants hatch elaborate methods of getting around the traditional game rules. One example is that over the course of thirty-five seasons *Survivor* has established new rules as unexpected situations arise in Tribal Council. This has included procedures for re-votes if there are multiple tied votes, or creating the rule that if a participant leaves the game by choice they are no longer eligible to sit on the jury (*Survivor Nicaragua*: Season 21, 2010). These situations were either not necessary or unimaginable when creating the rules for season one. However, their induction into the format bible means that if the situation arises again, a precedent has been set, and the rules will be followed – very important for a 'game' with a million dollars at stake. Importantly, each development also provides a new mechanism for tension and drama to enter into subsequent seasons.

Establishing a format bible suggests that an audience could have some level of expectation as to what they are about to watch. Every one of the case studies demonstrates an episodic and season-specific structure with unique characteristics. *American Idol* has two episodes a week: one for performances, the second for guest performers and eliminating (at least) one contestant. An episode of *Survivor* will have reward and immunity challenges, followed by an elimination, while the bachelor will go on two dates (single and group), before a cocktail party and elimination of a contestant. Even outside of the game-doc sub-genre, *Housewives* maintains a standard episodic structure, featuring individual storylines and small group conversations, before a dramatic event (usually involving alcohol) attended by all participants. Following this sense of structure within the overall format bible tells the audience what to expect when watching each format: to deviate from the format bible is to produce an altogether different show (which negates the reason for purchasing a format bible in the first instance).

The establishment of a format bible increases the chances for worldwide sales and revenue. If it is possible to replicate the success of a format from one country to another, the format bible provides all the necessary elements to produce a regional iteration of the show. The format bible is detailing the requirements of the show's 'brand': everything from logos,

theme music, structure and rules can be packaged and sold as any other global commodity. In return, regional versions of a well-known format have an established audience. Competition formats have a presumed audience already aware of the rules and issues of gameplay, and with the *Housewives* format, the themes of 'excess' and the 'elite' remain relevant no matter the region. This recognition provides less risk when embarking on a new production as advertising can be pre-sold on the basis of an already-established audience being present, and both old and new viewers will be keen to see how their regional identity will be expressed within the show format. Using an established format minimises risk, while at the same time expecting high audience numbers (from both inside and outside of their region). And, of course, purchasing a format and adapting it regionally is not just less risky: it also is highly likely to be more financially attractive to production companies and networks.

Alternatively, despite the restrictions and requirements of a format bible, anything that falls outside of these constraints is open to interpretation. Although *The Bachelor* has established a routine of always being followed by *The Bachelorette*, this cannot be a stipulation in the format bible as regional variations do not obey the same pattern. Variations like this suggest that the format bible contains various levels as to what is compulsory and what is considered open to interpretation.

The ability to leave many aspects of a format as a free-for-all means the regionality of a given iteration of a format can be identifiable, promoted, and praised. Particularly with the *Housewives* format regional differences become the most identifying factor between the multiple iterations, and this is also true of the other three case studies to a lesser degree. All formats featured in this thesis have been sold worldwide, and so all have followed the twin strategy of employing a format bible and using the non-regulated aspects of the format to deliberately establish a regional flavour. One example of this is although *The Bachelor* has an established season format worldwide, the Australian version removes the concept of the 'Fantasy Suite', which is when the final three contestants are given the opportunity to continue their date overnight without cameras or crew. In America particularly, on each of the final three dates are an elaborate note from the host along with a key to the 'Fantasy

Suite', asking whether they would like their date to continue. However, in Australia, there are no overnight dates, nor the term 'Fantasy Suite'. The fact this concept is present in other regional versions (including New Zealand), suggests this must be an 'optional extra' within the format bible. The benefits of an established structure allow an amount of freedom and flexibility in areas that may not sit particularly easily in certain locations or contexts.

10.4   Even closed texts must include liveness

It is noticeable that although the four case studies examined different format styles, all shows have developed their own varying elements of liveness. The fact that these shows all screen during prime-time highlights that those shows that embrace live are still 'eventful television' (Scannell, 1995). Another advantage of including elements of live is to compel the audience to watch the show as it airs as 'appointment television' (Wee, 2016), incorporating the live-broadcast timeslot into their schedule. While an easier task for some Reality Television texts – particularly those that require audience voting – it is clear that even 'closed' texts that have no direct time influence have also demonstrated a deliberate move towards liveness.

The most common method to incorporate liveness is by creating 'eventful television', and for some formats, these events appeared from the very first season – for example, *Survivor* has always concluded with the winner announced live, followed by the reunion show. The season is filmed months earlier, followed by a period for the season to air (as evidenced by the participant's change in appearance between day 39 and the reunion show), yet the final vote tally is read live on air for a live reaction from the host, participants, and audience. Shows such as *Survivor* that do not rely on audience voting means that an entire season can be shot and edited without the need for liveness, but when it matters most – announcing the winner – the show must include this liveness to make it 'eventful'.

Likewise, *Housewives* performs liveness during the end-of-season reunion show, and in some ways, provides even more drama than during the season. Recorded live in front of a

studio audience, the women air their grievances regarding the events of the season. The episode focuses on liveness instead of the structured, high-quality docu-soap technical style, closer in form to a talk-show and its associated connotations of confrontation. Similarly, the *Bachelor Tells All* and *Women Tell All* of *The Bachelor* are recorded live talk-show formats completely different to the episodic structure of the closed text. The women can confront the uncomfortable-looking bachelor as he explains his reasons for eliminating them, as watched by a live studio audience. The case study of *The Bachelor* demonstrated this concept in greater detail, where the three-hour live premiere is a way for the audience to view the closed text as an event. It is not necessarily the episode within the three-hour slot that is the sole reason for watching, but the red carpet, the live-cross to viewing parties, and the studio audience all contribute to the tension, the drama, and the unrelenting sense of anticipation. By making the premier episode 'eventful television', liveness can work to encourage a viewer to return for another season.

With the ability of time-shifting, all television genres face the issue of retaining the qualities necessary to be 'appointment television'. With Entertainment Reality Television, there are added issues – there are now many formats to choose from and multiple seasons per format. If a viewer were to miss the first part of a season they could decide to leave the season altogether and pick up again from the next one. While the four case studies feature elements of liveness in different ways (for example, talk-show elements versus live results shows), all of the case studies have incorporated social-media as a way to create a sense of immediacy. While this incorporation is more substantial in a show requiring audience voting (for example *American Idol*), even closed texts encourage viewers to interact online. *The Bachelor* and *Survivor*, neither of which uses the audience to find a winner, both encourage participation by displaying hashtags throughout an episode. In the premiere episode of *Survivor: Cambodia*, the hashtag #joega appears after a short segment on Joe leading his tribe in a yoga class. For those watching, their thoughts can be voiced to other audience members via Twitter. But the only way to be a part of this conversation is to do so when the hashtag appears on the screen. To watch the same episode but with a time delay means a viewer can still comment, but the initial conversation has passed <u>because the time has passed</u>. For this research, the case studies for the later seasons of *American Idol* and

Survivor were conducted at least six months after they aired. The hashtags were still present in the viewed text, but a quick search online found that none of the hashtags were still used in the same context - #joega now relates to a man named Joe who runs a yoga business, with no connection to the original *Survivor* Joe. To participate in the 'watercooler in the cloud' conversation, the viewer <u>must</u> watch the show as it airs. In this sense, incorporating social media elements emphasises the need to watch Reality Television as it is broadcast, ensuring their relevance by including these elements of liveness.

10.5   Across open and closed texts, all case studies encourage audience engagement

Allied to the need to feature significant levels of liveness, case study analysis shows that encouraging audience engagement is vital, with formats incorporating these elements wherever possible. From the very beginning, *American Idol* was a format that focuses on audience involvement with the phrase 'you decide', and has continuously developed and incorporated this into the show. However, this has also been a limitation for the show, as production had no way of foreseeing the course of technical advances or digital platforms. The need to stay current with latest digital media trends meant the show constantly offered new ways of interacting – including literally including sections where the host spent screen-time teaching Americans to send text (SMS) messages. Similarly, despite the limitation of being "closed" competitions (the audience does not vote) or docu-soap style, the other three shows also demonstrate ways of encouraging audience engagement. As mentioned above, *Survivor, Housewives,* and *The Bachelor* have no viewer input as the show unfolds. The viewer has no effect on weekly eliminations, and viewer comments on the official website or fan sites/blogs cannot be considered as to how the show unravels.[35] Therefore, and particularly for closed texts, these formats have focused on encouraging audience engagement to remain relevant.

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[35] There are exceptions to the rule, for example in New Zealand where *The Bachelor* was broadcast six weeks into a ten-week filming period. Because of this, reaction from the media and social media were incorporated into the final weeks. However in America, there is often a gap between production and subsequent broadcast.

It is clear producers consider this an important aspect to include as all four case studies were created before social media: the format bible would have had no provisions for digital interactions.[36] In the intervening years however, the use of second screens and multiple platforms have been embraced by closed texts to encourage engagement, with official websites, producer-curated social media accounts for participants, and by suggesting specific hashtags throughout a show. Again, much like elements of liveness reinforcing the show as appointment television, promoting social media identities or hashtags which can be used across multiple platforms encourages conversation amongst the audience and promotes a sense of the fear of missing out should one choose not to participate.

Entertainment Reality Television can include these graphic reminders in a non-invasive way that other genres simply cannot. Encouraging a viewer to shift their gaze to another device may not be so readily accepted during a television drama - to display a hashtag during a shocking death scene in *Game of Thrones* (2011 - 2019) would be distracting.[37] A similar event for *American Idol* would be a shock elimination and a "favourite" being sent home, yet as described in Chapter Nine, the hashtag #finaltwo appears as soon as Dalton's name is announced. In this way, these formats succeed in overtly encouraging the audience to engage outside of the show, without distracting the viewer from the show: it is "outside but alongside", rather than separated from the original text. The ability to do this in formats created before social media shows progressive thinking and importance on all aspects of including methods for audience engagement.

As a format, *American Idol* demonstrates the necessity of engaging the audience by capitalising on the many voting options available in 2016. Although fortunate that it has always been centred on audience voting, the show (and host) is constantly reminding the

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[36] The most recent format included in this thesis, *The Real Housewives*, was created in 2006, the same year that Twitter was introduced (March) and Facebook opened up to anyone over 13 with an email address. (September). While both popular tools, neither would have been considered a 'requirement' for a format bible at this stage.

[37] Although 'viewing videos' are popular - particularly with *Game of Thrones* - the video is generally not uploaded or engaged with until after the viewing of the show, whereas the focus here is on deliberately shifting a viewer's gaze to engage with others at that specific moment in time.

viewer to shift their focus to multiple devices. Viewers can call, text, google vote, supervote, and visit the official website to place up to 50 votes a week, and are encouraged to do all of these during the episode broadcast (and not just in the commercial breaks). Counterintuitively, perhaps, the format is pushing the viewer to look away precisely for the benefit of audience engagement with the programme. It is, therefore, a kind of multi-platform event. Part of the appeal of *American Idol* is the constantly developing methods of engagement - the show did not move from phone voting to five different methods within the space of one season. The rollout of different methods has progressed as technology has developed, for example using your phone to make a call, to texting, to internet-accessible phones to place your Facebook votes. *American Idol* demonstrates that a format will encompass everything to provide the latest systems available for potential audience engagement. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that new technology could have made a show like *American Idol* completely redundant had it been simply 'bolted on' to a rigid format. Instead, producers adapted and tweaked the format in the recognition that the need for audience engagement was crucial to ongoing success.

10.6   Flexibility allows formats to flourish

Reality Television now occupies a large portion of prime-time programming, and even a small national audience like New Zealand has seen the introduction of entire channels devoted to the genre with E! and Bravo (both based off American models), with enough content to maintain an ongoing schedule based on sufficient audience demand. It is important to note that despite the 'shelf-life' of a particular format, the resulting space will be filled by another show with similar elements and characteristics. For example, the cancellation of *The X Factor US* is the end of that particular show, but there will always be a singing talent competition reality show to take its place. Within the Reality Television genre, there remains a competition-style Reality Television sub-genre, a talent competition-style Reality Television sub-sub-genre, and ultimately, at least one, singing talent competition-style Reality Television show.[38]

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[38] Although this thesis focuses on *American Idol* as the dominant singing talent competition reality show it may well be that *The Voice* will overtake this position, given that at the time of writing there are 62 global versions of the format since 2010.

These formats succeed as they continually find ways to reinvent themselves, and every season pushes its "unique selling position" within an increasingly crowded marketplace. *The Bachelor* focuses the theme each season around their hero; Chris Soules AKA 'Prince Farming', Juan-Pablo the 'Latin Lover', or the first Black lead with *The Bachelorette* (The Bachelorette: Season 13, 2017). *Survivor* focuses on societal issues, with each season applying a new twist on tribal divisions; age and gender with *Survivor Nicaragua*, (2010), *Millennials versus Gen X* (2016), or *Fans versus Favourites* (2008). No format wants to be left behind with constant influx of Entertainment Reality Television options, therefore every opportunity is made to embrace change and remain relevant.

Another method of staying relevant is incorporating successful elements of different genres. Seeing the large audience numbers that watch the Oscars, *The Bachelor* launches the season premiere using the same concepts – red-carpet interviews and eager crowds waiting for the 'stars' of previous seasons, literally incorporating the "fashion show" of the red carpet as a predictor and marker of legitimacy. Likewise, the incorporation of soap-opera conventions within the long-running narrative of *Survivor* requires the audience to return to see redemption for their favourite characters who may have not succeeded in the first (or even in subsequent) attempts at the game. The observational documentary style of *Housewives* has shifted to slickly produced television drama, focusing on 'water-cooler' moments of highly personalised conflict between participants. This is unsurprising: in an increasingly cluttered mediascape, constant reinvention is almost the starting-point for any degree of success. Of course, different formats employ different characteristics to draw and maintain audiences, resulting in hybrid shows that incorporate successful characteristics of different genres to ensure and reinforce its survival. Each format is constantly improving the gameplay, drama, and audience numbers with every season: for *Housewives*, the more 'table-flipping' the better (The Real Housewives of New Jersey: Season One, 2009); the ethical decisions integral to the narrative of *Survivor*; eliminating those not 'there for the right reasons' in *The Bachelor*; or the constant encouragement to vote in *American Idol*. This ability to adapt is due to producers constantly looking outside the Reality Television genre

for inspiration, resulting in the hybrid-nature of fascinating, compelling, and engaging formats.

Chapter Eleven – Conclusion

11.0   Introduction

Reality Television has, in its relatively brief history, been an increasingly common site of enquiry from a number of angles and dispositions. On the one hand, political economists (see: Andrejevic, 2004; Couldry; 2008) have tended to concentrate on the role they see the genre playing in increasing disciplinary and surveillance-based modes of control in contemporary society. By contrast, audience scholars (see: Hill, 2007; 2014; 2018), have tended to situate Reality Television as a key location for enquiring into the lived experiences of viewers within everyday life. Both approaches, however important their enquiries may be (and are), use Reality Television as a mechanism to speak to other, perhaps more general, concerns.

My research has been deliberately designed from the outset to sit somewhat apart from each of these approaches. While I have, of course, looked to scholars from all ideological or political backgrounds to inform my work, I have been primarily interested in formats of Entertainment Reality Television and *how they fit within the genre of television,* and not as a way into other, more general or societal, concerns. My research has therefore focused on developing an overview of the changes, challenges and developments within each format, and in order to provide a workable framework for that task was built on a case study model. Here, my aim of including four different formats has been to position myself as a critical viewer of <u>television</u> (rather than of any particular format or programme). From that perspective, my key overarching theme has been "What characterises the dynamics within these formats as they unfold to the viewer over time?"

11.1   Research Context and Design

In answering this question, the most important contextual point is that the genre of Reality Television is very difficult to define. Unlike other genres that can be easily situated based on recurring tropes and conventions, Reality Television centres on broad principles of what is "real" – real people, real life – at the same time as utilising and deploying characteristics

from a range of other, more established genres. In Chapter Three I argued that definitions of "Reality Television" in academia are typically unique to the author and research and, while they may overlap, most texts find it necessary to position an "interpretation" of the genre. Consequently, the literary analysis of "the Reality Television genre" suggests an assemblage of definitions, offering a Venn diagram of varying sub-genres. The literature reveals how the genre has developed a hybrid nature, from a documentary basis and affected by the codes and conventions of the television medium. Attempts to pinpoint exactly what makes a show 'Reality Television' is still debated, and may be based on content, technical attributes, or level of producer influence. Accordingly, developing a coherent, unifying definition of the Reality Television genre would be substantial enough to be the task of a complete thesis. Therefore, it was never my intent here to develop yet another definition of Reality Television, but instead use existing definitions and frameworks to ask, "What are Entertainment Reality Television formats doing, and how?" For this very reason, my thesis can therefore be seen to be beneficial for the study of the Reality Television genre: it provides a holistic overview analysis of how four individual formats developed between 2000 and 2018.

My research design centred on a critical approach towards television studies and was structured as a multiple case study methodology. Four case studies (Chapters Six to Nine) provided in-depth textual analysis of individual formats, and combined analyses of isolated seasons and an overall series. Textual analysis (as opposed to analysing the production or the audience), required locating patterns of meaning within the specified text. I was able to achieve a degree of data triangulation because I combined my textual analysis with a number of other sources (most often published primary works of various kinds). Each case study was purposively designed to highlight an intriguing aspect of the Entertainment Reality Television genre. Three of the case studies focused on the reality competition sub-genre, with the fourth focused on a docu-soap (this variation provides an additional perspective). The combination of the four case studies resulted in an overall picture of *what* formats are doing and *how* across an 18-year period.

11.2 Reflections

11.2.1 Implications of this research

The benefits of my research lie in three main areas. First, by limiting the time frame of the formats under analysis, it provides evidence of what took place at a very specific time in history - the last eighteen years of the Reality Television genre. However, this does not mean that my research is dated. On the contrary, this thesis will stand as a time-capsule of a movement within the genre, as it moved into – and maintained - prime time positioning.

Second, one of my main aims for this research was to investigate the qualities of Reality Television without the associated connection of taste or class. Instead, this thesis has deliberately focused on decoupling high/low class with good/bad connotations. Although in recent years the rise of "quality television" is showing a perceived shift towards television content, using the word "quality" implies an element of judgement in itself. In that sense, this thesis has remained positive in exploring the incorporation of genre-adjacent characteristics into the Reality Television genre, proving that a low/high connotation does not necessarily have to mean good or bad. The implications here lie in encouraging further research to maintain a similar decoupling. This may perhaps increase scholarship that searches for intriguing, positive aspects within perceived "low-class" areas that does more than look to audience meaning-making. The scholarly response to this thesis may be that the Reality Television genre remains "low-class", but with recognition that it does what it does well, even if that may not be "good".

Finally, while the research questions and focus of the overall thesis is an examination of the Reality Television genre, there is also benefit to the study of other genres in the field of television. For example, the case study in Chapter Six begins with an unpacking of the common characteristics of the soap-opera genre. Themes of the long-running narrative and the romantic entanglements of the 'super couple' provide the context to examine four of the thirty-five seasons of *Survivor*. While this is of course instrumental for my research, the implications here lie in how the expression of characteristics in an unexpected genre will flow back to the initial genre. In other words, if a soap opera show can see a new and compelling application of the 'super-couple' in a Reality Television show, how can this new

application be translated back into the soap opera? While analysing these characteristics from other genres has informed this thesis, an analysis from the opposing viewpoint may be of benefit to the original genres.

11.2.2 Limitations of research

This thesis was, of course, affected by several practical limitations. The first was restricting this study to only four case studies. This was due to a variety of practical factors, mainly that it is impossible to analyse every Reality Television show produced. Added to this are issues of access, as underperforming shows are no longer broadcast or are not available to stream or on DVD. Due to limitations of space the decision was made to perform only four case studies. As such, the potential texts were selected purposively as those that best typified particular aspects I wished to explore. A subsequent limitation here was the ability to access the original text, required for the textual analysis, with the final decisions eventually made due to access considerations. For example, an analysis into *The Real Housewives of Washington DC* would have made a fascinating counterpoint of how the politics of the region were expressed within the *Housewives* format, unfortunately it is extremely difficult to legally view this text from within New Zealand. Instead of surface-level analysis across a high volume of shows, this limitation resulted in performing critical in-depth analysis on a smaller of shows, resulting in a more robust and solid understanding of the Reality Television genre.

There was also the practical limitation of including specific details of my personal experience on a Reality Television show. While there could have been an element of ethnographic research included, this was restricted by the contract I signed as a participant on *The Bachelor*. Although this contract has been disregarded by other participants from that same season (including the leading man who consistently criticises the production, how he was portrayed, and several of the contestants), it was never my intent to include my time on the show as a form of research or analysis. Particularly as my exit from the show was clouded with accusations of academic 'spying', any contributions to this thesis from my own perspective have been minimal and relate more to my personal research viewpoint than any findings or conclusions overall.

11.3   Future research

This thesis exposed many avenues for further research. Although I initially chose not to perform audience analysis, I now realise the immense benefit such an approach might provide as the next stage in a wider project. While I have focused on what the genre is doing and how, the flipside to this would be to investigate what the audience is watching, and why based on the findings I have generated thus far. Have these formats placed their focus in the right areas? Have they been developing their format in line with what the audience wants? It also raises the intriguing possibility of whether the combination of knowing how a genre has developed and what an audience is seeking could culminate in a perfectly tailored Entertainment Reality Television show.

Another future line of enquiry would be an in-depth investigation into Reality Television in New Zealand. As covered in Chapter Two, because of its peculiar television environment, New Zealand had very early experiences with Reality Television, and has been an influential test audience for various formats. An interesting sub-topic here would be that while there have been a large number of original New Zealand productions, local versions of global formats have not been as common. Although there was early adoption of the singing competition show with *NZ Idol* and *X Factor NZ*, it is only since 2015 that the country has produced local versions of *The Bachelor*, *Housewives*, *Married at First Sight* (2017 -), or *Heartbreak Island* (2018 -). This sudden increase in local versions of global prime-time formats (outside of the singing competition) suggests there has been a shift in the last four years – what has instigated this, and why?

Further, as Chapter Eight demonstrated, the format bible allows for any given global format to be 'localised'. Analysis of *The Real Housewives of Auckland* focused on the global format and the subsequent regional differences. An alternative here, however, would be to consider this from the viewpoint of the region, and how does the local break through into the global format. In particular, how does New Zealand represent itself across various shows, despite global format constraints? What are the similarities and representations of New Zealand culture, as presented within local versions of *The Bachelor*, *The Real Housewives of Auckland*, or *NZ Idol*? Looking at this from the regional perspective, rather

than from the format, would raise interesting points in contrast to this thesis that would prove beneficial to both television and cultural scholarship.

An autoethnographic approach to Reality Television would also be incredibly beneficial. As mentioned in Chapter Three, there is very little academic research written from the perspective of the participant. With my own personal experience, combined with what ethnographic accounts from other participants that exist, this line of enquiry could be significant. A series of initial questions present themselves. For example, have participants noticed that the genre has developed, and how? On a larger scale, those who have participated multiple times and across different formats (for example, Boston Rob), would have fascinating insights of their experiences as their media literacy and competition expertise grew and reinforced each other. Although it would be harder to gain access in interviewing someone as prolific as Boston Rob than participants within a smaller scale (for example, New Zealand participants), it may be possible to conduct this research based on available interviews and sound-bites. My own personal experience of being a participant would provide a unique perspective as a researcher into this line of enquiry.

Lastly, based on my own experience of participating in a Reality Television show, there would appear to be a symbiotic relationship between a production and external media. For those shows that are still filming when the first episodes go to air, how does the immediate response from external media influence production's manipulation of the narrative? This is something I examined in research independent of this thesis, as my personal experience saw a dramatic shift in my 'character' as a result of media enquiries after the first episode screened. Providing an autoethnographic account into this symbiotic relationship (as much as possible with regards to the participant contract), would provide yet another scholarly angle to how the Reality Television genre has learned to incorporate external platforms to bolster the source text.

11.4   Summary

The closing thoughts from this thesis are that these formats within the Entertainment Reality Television genre have proven to be very adaptable, as the explosion and subsequent

success of prime-time Reality Television formats has both necessitated and encouraged risk-taking. Much like a soap-opera, *Survivor* offers themes of love and redemption with no end to the story in sight. The excitement of *The Bachelor's* live red-carpet event gathers viewers nationwide to join in the party from their lounge. Each location of the *Housewives* format allows a unique region to shine from within a recognisable series structure. And finally, *American Idol* continually adopted the latest digital media trends to encourage audience interaction. Instead of becoming irrelevant or losing viewers to new formats, the formats examined in this thesis all demonstrate the ability to adapt to ensure relevance, profitability, and longevity, predominantly by incorporating the successful characteristics of neighbouring genres.

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