

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

USING REALITY TELEVISION AND MEDIA NARRATIVES AS POLITICAL  
COMMODITIES TO SELL AUDIENCES ON THE 2016 UNITED STATES  
ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

By  
Ramon Febus

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

August 2016

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Using Reality Television and Media Narratives as  
Political Commodities to Sell Audiences on the 2016  
United States Electoral Campaign.

(August 2016)

Abstract of a dissertation at the University of Miami.

Dissertation supervised by Professor Christina Lane.

No. of pages in text. (261)

Reality television cultural and media narratives were used and marketed in the 2016 United States Electoral Campaign to reach and incite audiences and media consumers. Film analysis, television analysis, culture studies, rhetorical analysis, multi cultural discourse analysis, and social factor analysis were used as methods to contextualize, explain and juxtapose reality television media discourse as political marketing for audiences. Factual entertainment and reality television are historized to explain the current political environment and how it relates to the media atmosphere of television, social media and analyzing audiences. It is concluded that neoliberal narratives have led to the current media landscape. Topics related to the future of journalism, politics and mass culture are explored for future research.

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## Introduction

*“This is not entertainment. This is not a reality show.” – President Barack Obama*

*“Reality television has now taken over television. People want to see real moments and see life unfold in front of them. Not scripted, but real moments. . . . When you have a big reality-TV star as the front-runner for the Republican nomination, there is no way to separate it. This is the new reality.” - Omarosa*

In a rebuke of the media’s coverage of the presidential race to date, President Barack Obama told the media to “knock off trolling for ratings and clicks with emphasis on the circus,” because it is dangerous for the country (Calamur, 2016).

“What I’m concerned about is the degree to which reporting and information starts emphasizing the spectacle and the circus, because that’s not something we can afford in this election cycle,” Obama said when asked for his reaction to Donald Trump having become the presumptive GOP nominee (Calamur, 2016). “The American people, they’ve got good judgment, they’ve got good instincts, as long as they get good information,” he scolded to the press during a White House press briefing (Calamur, 2016).

“But, most importantly, and I speak to all of you in this room as reporters... I want to emphasize the degree to which we are in serious times and this is a really serious job. This is a contest for the Presidency of the United States. Every candidate, every nominee needs to be subject to exacting standards and genuine scrutiny. You have got to make sure that their budgets add up, if the way they’ve got an answer to a problem is actually plausible, that they have details for how it would work. And, if it’s completely implausible and would not work, that needs to be reported on. The American people need

to know that. If they take a position on international issues that could threaten war, or has the potential of upending our critical relationships with other countries, or would potentially break the financial system that needs to be reported on.” (Calamur, 2016)

However, as the 2016 United States Electoral Campaign unfolds, it is hard not to ask whether this call to seriousness and scrutiny is coming too late? Is this media to fulfilling its responsibility? The blurred lines of news and entertainment, which have always existed but have blurred further in contemporary times, and the climate of reality television contribute to a class discourse that stigmatizes the workers and minorities even as these same audiences often embrace celebrity culture and reality television tropes as representative and even “factual?”

This dissertation will examine the way that media discourse and cultural narratives, and particularly those narratives constructed through reality television, have functioned as political tools or commodities in the 2016 Electoral Campaign. It pays particular attention to the ways in which audiences and voters are outwardly positioned by purveyors of media as active participants but ultimately seen as objects of consumption. In order to better understand the way that the campaign played out in the media—via television, the Internet and social media, this dissertation will analyze the evolution of reality television and factual entertainment, television’s effects on audiences and how it relates to their needs for belonging, the production and economic motivators involved, and the construction and forging of a national identity in this process by the media. It will also explore the historical narratives that have led to this media discourse today and the social media bi-products of these cultural and media narratives. This dissertation will attempt to answer the question of how Donald Trump, a businessman

and a former reality TV star with no previous political experience became the Republican Nominee for the President of the United States in 2016. He easily stepped onto this political stage because of his success as on reality TV. Trump's ascendancy could not have happened if mainstream media did not give him such broad latitude to play his part, however. And as this dissertation will show, he could not have gotten as far as he did if his campaign was not engaging with deeply felt audience cultural narratives.

This dissertation will state the history of factual entertainment and how it begat the current state of reality television and the cultural narratives and media discourse that surround them and produce them. Then, it will explain how television industries, serialization and globalization still play a significant part in the current media landscape as compared to online streaming and OTT platforms. This analysis will then go to try to understand the motives, users and gratifications, personality traits, activity, participation and consumption of audiences of reality television cultural narratives and media consumption. Then it will be illustrated how the semiotic audience relationship applies to the political landscape. Film analysis will also be used to study this phenomenon.

## Chapter 1

### Literature Review

#### Methods

The dissertation analysis is inspired by the multi culture discourse analysis (MCDA) approach proposed by (Machin & Mayr, 2013). This methodology analyses linguistic elements of a text combined when appropriate with the analysis of visual elements. It is derived from Social Semiotics (Leeuwen, 2005). and treats the actions and artifacts used in communication as semiotic resources. In the following analysis, I treat spoken and visual discourse editing as semiotic resources that the producers and media use in order to produce a program with the potential to attract and entertain audiences.

I consider the following analysis to be a form of social actor analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2013). A central concept in this analysis is ‘recontextualization of social practice’, which centers on how social practices, including discursive practices, are turned into discourse and into representations of social practices in the context of specific discursive practices (Leeuwen, 2005). Recontextualizing a social practice necessarily involves making choices about how to represent the practice in question and how different resources will be used for different purposes. It is the end result of these choices that is analyzed. A basic aspect of analyzing discourse is to analyze choices. These choices made will stress certain identities of the participants and link particular values to them, and, of course, also suppress other identities and values.

The methods used to analyze creativity, commerce, and cultural productions are cogently addressed by Rodríguez-Ferrández who advocates a return to the classical

Frankfurt School's original term culture industries. The label dates back to the 1940s, of course, to Adorno and Horkheimer's devastating critique of mass media and mass culture. But as Rodríguez-Ferrándiz points out, our view of culture and its systematic (re)production has been recast and rehabilitated by Umberto Eco, Stuart Hall, John Fiske, Pierre Bourdieu, and other scholars. From their more nuanced perspective, "Consumption in general and its most eminent form, the consumption of culture, constituted an arena for a genuine construction of meaning, or at the very least, for a reappropriation for purposes that could not be anticipated, rather than a mere displaying of the meanings which had been craftily placed there by the producers of culture" (Ferrandiz, 2011).

Rodríguez-Ferrándiz prefers the term culture industries to other current labels—entertainment industries, leisure industries, and particularly, creative industries. The latter is widely used in Europe and Australia, he notes, and tends to dominate the discussions and policy legislation related to cultural production. In the process, the very concept of "creative work" has been diluted of all nuance and precision: "We have passed from the anguish and disappointment Adorno felt on seeing the creative act of the artist swallowed up by the logic of industry, to qualifying the entire industry as 'creative,' to place creativity itself at the very heart of this industry" (Ferrandiz, 2011). Rodríguez-Ferrándiz does not include media industries in his inventory of labels, although he acknowledges "the communicative explosion of all industrial production in a media environment" (Ferrandiz, 2011).

Media industries provides a venue in which these developments can and should be assessed, along with the larger theoretical issues involving the entrenched and very different conceptions of individual agency and authorship in film and television studies.

Film scholars continue to focus authorship studies on the director, a work role that is rarely even mentioned, let alone seriously considered, in discussions of TV series authorship. Television scholars, meanwhile, tend to gauge authorship in terms of the producer or the writer—or both in the case of the showrunner, who invariably rose through the writers' ranks to a management role, and who oversees the series as an executive producer while directly supervising the writing staff. These very different views of authorship are a function of the distinct modes of production involved, although these distinctions are rapidly blurring under current industry conditions.

As these studies spans a widening array of media industries, each with its own regimes of production and expression. As the forces of convergence and conglomeration bring these industries—and these regimes—into closer accord, issues of production and expression become ever more important and more complex (Schatz, 2010). Indeed, the challenges posed when dealing with adjacent industries like film and television seem rather modest once we begin to factor, say, the gaming and software industries into the equation (Schatz, 2010). However, how do these industries systematically create both capital and culture? How do they value standardization and innovation in the production and consumption of media content? What work is required to produce that content, and which work roles—and which workers—are privileged in that process? Questions of ownership and control pertain as well, of course, but these should be considered alongside—and in dynamic interaction with—those that address the expressive power and appeal of culture industry products (Schatz, 2010).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) will also be used. CDA approaches with methods from a variety of disciplines, including especially rhetoric and composition,

education, and communication, many making extensive use of rhetorical analysis and of complex longitudinal studies and institutional histories, ethnographic methods, and large archival rhetorical analysis.

Rhetoric and composition has always been concerned with the power of spoken and written discourse, in particular the ways in which language can be used to persuade audiences about important public issues. If anything, such interest has increased in recent times, constituting what Mike Rose has called a “public turn” (Oddo, 2013). CDA aligns itself with this tradition in attending to purpose, situation, genre, diction, style, and other rhetorical variables, but also supplements it in a number of ways. CDA will be used to interpret texts from twitter, media discourse and culture narratives.

In this dissertation, concepts from rhetorical theory and discourse analysis are combined to illustrate an approach to analyzing news discourse, particularly about cultural reality television narratives and media discourse. Specifically, it is shown how macro-news frames and micro-linguistic choices in media texts combine to accomplish the rhetorical goal of demarcating good science from bad science by creating presence for certain interpretations of the news story and by using specific lexical choices motivated by topic derived from an idealized vision of science. This framework is applied to media discourse.

## Brief Contextual History of Reality Television and Factual Entertainment

In 2008, Popular Mechanics magazine named *The Truman Show* as one of the 10 “most prophetic science-fiction movies ever.” Peter Weir’s movie starring Jim Carrey as an average guy, who has been bought by a company as an infant, is unknowingly filmed 24 hours per day for a popular TV show, and realizes at the age of 30 that his whole life has been a televised lie, was released in 1998. Soon afterwards, the world saw the breakthrough of a new kind of factual entertainment shows that also pretended to depict real people in real situations and captured their intimate moments with the camera: *Big Brother*, *Survivor* and others were an instant success and became the prototypes of the reality TV genre already parodied in *The Truman Show*.

The new formats introduced around the year 2000 had several predecessors already featuring some of their characteristics. For example, the makers of *The Truman Show* must have been familiar with the MTV series *The Real World*, which documented the everyday life of ordinary people since the early 1990s; hence, they didn’t need much imagination to create a fictional over-the-top version of a reality TV show. But they were prophetic with their assumption that reality TV was not a short-lived boom, and they anticipated the discussions about authenticity and ethical problems of the genre that were initiated by the popular shows of the early 21st century (Aubrey et al., 2012). Even the storyline of *The Truman Show* later appeared in an actual format.

These pioneer formats still attract millions of viewers, although their audience rates have dropped over of the years. They now have to compete with a huge number of new reality-based entertainment formats introduced during the past decade. To name a few, casting competition shows have taken over such as *American Idol*, *America’s Top*

*Model*, and *America's Got Talent* series have revived and modernized the genre of the televised talent contest by giving a deeper insight in the candidates' lives. This casting competition format also applies to dating game shows such as *The Bachelor* which allow the viewers to share romantic moments with the participants; makeover and coaching programs provide advice for a better life in an entertaining way.

Since 2009, millions of Americans have followed the adventures of "Snooki," "JWoww," "The Situation," and their friends in the MTV show *Jersey Shore*, and even President Obama publicly joked about the frequent solarium visits of the *Jersey Shore* cast in a speech at the White House Correspondents' Dinner. *Jersey Shore* also demonstrates that people may gain celebrity status by participating in a reality TV show; to name only a few examples more, one could mention successful casting show contestants such as pop singers Kelly Clarkson and the media conglomerate that are the Kardashians and the star of the apprentice, Donald Trump.

These pseudo celebrities have been created in a shift from reality television into factual entertainment (Hill, 2005). Factual entertainment distances itself from reality television in breaking the fourth wall where the participants are observed from a "fly on the wall" perspective whether it be in front of the cameras, so called "behind the scenes", in interviews and in social media (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). Factual entertainment is thus very attractive for viewers and has gained importance since the end of the last century. The audience is interested in watching "real" events and "real" persons in television entertainment. The fact that these celebrities are controversially discussed due to concerns over their effects on society or criticized for voyeurism, contrived settings, or commercialism, may even have increased this interest (Aubrey et al., 2012). Both success

and controversy of the new factual entertainment programs have also made them an important research topic for social scientists.

### **History of Factual Entertainment**

TV formats portraying ordinary people in unscripted situations are almost as old as TV itself. Allen Funt's *Candid Camera* about people confronted with funny, unusual situations and filmed with a hidden camera, first aired in 1948, is often seen as a prototype of reality TV programming (McCarthy, 2009). In the beginning, some critics condemned his show as an invasion of privacy, but with the same recording technologies as used for espionage and surveillance, and playing with topics such as unquestioned authorities or uncontrollable machines, the show obviously fitted the Zeitgeist of the Cold War era and became a long lasting success (Tal-Or & Hershman-Shitrit, 2015). The appeal of the program, which holds true in the present, could also be explained; similarly to later reality TV shows, with the voyeuristic focus on unguarded, unscripted, and "intimate" experiences of other people, presented from unseen, unacknowledged vantage points. Here is a brief timeline that goes over the most seminal moments in the history of Factual Entertainment and Reality Television:

- August 1948: Allen Funt brings his popular radio show *Candid Microphone* to television as *Candid Camera* and reality TV is born.
- January 1956: After years of airing locally in Los Angeles, *Queen for a Day* goes national on NBC. It features four housewives telling their tales of woe to a studio audience, which votes on who will be *Queen for a Day*. The show's success changes the way networks look at daytime programming.

- December 1965: Chuck Barris adds a new twist to the reality genre with *The Dating Game*. The show runs on ABC until 1973.
- January 1973: PBS debuts *An American Family*, a 12-part series documenting an ordinary American family: the Louds of Santa Barbara, California. 10 million people tune in to watch the Louds, Pat and Bill, and their five kids, one of whom, Lance, was openly gay.
- March 1980: People with quirky talents finally get to showcase them on TV as *That's Incredible!* debuts on ABC, spotlighting everything from a man who catches arrows in his hands to an acrobat who leaps over moving cars.
- March 1989: *Cops* the series that follows the exploits of real police officers, quietly launches on Fox. The show is still going strong after 20 seasons and over 700 episodes.
- November 1994: Hours after the final episode of *The Real World: San Francisco* airs on MTV, cast member Pedro Zamora dies of AIDS. The gay AIDS educator gripped viewers thanks to his highly charged exchanges with the controversial Puck.
- 1996: Reality vet Scott Sternbergh joins *Before They Were Stars* as an executive producer. The show is one of the first to get up-close-and-personal with the everyday lives of celebrities, and spawns a generation of similar reality shows.
- May 2000: Sixteen ordinary Americans are marooned on a remote South China Sea island for CBS' *Survivor: Borneo*.
- August 2000: Darva Conger, winner of Fox's reality show *Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?* extends her 15 minutes of fame by posing nude for Playboy.

- June 2001: Contestants consume their first gross edibles on NBC's *Fear Factor*. On the second episode, participants are required to eat a number of worms to stay in the competition.
- July 2001: Justin Sebik becomes the first contestant in U.S. reality-competition television history to be kicked off a show, when CBS' *Big Brother 2* evicts him for pulling a knife on Krista Stegall.
- November 2001: The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences adds an Emmy category for reality television . Fox's *American High* takes the prize.
- June 2002: With little fanfare, *American Idol* debuts on Fox as a summer replacement show. Approximately 50 million viewers tune in to the September season finale.
- September 2002: *The Osbournes* MTV's reality series about Ozzy Osbourne and his quirky home life, wins the Emmy for outstanding nonfiction program (reality).
- June 2003: *From Justin to Kelly* the big-screen musical starring *American Idol* winner Kelly Clarkson, opens in theaters. It is unsuccessful grossing under \$5 million.
- September 2003: The Emmy institutes an award honoring outstanding reality-competition program. CBS' *The Amazing Race* wins.
- December 2003: Trista Rehn earns a \$1 million payday as the star of ABC's *The Bachelorette* by allowing the network to televise her wedding to the competition's winner Ryan Sutter. The nuptials draw over 26 million viewers.

- November 2004: Rob Mariano and Amber Brkich are the final two left standing in CBS' *Survivor: All-Stars*. The couple goes on to compete twice in *The Amazing Race* and have their wedding air as a CBS special.
- July 2005: Over 22 million people tune in to see *General Hospital's* Kelly Monaco and partner Alec Mazo out dance actor John O'Hurley and partner Charlotte Jorgensen to become the first winners of ABC's *Dancing With the Stars*.
- July 2008: *American Idol's* Ryan Seacrest, *Dancing With the Stars'* Tom Bergeron, *Deal Or No Deal's* Howie Mandel, *Project Runway's* Heidi Klum and *Survivor's* Jeff Probst are honored as the first five Emmy nominees in the new category outstanding host for a reality or reality-competition program.

Elements of modern reality TV can be discovered in both non-fictional entertainment shows such as broadcast contests, quiz and game shows, talk shows and documentaries about ordinary people. Thus, a history of reality TV would not be complete without a brief insight in the development of these genres with their long tradition. Like *Candid Camera*, the first talent contests in U.S. television date back to the late 1940s.

Notable beauty and musical contests have been televised since the 1950s. The Miss America pageant was first broadcast in 1954 and the annual Eurovision Song Contest, with an estimated average of 125 million viewers in recent years one of the world's most popular nonsports events on television started in 1956. While in the early years, the winners of such contests were mostly elected by a jury, the first forms of voting by the viewers appeared in the 1970s, and the widespread use of this interactive element, which has become so important in many modern reality TV shows, started in the 1990s, after the capacity of telephone networks had been remarkably improved. At Eurovision

Song Contest, an international telephonic and SMS voting all over Europe was introduced in 1997. These evolved into very successful variety shows in the 1960s which was portrayed prophetically in 1957 by Elia Kazan's *A Face In The Crowd* which will be discussed later in further detail to analyze the parallels with the rise of Donald Trump in the political sphere.

Quiz and game shows, giving ordinary people the possibility to present their knowledge and skills to a wide audience, were also very popular in the early years of television. In the U.S. they almost disappeared from prime time after many of the higher stake shows were investigated for being rigged in the late 1950s, but shows with lower winning prizes soon made a comeback on daytime TV. In many other countries these shows had a much more permanent presence on both public service and private channels. But it was not before the 1990s when a worldwide renaissance of high stake prime time quiz shows was initiated by *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?* which was a British format created in 1998 and subsequently licensed or optioned in more than 100 countries.

Shows such as *Queen for a Day* or *Strike It Rich* where the candidates had to describe an object or service they desperately needed and were awarded with personalized prizes, already anticipated elements of confessional talk shows and makeover programs. Dating shows such as *The Dating Game* were another subgenre in which the candidates had to sacrifice some of their privacy. With the game element omitted, it was a short step from such shows to the confessional talk show genre, focusing on ordinary people instead of the celebrity guests that appeared in the classical talk show formats.

This subgenre, presenting intimate stories and often touching taboos, was mainly introduced by *The Phil Donahue Show* in 1967 and created a boom: the daytime talk show. The concept was popularized by *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (1986-2011) and became very successful in American and European daytime programs in the 1990s, after the focus of many shows had shifted from personal issues connected with social injustice to interpersonal conflicts, but although slightly declined in popularity afterwards they never went away because of their low costs to produce (Shattuc, 2009). While confessional talk shows are not always seen as a subgenre of reality TV, they feature typical elements of the genre like helping ordinary people to screen presence and establishing problems of everyday life as communication topics (Grimm, 1997). Besides non-fictional entertainment shows, another important ancestry line in the genealogy of reality TV refers to documentaries. In *Candid Camera* and other projects, Allen Funt wanted to document the behavior of “the average man in a crisis” (McCarthy, 2010).

McCarthy’s work attracted the attention of social scientists that started using hidden cameras for their research, including Stanley Milgram who became famous for his controversial experiments on obedience to authorities held at Yale University in the early 1960s. The scientific background of the wish to depict “real” life and “real” actions of ordinary people may be an explanation why some public service channels, with their mission of popular education were among the pioneers in the field of documentaries seen as precursors of modern reality TV formats (McCarthy, 2010).

This stands in contrast to the present-day perception that reality TV formats as private TV stations mainly broadcast cheap, commercialized and sometimes ethically controversial programs. *An American Family*, broadcast on PBS from 1971 to 1973, is

often discussed as one of the first reality TV programs (Murray & Ouellette, 2009). Originally intended to be a chronicle of the daily life of a typical American family, the 12-part series documented the separation of the parents Bill and Pat Loud, as well as the coming-out of their homosexual son Lance. The program stood in the tradition of observational, so called “fly- on-the-wall” documentaries introduced in the 1960s (Bruzzi, 1994), but also borrowed structural elements of drama and soap opera with the intention to question the conventional depictions of family life in fictional entertainment (Kompare, 2009).

The series was very popular, but also provoked scandalized reactions. The Louds were criticized as either symbols of the cultural fallout of the 1960s or as victims of a manipulative sociological experiment conducted by unscrupulous producers (Hill, 2005). Three decades later, a similar format demonstrated the fluid boundaries between documentary and reality TV. *American High*, a series about the lives of 14 high school students, was sold as a reality program since its first appearance on Fox in August 2000.

In the following year, PBS picked up the program and marketed it as a documentary series (Murray & Ouellette, 2009). From the present-day perspective, *An American Family* and later formats depicting people in their usual, more or less extraordinary living or professional environment may be categorized as docusoaps. Docusoaps differ from conventional documentaries as they prioritize entertainment over social commentary and take advantage of structural and dramaturgical elements known from soap operas such as the focus on character personality, short narrative sequences, intercuts of multiple plot lines, mini cliff-hangers and the use of a musical soundtrack (Bruzzi, 1994).

These magazine-style programs combining evolved in the nineties with camcorder or surveillance footage, eyewitness testimonies, reconstructed scenes, and expert statements were the first for which contemporary scientists and media actually used the term “reality TV” in the public discussion. They have also applied this term for talk shows, docusoaps, and a new form, “constructed” documentaries only since the mid-1990s (Dovey, 2000). The earliest notable examples for this new form were the Dutch series *Nummer 28* in 1991 and the very similar American *The Real World* which has been on MTV since 1992.

Both formats entail many of the textual characteristics, which are defining the current form of reality TV. For example, young adults were cast in a manner to ignite conflict and dramatic narrative development and placed in a setting filled with cameras and microphones, and the producers employed rapid editing techniques in an overall serial structure (Murray & Ouellette, 2009). All these elements reappeared some years later in *Survivor*, which came from Sweden in 1997 and *Big Brother*, which came from the Netherlands in 1999.

The two formats initiating the boom of reality TV in the beginning of the 21st century. Both programs combined the voyeuristic aspect of the reality program with the competitive element of the game show (Tincknell & Raghuram, 2002). In spite, if not because, of controversial discussions in the media, the new shows had immediate success and were sold to many other countries (Tincknell & Raghuram, 2002). In the following years, dozens of new formats fitting the definitions of reality television mentioned above and first of all, sold as reality formats by the producer, were introduced all over the world and led to a massive diversification of the genre, since they combined elements of other

genres and introduced new elements. This gave us the factual entertainment landscape we have today.

### **Factual Entertainment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Commercialization of “Real”**

Many subgenres of reality television emerged at the turn of the century but as of today there are two main categories: competition and docusoaps (Nabi, 2007). Ouelette (2014) expands this approach to characterize various subgenres of reality TV and to bring them in a systematic order. They distinguished “narrative” and “performative” reality TV. Narrative reality TV refers to formats entertaining the viewers by an authentic or staged rendition of extraordinary, real, or close-to-reality events with non-prominent actors, whereas formats providing a stage for uncommon performances with a direct impact on the participants’ lives fall into the category of performative reality TV. By this definition, the latter category includes all reality TV formats with competitive elements. Ouelette (2014) also distinguished “docusoaps” portraying people in their usual living environment and “reality soaps” bringing them in a new, uncommon environment.

Narrative reality TV includes some of the early forms of reality TV such as the news magazine programs based around emergency service activities, and docusoaps about people of any professional or private background. Other subgenres of narrative reality TV are real life comedy such as the MTV series *Jackass*, the huge boom in television court programs both in English and Spanish television such as *Judge Judy* and *Caso Cerrado* and personal help shows.

However, the huge blockbuster tentpole of narrative reality television are docusoaps. Notable American examples include the *Real Housewives* series following the

lives of affluent housewives in American suburbs; *Jon & Kate Plus 8*, portraying a family with sextuplets and twins; *Laguna Beach*, about teenagers in California filmed in a rather narrative than documentary style; and its spin-off *The Hills*. Another series dealing with young people partying on the beach became MTV's biggest reality TV success so far: *Jersey Shore*, following eight housemates, mostly of Italian-American origin, spending their summer at the Jersey Shore and on other beaches, started in December 2009 and set record ratings of up to 8.45 million viewers per show (Gorman, 2011).

The series introduced new terms, acronyms, and phrases into American popular culture and caused controversies regarding the portrayal of Italian-American stereotypes. The neoliberal narratives and cultural discourses will be discussed later on with further detail.

Unlike in *The Real World*, but like in some other more recent formats, the cast of *Jersey Shore* did not change with the start of a new season. As a result, the participants' notoriety does not fade after the end of a season, as it is the case in many other reality TV formats, but is continuously revived. This brought for the first time the concept of seriality in factual entertainment. The *Jersey Shore* protagonists have thus become well-established media celebrities. However, as of the end of the fourth season in autumn 2011, their celebrity status is still no issue in the show itself. In the meantime, *Jersey Shore* has become a field of academic research of its own, with universities organizing classes and conferences focusing on the series (e.g., University of Chicago, 2011; Caramanico, 2011).

Besides docusoaps about "ordinary" people possibly becoming celebrities in the course of the broadcast, the early 21st century saw the birth, expansion and introduction

of celebrity docusoaps, giving an insight into the daily life of already prominent people. Sometimes these shows are made in a humorous way, using narrative conventions of the sitcom genre. *The Osbournes* depicting the life of rock star Ozzy Osbourne and his family, may thus be categorized as a docusoap (Dhoest, 2004), but also, more precisely, the birth of the docusitcom or reality sitcom (Murray & Ouellett, 2009).

Other MTV series documented the life of pop singer couple Jessica Simpson and Nick Lachay in *Newlyweds: Nick and Jessica* and the beginning of the musical career of Ashlee Simpson, Jessica's younger sister in *The Ashlee Simpson Show*. Success of such celebrity shows is not determined by the initial celebrity status of the portrayed personality, and this status may change in the course of the series.

Kim Kardashian, the main protagonist of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* had mainly gained notoriety for suing a pornographic film company after the publication of a private sex tape; but she developed her career as a model, actress, and businesswoman parallel to the broadcast of her show, which offered a platform to promote her commercial projects. In any case, the celebrity docusoap or docusitcom can be seen as a means for more or less prominent people to keep the attention of the media and the audience.

In contradiction to the claim to depict "real life," not every format in the field of narrative reality TV is unscripted. Producers of reality TV formats are regularly accused by viewers, former participants, or former collaborators that parts of their shows are scripted, and possibly faked scenes are discussed in Internet forums and sometimes also in the popular press. But in several formats, the existence of a script is openly admitted. Court programs and personal help shows usually present fictional cases; what counts is

that the experts are “real” (Grimm, 2010). The only formal difference to conventional, unscripted docusoaps is a discrete indication of the fictionality in the end credits. For the producers, these formats have two advantages: (1) regarding the need for more sensational and extraordinary stories, it has become easier to cast actors than to find interesting people willing and able to tell their story on television; and (2) the makers can insert statements and confessions which would hardly be made in public by real people, especially in contexts of crime (Brauck, 2009). The success of these broadcasts proves that viewers obviously don’t care much about the lack of authenticity.

The major perpetrators of this in the docusoaps genre are dating and makeover programs that usually depict the participants’ actual living environment, but they are intended to have a direct impact on their lives. Contrary to earlier dating shows, *The Bachelor* became successful on prime time TV (Gray, 2009). Finding Miss Perfect or Mr. Right has not remained the only change in a person’s life documented by reality TV.

### **History and Conceptualization of Reality Television**

The research and literature review is divided in three parts. The first part, dealing with the concept of reality TV, starts with a discussion about definitions of reality TV in contrast to other forms of entertainment and documentaries, then traces the history of factual entertainment in the 20th century and makes an attempt to map the current reality TV landscape by presenting the various subgenres and their development.

The second part briefly deals with reality TV as a global phenomenon and discusses why non-fictional entertaining television formats could become successful all over the world and which strategies are applied to adapt them to local markets with

different viewer habits and preferences. The third part, which will go into further details than the rest, gives an overview of studies about the audience of reality TV programs: Why do these programs attract such a wide range of audiences? Which gratifications are sought and obtained when people watch particular formats? What do viewers think about the authenticity of reality TV shows? This is the role of reality TV programs in promoting neoliberal values and imparting them to their audience.

Reality TV can in fact be seen as a meta-genre including various subgenres. While early reality TV formats such as *The Real World* focused on “real life” and the portrayal of “ordinary,” non-prominent people, these characteristics are no longer typical for the genre. Instead of an “attempt to ‘capture’ ‘a life lived,’” recent formats of the genre can rather be seen as “televsual arenas of formatted environments in which the more traditional observational rhetoric of documentary jostles for space with the discourses of display and performance” (Flolmes & Jermyn, 2004).

In other words, reality television was known for ordinary people in ordinary circumstances being “real” and becoming celebrities. Factual entertainment kept that same format but it used celebrities in supposed “ordinary” circumstances and gave them familiarity and realness. Audiences have the voyeuristic impression and illusion that they are in Kim Kardashian’s living room and Donald Trump’s boardroom. And they have let audiences into their lives and likewise with audiences. They are not just characters on television, whether they like them or not, these celebrities become kin.

Participants of reality TV shows may gain celebrity status due to television exposure, forming a new stratum of “ordinary” or “temporary” celebrity in “programs that film real people as they live out events in their lives, contrived or otherwise, as they

occur” (Ouellette, 2014). Several key elements characterize such programs: (a) people portraying themselves, (b) filmed at least in part in their living or working environment rather than on a set, (c) without a script (or at least pretending to be without a script), (d) with events placed in a narrative context, (e) for the primary purpose of entertainment (Lorenzo-Dus & Blitvich, 2013).

The genre transcends the boundaries of classical television genres by means of documentary elements, merging information with entertainment, and reality with fiction (Kruger, 2010). Reality shows differ from classical documentaries in regard to their main intention: Instead of stressing journalistic inquiry or intending to stimulate political debates, they are primarily made for entertainment and diversion (Comer, 2009).

Audiences become accustomed to this and their judgments are only based on entertainment values and a verisimilitude of realness. This intention leads to the use of more or less staged or artificial environments (Comer, 2009). The event covered by the broadcast is initiated by the medium itself, which is not the case in conventional documentaries (Kruger, 2010).

The primary distinction of reality TV from fictional entertainment is the fixation on “authentic” personalities, situations, problems, and narratives. But while program makers promise to depict reality, the plots of reality-based formats are influenced by the participants’ awareness of being filmed and by the necessity for the producers to cut down the filmed footage to the length of a TV broadcast (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). Little is left to chance in reality TV formats. Like in fictional entertainment, location and cast are carefully selected before the shooting. But there are two main differences to fictional formats. The actors are non-professional and in most cases they act without a script. Still,

a common characteristic of reality TV programs remains their claim to provide viewers an “unmediated, voyeuristic, and yet often playful look into what might be called the ‘entertaining real’” (Murray & Ouellette, 2009).

This claimed “authenticity” might also be seen as a primary selling point of the genre. In order to gain public attention for their reality TV shows, TV channels often present them as extraordinary media events, stressing their importance and uniqueness. Possible means for this “eventization” (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004) are the extensive use of program trailers; features about the show in news broadcasts; talk show appearances of hosts, makers, or participants; and in some cases even spin-off magazines providing a deeper insight into the participants’ lives.

This has also been in other media, especially press, and regularly cover developments in reality TV shows. The shows are particularly newsworthy if they provide dramatic contents and moral controversies. The producers intend such controversies because they raise public interest and awareness. Along with dramatization, stereotyping, focus on emotions, and intimate details, calculated breaking of taboos has thus become one of the typical strategies of reality TV producers (Klaus & Liicke, 2003). As a consequence, a “perfume of scandal” can be observed around many shows of the genre (Biltreyst, 2004). However, in most cases the public discussion on controversial reality TV formats calms down after the initial phase of a broadcast. In essence, if a show is successful enough to be aired over several seasons, it is no longer disputed. However, what better format than an election cycle where it has a specific end date and many events such as debates, town halls, primaries stressing their “uniqueness”? How many “Super Tuesdays” were there in this Primary Season?

Which leads to audience interactivity. Public interest is also given by the interactivity of some shows, allowing the viewers to feel that they can take part and influence the content of the show. This is especially the case in reality game shows or in casting shows where audiences can vote to evict participants and elect winners (Holmes, 2004). Much like in politics. But there are also many popular reality TV formats without the possibility of televoting such as programs without competition among the participants or contests in which solely a jury elects the winner. However, many reality-based formats involve their audience by discussing developments and candidates in online forums or, more recently, on social media pages, and providing other interactive features on social media serving also as a testing ground for conventional media outlets (Ouellette, 2014).

Although the possibilities to involve viewers actively have become much more sophisticated over the years there is a long tradition of interactive media, i.e. letters to newspapers, calling in to radio talk shows, participating in television giveaway sweepstakes, etc. However, this fostering of a sense of audience engagement and to create a loyal community among viewers has never been at its height like today.

Six months before Bill Clinton was elected president for the first time, *The Real World* debuted on MTV, signaling the beginning of the network's retreat from music videos and its embrace of reality programming. To be more specific, the series debuted on May 21, 1992, the same day Clinton made a campaign speech that addressed the debate over family values and noted "TV's crass commercialism and glorification of selfishness and violence" (Baruh, 2010).

By the time Clinton was preparing to leave the White House eight years later, reality TV was starting to infiltrate mainstream pop culture, thanks largely to the success

of CBS's *Survivor*. In the 2000s, as reality shows swelled in number and transformed from mere trend into a diverse, Emmy-recognized genre, critics repeatedly wondered whether these shows were debasing our society.

In 2016, Honey Boo Boo has come and gone, but reality TV is still a legitimate genre, one we've been watching and absorbing for more than two decades. At the moment, another Clinton, that would be Hillary, is six months away from maybe, possibly, being elected president. And thanks to the presumptive Republican nominee, it feels like we've reached another milestone for the reality-TV age: The executive producer and former star of a reality competition show is attempting to make America great again by drumming up controversy like a professional *Real Housewives* catfight-starter.

Donald Trump is many things: a business mogul, a real estate magnate, and a go-to punch line. But before he got into politics many Americans knew him primarily as the host, judge, boss, but primarily the reality television star of NBC's *The Apprentice*. When the entrepreneurial competition show debuted in 2004, it instantly became a top 10 hit. Millions tuned in every week to hear Trump say his signature line, "You're fired," and cement his image as a man who played up conflict for the cameras and who never met a self-promotional product placement he didn't like. He was a quintessential reality star and a senior Trump campaign adviser, Paul Manafort, said "This is the ultimate reality show. It's the presidency of the United States" (Calamur, 2016).

And if Trump is the reality-TV candidate, the rules and tropes of the genre he mastered can help us understand both his appeal and his limitations. Everyone may love to watch the villains and the insult-lobbing ringmasters on reality shows, but no one ever

roots for them, which, technically, should not bode well for Trump's chances. However, as mentioned from previous reality television shows, audiences always remember the "villains" and in most cases root for them. They stay around longer and producers love to keep them around.

When Trump's supporters are asked what they like about him, they often cite his blunt talk and lack of political correctness. That off-the-cuff style, including his insistence on making outrageous claims alleging that Ted Cruz's father was buddies with Lee Harvey Oswald, or accusing Mexican immigrants of being rapists is, consciously or not, a play right out of the reality-show-contestant handbook. The people who stick around longest on competition shows aren't always the ones with the most "skill" at whatever it is the shows make contestants do.

Often, they're the ones who stir up the most hate-watch rage such as "Jonny Fairplay", Omarosa, Richard Hatch, Puck from the *Real World* and even when their intentions are benign, the vocally semi-challenged Sanjaya *American Idol*. Surely Trump and his advisers must know it, too. Blustering his way through rallies and interviews with his mix of insult comedy and unrestrained id has earned Trump plenty of media attention and helped him solidify his reputation as the guy who bucks the establishment and doesn't worry about policy specifics. He obviously believes that approach will appeal to voters who, as TV viewers, have long been energized by outspoken truth-tellers. So far, he's been absolutely right.

But what the past two decades of reality TV also teach us is that the loudest, most contentious person in the pack doesn't always win. On *UnREAL*, co-created by Sarah Gertrude Shapiro, a former field producer for *The Bachelor*, the "villain" of

“Everlasting,” the reality show within the show, is a Machiavellian beauty named Britney who gets booted off early in the proceedings. She does return to the show for the sake of juicing ratings, but she doesn’t emerge as the victor because, even though she provides drama, the producers and writers realize that’s not what the audience of “Everlasting” wants to see.

Trump’s own show provides another example. Consider the first season of *The Apprentice*, which ran during the 2004 presidential primary race. Contestant Omarosa Manigault became a celebrity and later, a regular on the reality-show circuit by constantly getting into arguments and insulting the members of her team. She managed to stay in play for nine weeks until Trump fired her for being too much of a loose cannon.

But like the man who terminated her “employment,” Omarosa proved she had staying power, returning to compete two more times in the spin-off, *Celebrity Apprentice*, and appearing on shows like *Fear Factor* and *The Surreal Life*. She’s also publicly supported Trump the presidential candidate; last year, after praising his performance in a debate. Omarosa said, “Reality television has now taken over television. People want to see real moments and see life unfold in front of them. Not scripted, but real moments. . . . When you have a big reality-TV star as the front-runner for the Republican nomination, there is no way to separate it. This is the new reality” (Calamur, 2016).

Which all may explain why many people have been observing Trump, and the election in general, with detachment. The primaries and caucuses notwithstanding, it’s still early, and many have engaged with the political theater the same way audiences engage with reality TV. During the debates, audiences engage for an evening of live tweeting, the same way when watching *The Bachelor*. Some people laugh about the

possibility of a President Trump being inaugurated because even now, it feels as likely as watching Snooki deliver the State of the Union address.

However, this is how audiences tend to process most things as a culture these days. Having a reality-TV celebrity running for commander in chief may subconsciously signal our brains to participate in this election the same way we've grown accustomed to consuming reality shows: not as if they're real, as Omarosa suggests, but instead believing that none of it is genuine, that none of it has any actual consequences.

When it comes to deciding who should run the country, though, there clearly are consequences. The "bad guys" don't usually carry the day on reality shows, but there certainly have been times when a pompous blowhard has managed to emerge victorious. The conniving Richard Hatch won the first season of *Survivor*, even though he was openly considered to be a snake. That's a reality show; tribal-council politics shouldn't reflect electoral politics. But maybe there's a cautionary tale in that, a reminder that the best man or woman doesn't always win, even if the majority of those watching wish they would.

Back in 1992, a month after *The Real World* first aired, Bill Clinton appeared on MTV to answer questions from young voters as part of a live town hall broadcast when he eventually won the election, his willingness to court the youth demographic on MTV was frequently cited as a factor that led him to victory. It was another example of a politician benefitting from his compelling TV presence, not unlike the way John F. Kennedy did when he debated Richard Nixon in 1960, or how Ronald Reagan built on his persona as an affable movie star.

Presidential elections have always been about celebrity, so maybe it was inevitable that a reality-show personality would eventually find his way into one. Still, to quote the slogan made famous by *The Real World* candidates are “picked... to have their lives taped. Find out what happens, when people stop being polite and start getting real.”

It is important to analyze why Richard Hatch and his namesake Richard Nixon won. What narratives culturally and media discourse surround this reality TV atmosphere for this to happen. This will be discussed in the next section.

## Chapter 2

### Cultural Narratives and Media Discourse

#### Cultural Discourse, Neoliberal Narratives and “Technology of Self”

Sociologist David Grazian argued that “the narrative conventions of reality TV echo the most central policymaking paradigm in America in the past decade: the neoliberal agenda” (Grazian, 2010). In this context, various scholars have discussed the role of reality TV in communicating and supporting neoliberal values. Neoliberalism can be defined as a range of discourses absolutely legitimating the market, but delegitimizing institutional forces seeking to counter the market, such as the state and the social (Miller, 2007).

This worldview has generated specific trends which have accelerated globally since the 1980s, such as spending cuts on public services, economic deregulation, privatization of state-owned institutions in the name of efficiency, and the elimination of the concept of public good or community, replacing it with individual responsibility (Ouellette, 2014). The importance of entrepreneurial liberty leads to an organization of social resources and human labor, which requires of its participants continuous loyalty and the acceptance of permanent surveillance in order to optimize products and to allow closely targeted marketing. For example, it may affect an individual’s personal life in a way that employees have to be flexible in their working hours and “always available” for the company. But the system also demands accepting the fragility and impermanence of the opportunities it provides (Couldry, 2008).

Similarities between these characteristics and the settings of competitive reality TV shows are obvious. Contestants are provided with tasks, which they must fulfill on their own, and for which they have to take full responsibility for success or failure. At the same time, they are under constant surveillance, and even in cases of a good performance, they can be easily expelled from the show. In his analysis of *Big Brother*, Couldry (2008) stated that the show legitimates the concept of constant surveillance, since this concept is the precondition for the viewers' pleasure to see the candidates in intimate situations.

Furthermore, he argued that the performance "values" of *Big Brother* are striking for their fit with the demands imposed by neoliberal practice on workers. First, candidates have to obey an absolute and unquestionable external authority, the media producers; second, team conformity is also demanded, since the acceptance of compulsory teamwork is a basic rule of the game; third, candidates have to be "passionate" and to show a positive attitude, but must remain "authentic" to have success in the game—which reminds one of guidelines for employees as made for example by the British supermarket chain Asda, requiring emotional investment and demanding that every smile must be "a real smile" (The Observer, 2004); finally, in spite of all social dimensions of the show, the contestants are judged against each other as individuals.

Constant self-improvement is often suggested as the only reliable protection from the uncertainty about employment stability and opportunities in a neoliberal economy demanding flexibility, ongoing corporate reinvention, and a shift from production to branding (Ouellette & Flay, 2008). The boom of the self-help industry with specialized literature, as well as contributions in magazines, the tabloid press, and TV broadcasts in

the early 21st century contributed to that trend. For example, in the field of reality TV, makeover and casting shows present work on the self as a prerequisite for personal and professional success.

The most obvious examples of self-fashioning on television are beauty and style makeover programs. Sender (2006), in her study about *Queer Eye for a Straight Guy*, as well as Ouellette and Flay (2008) in a more comprehensive analysis, discussed the role of these formats promoting “technologies of the self” with which candidates should be able to engineer better, more fulfilling lives. These “technologies of self” shifts and narratives acquiesce to the “Make America Great Again” campaign.

Trump candidates are telling stories about the weak and corrupt state of the nation that are resonating with millions. Popular post-mortem accounts have helped readers understand how presidential campaigns evolve in response to rapidly changing events and how campaigns often affect the victor’s subsequent presidency. More importantly, however, they remind us of the stories that candidates tell about themselves. These self-narratives are intended to define the candidate to voters in a way that makes them seem worthy of the nation’s highest office.

This year Hillary Clinton offers perhaps the most complex storyline, emphasizing her multiple roles and identities: woman, mother, grandmother, devout Methodist, former First Lady, US Senator, and Secretary of State, and lifelong proponent for liberal issues. Which strand of her storyline she emphasizes the most often depends on the particular issue she is addressing. Among the Republicans, both Senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz have played up their own life narratives: offspring of Cuban immigrants, family

men, devout Christians, and lifelong champions of conservative principles and traditional values.

Such detailed self-narratives may prove dangerous to the candidates when they seem to clash with other realities and accounts. A successful presidential candidate, like a reality television star, not only presents a compelling self-narrative, but also constructs a narrative about America: its origins, its problems, and its promise; using mostly vague language about big ideas. This is where Trump has flourished in his “Make America Great Again” narrative.

It is not the first time the word America has been used as a rallying cry or a neoliberal narrative in a presidential campaign. President Ronald Reagan’s 1984 “Morning in America” campaign theme is perhaps the most famous and successful American narrative in recent memory. It has become a surprisingly durable meme about emerging from darkness into a new era of prosperity and optimism.

Both Presidents Clinton and Obama trafficked in the idea of “hope,” tying their personal narratives to a vision of American economic and racial progress. And recently, the phrase “American exceptionalism” has become shorthand for a narrative about an America set apart from the other nations of the earth whose destiny is to lead the world into peace, democracy, freedom, and prosperity. These carefully crafted patriotic neoliberal “mono-narratives” not only enable candidates to talk about their own vision for the nation, but also provide ways to draw a contrast with their opponent’s presumed pessimism, ignorance of America’s exceptionality, and alienation from its true values.

In 2016, it is Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders who have made the most powerful use of their respective mono-narratives about America’s problems and promise.

Each has created what literary theorist John Stephens calls a “master narrative” or “metanarrative,” which he defines as “a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema, which orders and explains knowledge and experience” (Stephens, 1998). The narratives proffered by the Trump and Sanders campaigns seem to fit such a description, and are proving to be wildly, if improbably, popular with wide swaths of the voting public.

However, Trump’s master narrative proves to be more effective and reality TV accessible in its crude and vitriolic way of saying that America is crumbling in every way imaginable, a pathetic victim of the rest of the world, disarmed by weak and corrupt “establishment” politicians. Only Trump, the self-proclaimed phenomenally successful businessman, can “Make America Great Again.” In Trump’s account, the causes of America’s demise have to do with one or another species of otherness that represents mortal danger to the nation: illegal Mexican immigrants, many of them rapists and murderers; Muslim refugees who may themselves be secret ISIS terrorists; cunning Asian businesspeople who threaten the well-being of innocent Americans.

Corrupt and incompetent Washington politicians and insiders, personified by Barack Obama, who have no idea how to protect America and make deals to benefit its genuine citizens, abet these presumed villains. Trump labels them as “losers,” “idiots,” “low-energy,” and with other epithets. His simplistic prose is laced with adjectives, most of them superlatives — “greatest,” “worst-ever,” “huge,” etc.

What is different historically and becomes as Omarosa said a “new reality” in Trump’s master narrative of American decline is the way in which his own self-narrative is inextricably woven into it. He himself becomes the sole counter-narrative to this relentlessly negative account. He embodies the “great America” he promises and any

other narrative, complementary or contrasting, is excluded, as if it were a distraction from the host of this political reality show writ large.

Trump may say that he will be working for the American people, but we, as in his reality show, are relegated to being his apprentices in this scenario. Off-putting and easy to refute, Trump and his narrative have nevertheless captured the imaginations of those who sense he is speaking truthfully about the forces that are keeping them down. “Trump’s lies and his distortions of reality don’t stick to him because his followers are not interested in truth. They prefer satisfying stories” (Applebaum, 2016). One might add that such stories are most satisfying when they have readily identifiable enemies, whom Trump names and promises to punish.

French philosopher and theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard asserted that our postmodern era is characterized by a mistrust of the sorts of master narratives that modernity had championed. Rejecting these master narratives as too simplistic, undergirded by self-interested power structures, and dismissive of marginalized groups, postmodernists have interested themselves more with localized, incommensurable, and possibly irreconcilable narratives that more adequately mirror the fractured and tribalized nature of contemporary life.

Despite this professed rejection of master narratives, they nevertheless retain their power to capture our imaginations and deepest longings. It is hard being postmodern people living in a fractured, tribalized society. Even as postmodern theory may shape our academic and intellectual pursuits, as well as our social commitments, we have cordoned off the political arena as a space wherein we release the stress of postmodern existence.

Politics becomes the site where master narratives thrive and ideological purity is accepted and even admired. These narratives satisfy a felt need that postmodern living denies. Fifteen years ago, it appeared that the 9/11 terrorist attacks might become the new master narrative of American life, countering our fractured, tribalized condition that the contested 2000 election had exposed. But the ensuing Afghan and Iraqi Wars dashed these hopes, even as some politicians tried to use the attacks for partisan purposes.

In electing our first African-American president, Barack Obama, many Americans thought, at least fleetingly, that perhaps he could heal the fractures and unite the tribes. But, as soon became clear, contemporary politics depends on fractures and tribalism, and thus reinforces and exacerbates them. Even a historic presidency such as Obama's appears inadequate: racial discord has increased; the Middle East is in ever-greater chaos; and the economic crisis that marked his presidency's earliest years still resounds negatively in many people's lives, except those who were most at fault for causing it in the first place.

Trump represents the latest efforts to create new neoliberal narratives for this country, one each candidate hopes will prevail where others have failed. But the success of these narratives is no less dependent on the powers of tribalism and cultural fracture. Both speak to grievances against illegitimate powers; they respond to fear and anger more than hope. Whatever hope the campaigns do appear to voice is largely an image projected upon the candidates by receptive voters. Taking a negative approach; Trump infers what our society might or should be through their description of what it lacks.

Trump is, like in his reality show, judge, boss and star. He will not admit into not knowing everything and establishing a narrative of certainty of ideology and refuse to

consider his own insufficiency or counter narrative. In this reality star neoliberal approach it also lure legitimizing power as any other ideology—including the very “establishment” approaches to power that he denounces, as Trump depends on a hierarchical, top-down understanding of the executive office.

Regardless of outcome, the political master narrative will surely survive. The increasing diversity in American society has not, to date, made tribalism less prevalent or our common life less fractured, and it seems unlikely that our contemporary politics, mired in this residue of modernity, has any sure solution to that condition or even a desire to change it, though more diverse candidates are stepping forward. And so, we find ourselves in a never-ending cycle: imagining that such narratives, cloaked in the “respectability” of ideology, actually represent forms of resistance, we may ignore Trump’s potential—or all-too-real—power to oppress, power that must itself eventually be resisted, through new narratives. Trump is not only running as President, but as America’s Head Coach.

In a similar way as politics, coaching formats such as *Supernanny* represent an entrepreneurial ethic of self-care, using a combination of disciplinary and self-help strategies to enable individuals to overcome their problems (Ouellette & Flay, 2008). Another form of crisis intervention by television is the subgenre of charity programs *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* where private resources such as money, volunteerism, and people are mobilized in order to remedy personal hardship without state assistance. Reality TV may thus adopt functions of public welfare programs that have been cut back where only the most “deserving” cases of need, as determined by casting departments, are assisted (Jin, 2007).

It seems important that reality TV's primary intent is to entertain an audience. The shows are less concerned about providing a journalistic function such as stimulating a political debate or to educate. Even in news media. It may well be that these are secondary goals, but reality TV's main goal is to engage their audiences to attract advertisers. Diversifications of the genre may have led to a more individualized approach of reality TV and to it being less a matter of social utility.

The worldwide boom and diversification of reality TV since the 1990s has revealed a complex interplay of factors that paved the way for the success of reality TV, locally and globally. First of all, technological developments allowed a multiplication of the available TV programs in the last two decades of the 20th century. This was caused by the development of cable and satellite TV, then by the introduction of digital channels.

In countries where public-service channels previously were in a monopoly or predominant position, new commercial broadcasters could now enter the market. In order to conquer a good position in this market, the new players required popular and remarkable, but also comparatively cheap, programs to fill the additional program space. Reality TV formats fulfilled these needs. Although they are entertaining, they can be marketed as unique due to the authenticity of the participants, and they allow new forms of advertisement, merchandising, and audience participation in order to finance the production costs while having neoliberal narratives (Miller, 2007). At the same time, production costs are rather low since no scriptwriters and professional actors are needed, and the footage can be filmed with a new generation of compact and inexpensive cameras.

Narratives of reality TV shows are not perceived as “real” in any case however they have the perception of realness with neoliberal narratives that audiences apply to their lives. Voyeurism is put forward as a significant predictor of enjoyment for several reality TV subgenres since audiences feel that they are constantly under surveillance and have accepted this a daily reality (Jin, 2007). Hence, it may well be that viewers enjoy watching “real” people and not actors even though they believe the narratives are made-up. Viewers may identify more with reality TV participants because they embody similar lifestyles. In other words, such exposure experiences may be more easily integrated into their own lives than fictional programs based on more escape motives.

This transformation is linked to neoliberalism and as a political project it concerns a shifting relationship between discourses of exclusion and inclusion. The key argument is that working-class and minorities people are now portrayed through ‘a moral underclass discourse’ in which the working class is devalued and delegitimized, and given moral blame for their own structural situation. This discussion is based on a multimodal critical discourse analysis of participants who appear to be 'ordinary' working-class people and minorities (Jin, 2007).

Scholars within Critical Discourse Studies have pointed to shifting patterns in media representations of the working classes, which now are being depicted as an underclass who are morally to blame for their own structural situation of poverty and lack of opportunities (Lawler, 2013). It has been observed that working-class people are increasingly evaluated and delegitimized through a kind of middle-class gaze that judges them as repulsive or silly on the basis of inappropriate style, consumer choices and behaviors (Bennett, 2013). This moral assessment of working-class people has been

linked to neoliberalism and the dismantling of the welfare state, as authorities withdraw from structural responsibility for inequalities in the society (Bauman, 2005). This also creates a mistrust of working class and minorities towards media.

This transformation of discourses of representation of the working classes and minorities in the United States comes from inclusion in the seventies with shows like *All In The Family*, *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times* to the high class social exclusion of *Dallas*, *Dynasty* and *The Cosby Show*. Political ideologies are communicated not primarily through newspapers and political speeches, but most importantly through entertainment media and leisure (Bauman, 2005). Therefore my analysis is influenced by the multimodal version of Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), mainly to identify how the producers use a range of semiotic resources to construct a position from which a mood of laughter and ridicule, and sometimes emotions of embarrassment or shame, becomes the 'preferred reading.'

Key points of reference to the methods I will use to approach this analysis are the theories of the production and transformation of class relations advanced by Skeggs (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). Skeggs points out, when dealing with the concept of class one must keep in mind that the act of classifying something is always done from a particular perspective and involves the making of boundaries. Categories are historical constructs and must be seen as results of historical circumstances and struggles; they are not impartial concepts, as they are organized in accordance with specific interests. It is equally important to keep in mind that the middle class is not a clear-cut category. It cannot be read as a coherent group with distinct common notions about the world and with more-or-less equal socio-economic characteristics. This also means that the

boundaries between it and other classes are flexible. What counts as middle-class behavior is elastic and changes over time.

Even if classes are characterized by ambiguous boundaries, such boundaries are repeatedly being shaped and transformed. Today, this struggle is “fought out at the level of the symbolic” (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). This argument also suggests that classifications normally have moral implications, which are essential for the making of class.

Participants’ behaviors and manners are, through the mode of production, depicted as excessive or tasteless, and are thus recognized as less valued, less desirable. This attribution of negative value to the working class is, as Skeggs (2012) formulates it, a mechanism for attributing value to the “middle class self.” However to some they might seem as entertainment but to others it becomes reality through hegemony. In other words, it is normal, real behavior and “telling it like it is” in contrast with the faux properness of news and factual entertainment.

Inscription, the process through which discourse is established and transformed, is essential to making classifications. Inscription is defined as “the way value is transferred onto bodies and read off them, and the mechanisms by which it is retained, accumulated, lost or appropriated” (Skeggs, 2012). Inscription can thus be seen as the process of marking, and should not be confused with the sign itself, the product of the process. So, it is through this process that value is linked to individuals or groups of people. A good current example of such processes is seen in the portrayal in media of the Trump supporter: excessive, vulgar and tasteless. Attributes such as certain kinds of shoes, caps and brands of clothing are associated with them, and thereby come to represent the

underclass and are associated with irrational, ill-mannered behavior. Labels and monograms become symbols of identity that mark social deviance but at the same time they are key elements in representations of the working class.

This process of representation is boundary-forming (Ouellette, 2014). The idea is that laughing at or forming judgment at someone is an act of distancing oneself from the laughable, and can in some cases be an act of displaying disgust or contempt in relation to someone (Menninghaus, 2003). In face-to-face interaction, jokes and laughter are considered actions that exhibit shared views and closeness between interlocutors (Eriksson, 2015). So, laughter and ridicule has the potential to establish a distance between 'them' and 'us', as it tends to be an action that displays moral judgments and a superior position in media (Tyler, 2008).

As Lyle shows, the middle-class gaze is a mode of production with clear potential to provoke emotions like disgust or to trigger laughter (Lyle, 2008). On reality television, issues of class are not explicitly invoked. Instead, they are raised through how taste and appearance are treated in discourse. The middle-class gaze is organized around certain discourses of identity, fashion, actions and values, and it promotes a superior, more credible position, which appears to be the natural, normal and respectable way of seeing things (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). This way of seeing things is structured by concern for the relationship to other classes, and particularly the lower standing working class. In order to maintain its elevated position, it needs to constantly mark boundaries to what should be considered less respectable and undesirable (Bonner, 2003).

### **Cultural Narratives and Discourse Created by Value Production and Economics**

Value production tracks its circulation throughout activities inspired by reality TV participation (Quail, 2012). It follows the transmissions of affect through its cultural, political, and economic expressions and studies the habituated practices engendered from this television form, exploring the contradictions within different moments, some of which produce cultural and political values and others of which produce economic value.

Grossberg has long advocated a critical method that follows affective forces and draws "links between points, events, or practices" within a multilayered and multidirectional field (Grossberg, 2012). While Grossberg's affective model and its focus on the processes of becoming helpfully correct tendencies toward economic and cultural determinism, it tends to view the cultural and political economic as separate realms requiring different entry points and methodologies. Contrary to this divided landscape, Massumi believes affect creates an ecological "coming-together or belonging-together of processually unique and divergent forms of life" (Caldwell, 2008).

Moving across reality TV quasigenres and propelling individuals into and out of different situations, affect offers a way to explore how we have come to belong together as well as the imminent possibilities for belonging differently. This notion of affect underwrites a form of inquiry that travels across spaces, assesses social energies fostered through practices habits, and everyday encounters, and tracks the formation of unstable coherencies formed through the associations among diverse cultural, political, and economic moments (Pardo, 2013).

Many assume that audiences concerns are strictly economical. The Trump campaign goes further into tapping into economical and cultural anxieties. Many argue

that Trump's signature issue, immigration, has resonated because of the economic threat posed by immigrants to the white working class. But immigration is not necessarily first an economic issue. For many, it is about national security, as reflected in the draconian suggestion that Muslims be barred from coming to the United States. For others, immigration is simply about the rule of law. Those who have entered the country illegally should not be allowed to flout the law while others who play by the rules must wait their turn until they can enter the country lawfully.

For a non-negligible subset of Trump voters, anti-immigration sentiment is about racism and nativism, plain and simple. Many more are uneasy about rapid cultural change and do not bring to their concern the ugliness of prejudice. It is not unreasonable to worry that the ever-growing foreign-born and second-generation populations will change the character of the nation in ways we cannot predict, whether along religious, political, ideological, or cultural dimensions.

These fears have influenced immigration debates throughout history, but as the very idea of assimilation is called into question by many, some today may find the prospect of cultural change especially threatening. People value ways of life for understandable reasons; when their permanence is thrown in question, it is reasonable for them to be anxious about change. Relative to economic anxieties, cultural insecurity has been given short shrift as an explanation for the Trump phenomenon.

Trump is being driven primarily by cultural anxiety and by dissatisfaction with cultural change and perceived cultural decline. "Make America Great Again" is clearly about fear of national decline, but it is not primarily about economic decline. Trump's

complaint is that “we never win anymore,” not a narrow protest that other nations are taking away our jobs or that wages are stagnant.

It taps into fears that something has gone wrong with our economy but also with our position on the international stage, with our values, with our families, and with the maintenance of law and order. Further, it could not be more obvious that Trump voters are mostly indifferent to policy. Trump’s appeal is in his brash confidence, his celebrity, and his refusal to bow to the political correctness that is newly ascendant. Indeed, for all the chest thumping over Trump’s success, there has been little discussion of the role that campus-based PC activism and, more recently, the Black Lives Matters movement have played in stoking the fears of cultural traditionalists.

One does not need to be a reactionary or a Trump fan to view, for instance, the disruption of Bernie Sanders rallies by activists, the shutting down of Trump’s Chicago rally, or the silencing of controversial views on campuses as destabilizing forms of incivility. The idea that Trump’s success primarily reflects the failure of conservative policies to address the economic concerns of its base gets things completely backward.

The complaint of “cultural traditionalists” is fundamentally with “cultural cosmopolitans” who are the highly formally educated, careerist, metropolitan, and culturally liberal elite that runs the country. These cultural cosmopolitans dominate both parties, but their liberalism most clearly finds a home with the Democrats. And liberals have been winning the culture wars pretty decisively over the past couple of decades.

So Trump is best viewed as a hostile takeover of the Republican Party by a non-conservative authoritarian who is stoking and leveraging the cultural resentment and authoritarianism of the GOP’s traditionalist base. And that base is primarily opposed to

the cultural liberalism that is ascendant in the Democratic Party. Audiences, who translate to voters, are reacting against conservative policies that fail to address economic distress, and have chosen a strange time to air their grievances and a strange medium to carry them: Trump.

These audiences constitute themselves as workers and consumers of neoliberal capital through their participation in reality television and its attendant practices (Jin, 2007). Trump and his reality TV narratives provide fertile ground for such analysis because of its reliance on advanced communication technologies, its interactive format, and an historical trajectory that parallels the development of neoliberalism, in other words “to think about media either as political economic practice or cultural practice” (Ouellette, 2014).

Using Michel Foucault, they contend that reality TV cultivates the self-governing activities of neoliberal subjects. It teaches participants to engage in appropriate behaviors beyond television viewing, such as continuous education and self-fashioning, as well as informed financial planning and participation in charitable partnerships. Ouellette’s analysis defines politics as the regulation of conduct that derives from and sustains the economic structure.

Surplus value theory can be used to explain the economic and political ramifications of reality television (Jin, 2007). The surplus value theory of economics states that workers sell their labor power for a given period of time. They sell this labor power for wages determined by the minimum average cost of reproducing that labor power. Within a given timeframe, workers labor longer and more intensely than the value of their socially determined wages; thus, the value that workers transfer into products

exceeds the value they are paid in wages. This surplus value and argues that it is the source of all profit (Jin, 2007).

This view, outlined in *Capital*, represents workers as living components of the capitalist valorization process, the circulation and exchange of commodities that transforms surplus value into economic profit. Against this perspective from above, Ouelette offers a politics from below by emphasizing working-class agency. In their view, workers struggle to reduce labor time and increase wages, simultaneously constituting themselves as a class and forcing capital into crisis because the shortened workday decreases surplus value and cuts into potential profits (Quail, 2012).

To overcome these crises, owners are forced to develop technological innovations that increase relative surplus value, a temporary rise in value production derived from greater efficiency (Jin, 2007). The spread of advanced technologies across the social field simultaneously enhances the general intellect and unwittingly provides opportunities for greater worker autonomy (Quail, 2012).

The tendency toward the production of immaterial labor, such as media and communication, is that with technological advances, “the creation of profit comes to depend less on labor time and on the amount of labor employed” than on the general intellect and its technologies (Quail, 2012). Advanced technological know-how so weaves into everyday life that the terms of production shift. Technologies work more and people work less. This is key in television, news channels and media in general since labor time no longer adequately measures potential profit. The potentiality unleashed by this transitional stage blurs the boundaries between the labor performed by people and processes performed by machines, making it difficult to distinguish work from leisure

(Miller, 2007). Negri (2000) stresses affective labor as a particular strain on these boundaries and an indication of this political economic leap forward.

For Baruh (2010), affective labor produces and reproduces human beings in their movement toward self-valorization or the possibility for becoming subject to one's own creative energies beyond the reaches of capital. Profit could not exist if production were not animated throughout by social intelligence, by the general intellect and at the same time by the affective expressions that define social relations (Baruh, 2010). For example, using affect as a theory of potentiality that transpires between human beings, energizing production as well as reproduction, activities such as home caretaking no longer constitute unproductive labor but affective labor which is work that adds value to life (Osborne-Thompson, 2014).

According to this theory of affective work the economic relations of commodity production, value vs. non-value, that the two become indistinguishable in contemporary life. With advanced technologies the amount of labor time is limited and required of workers without limiting productive potential and this extinguishes all need for money as the universal exchange value (Lorenzo-Dus & Blitvich, 2013).

While new technologies certainly enable commodity production with less human exertion, labor time has been relocated rather than reduced. Value forms through a complex of labor practices, often outside the traditional spaces of production, suggesting the need for a more sophisticated way of tracking value rather than the conceptual liquidation of value theory. Hence, in media and more specifically in reality television, monetary cost still determines whether or not consumers purchase a product as well as

whether or not a producer continues to manufacture that product. Far from disappearing, money circulates on a greater scale and with greater speed than ever before.

This is evident in the Trump campaign in not only the media ratings but also how inexpensive the production is. There has been much debate over the media's relationship with Donald Trump. But, there is little doubt that the bombastic and controversial GOP frontrunner has dominated the airwaves throughout the 2016 election cycle—and television networks have reaped huge ratings boosts as a result. CNN president Jeff Zucker said that the news media is not the culprit for Trump's ascent and that networks like his own are simply doing their job in covering a leading presidential candidate. (Calamur, 2016)

According to media analyst Andrew Tyndall, Trump was the second most-covered story of 2015, after “winter weather,” and the amount of coverage afforded to Trump in the 2016 election cycle accounts for nearly a third of all election coverage and more than all Democratic candidates combined. Trump could be described as one of the biggest ratings grabs in recent election-season memory.

For TV networks, the “Trump effect” is an example of surplus value. Trump has meant higher television ratings for all election coverage in general and, in particular, a higher profile and record ratings for the 21 debates held so far by the two parties. Ratings for some of those debates have been so high—with, in some cases, more than four times as many viewers tuning in as did for debates during the 2012 election—that networks have been able to hike their advertising rates well into six-digit territory for a 30-second ad (Calamur, 2016). CNN, for example, was reportedly able to charge roughly 40 times

its typical primetime rate of \$5,000 for a 30-second ad spot during its September debate (Calamur, 2016).

An aftershock effect, as tends to be the case with any presidential race, the current election cycle is providing a wealth of material to television's late-night comedians, who have relished the opportunity to mock Trump and his rivals on a nightly basis. HBO's John Oliver has seen particular success online, where clips from his show *Last Week Tonight* have gone viral (especially two recent Trump-focused segments), with the comedian reportedly enjoying a larger online following than broadcast network late-night hosts. The latter typically see higher Nielsen ratings on TV (Calamur, 2016).

Meanwhile, TBS' *Samantha Bee*, a relative newcomer with her late-night show, *Full Frontal*, debuting in February, has also deployed her share of buzzy, political segments to post a strong ratings challenge to the rest of the late-night TV field. Whether the media has fueled Trump's political ascent, or if the constant coverage is merely a byproduct of the public's fascination with him and TV networks are simply giving us what we want, coverage of the Trump campaign, and of the election in general, has bolstered TV ratings for the major broadcast and cable networks. These two examples are extra profit generated from coverage of surplus value. It is a surplus value on steroids.

Fox News Channel has had to navigate perhaps the most tumultuous relationship with GOP frontrunner Donald Trump of any major network at a time when Trump's love-hate relationship with the media is a major talking point of the election. Trump's clashes with Fox News anchor and debate moderator Megyn Kelly over Trump's claims that she asked him unfair questions led him to skip the second of the network's three debates, in January.

But, the conflict between Trump and the 21st Century subsidiary has also helped hand the network the highest debate ratings of the current election cycle, so far. Fox News is enjoying a network-record eight-week winning streak atop the weekly cable network ratings for full-day viewership (Calamur, 2016). In terms of primetime ratings, the network has been either first or second in the weekly ratings race every week of 2016, with CNN most recently presenting the biggest challenge by winning the primetime race twice in the past three weeks (Calamur, 2016).

Fox News set a record for televised political debates last August, when more than 24 million people tuned in for the first debate of the season. As a result, the Wall Street Journal reported that 30 second ad spots for the network's second debate sold for as much as \$260,000 though ads sold after Trump backed out went for slightly lower but still sold at a premium for debates. The network's three GOP debates averaged nearly 18 million viewers each, while the Fox News Democratic town hall this month drew only about 2.6 million viewers, as that party's events have failed to drum up as much excitement with viewers (Calamur, 2016). To put the network's huge ratings for GOP debates into perspective, the most-watched primary debate during the 2012 election drew less than 8 million viewers.

Time Warner's CNN scored the second most-watched debate of the current election cycle when it averaged 23 million viewers during the second GOP debate, in September. That was a ratings record for CNN. The Time Warner-owned network charged a reported \$200,000 per 30-second ad during its September debate, though CNN has not released an exact total. As Advertising Age noted at the time, a typical primetime ad spot on CNN costs only about \$5,000 (Calamur, 2016). CNN has hosted four GOP

debates throughout the current election cycle (including the most recent one, last week), drawing an average of 16.5 million viewers across each contest while averaging less than half as many viewers across four Democratic events. While TV ratings for Democratic debates have distantly trailed GOP events, CNN's live stream of its October Democratic debate set a record for the network by peaking at 980,000 concurrent streams (Calamur, 2016).

Despite Zucker's objections, CNN was awfully quick to ramp up its Trump coverage, with Zignal Labs finding that the network offered 2,159 reports on Trump in just the first four months of his campaign, which was nearly double the coverage of Jeb Bush, who was the second most-covered candidate by CNN at that time before later exiting the race (Calamur, 2016)

However, if any network can attest to the fact that coverage of the GOP presidential race attracts more viewer eyeballs than the Clinton-Sanders show, it's CBS which logged a whopping 5 million more viewers for its February GOP debate 13.5 million than for its November Democratic contest (Calamur, 2016). That disparity no doubt fueled controversial comments from network chairman Les Moonves. Trump's political success, he told reporters last month, "may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS" (Calamur, 2016). Moonves later said his comments were "misconstrued" but he added that he expects CBS to post "a record-breaking year" in terms of ratings and advertising dollars thanks to the election season.

Walt Disney's ABC News has also hosted one GOP and one Democratic debate, and more than 13.3 million viewers tuned in for the network's February GOP New Hampshire debate—again, more than 5 million above the ratings posted by the Dems on

ABC in December. ABC pulled in the highest 2012 primary debate audience of any network with 7.6 million viewers for a GOP standoff in December 2011.

CNBC hosted the third GOP debate of 2015 and hiked up its ad rates to a reported \$250,000 per 30 second spot to take advantage of the 20 million-plus viewers pulled in by FNC and CNN for the first two GOP events. The business-focused network's ratings for that late-October stand-off fell well short of its predecessors, but the 14 million viewers still topped any of CNBC's previous audiences despite complaints from the GOP establishment that the network's moderators were biased in their questioning of the candidates (Calamur, 2016).

Fox Business network averaged 12.25 million viewers between its first two GOP debates in November and January, including a network record audience of 13.5 million people for the first debate. Those viewer totals are especially impressive when you consider that, according to Nielsen, Fox Business averaged only a little over 100,000 total viewers per business day in October, the month before the network's first debate (Calamur, 2016).

TV networks will have plenty of opportunities to capitalize on the ratings behemoth that has been the 2016 election cycle. Networks should be able to bank on more big ratings when Trump debates in the presidential debates. Meanwhile, coverage of each party's convention this summer could provide another ratings bonanza, particularly if drama continues between the Trump and the Republican establishment and leads to a brokered convention. Either way, the public's resurgent interest in politics Trump-driven or not should be music to the ears of television networks after 2012, when fewer people tuned in for the GOP than the Democrats and both conventions saw ratings

dip from previous years. In these numbers-driven analysis, narratives took a back seat profits. All these networks did not care what was put on air as long as it produced ratings very inexpensively. This is an example of reality television surplus value.

Through this medium production and technology, human contact is “transmitted” in its actual and mediated forms and this affect and motivates individual and collective thinking and behaving (Bondad-Brown, Rice, & Pearce, 2012). This view of affect, which is one that treats value as a measure of diverse cultural, political, and economic energies transmitted between individuals and through commodities offers a springboard into a speculative narrative on reality TV.

Merging the theory of affective value with the labor theory of value, the participatory, and hence value-forming, characteristics of reality TV unite disparate situations and diverse people under the umbrella of media, culture narratives and its uneven political economic manifestations while preserving space for uncertainty and difference (Baruh, 2010). For example, people may have very little in common with others except for a shared habit of watching and voting for contestants on Dancing with the Stars and voting for politicians. Our individual votes mark our different cultural valuations, but the embodied response to the television even texting our desired winner through cell phone signifies a mutual belonging within the digital economy. Therefore, reality television merged politics and economics.

In this way, reality television transmits affect and modulates cultural narratives and experiences. These cultural narratives drive one from the television to the cell phone and the Internet, binding television with other communication technologies through which affect, like a contagion, likewise travels. Cultural narratives and discourse

circulating among reality television and cable news cycle come together along three different vectors through which the television audience collectively constitutes itself in harmony with the needs of media production and economics (Aubrey et al., 2012). The first vector signals the shift from mass culture toward mass customization. Contrary to the conformity of mass consumption, reality TV encourages individual self-expression and “keeping it real.” Participation in the niche markets or self-fashioning genres provided by reality TV becomes the platform by which one can value and evaluate the individuality so central to contemporary life.

The second vector normalizes the politics of surveillance as viewers construct themselves within what Foucault calls an “enterprise society” (Aubrey, 2012). In the enterprise society, an individual becomes his or her own most valuable commodity, one that must be constantly monitored, assessed, and updated. The politics of surveillance functions as a catalyst for such behaviors (Aubrey, 2012).

The third vector reinforces free labor in the workplace as well as in our home communities. Economic incentives might compel us to participate in voluntary forms of productive labor, such as carrying store cards for discounts, but reality TV gives life energy to such practical concerns, valorizing volunteer labor as a quintessentially progressive, innovative, and powerful component of our contemporary era. In other words, making the ordinary look extraordinary. Using these three vectors to connect diverse reality TV programming, cultural narratives are passed along through media in television, telephone, and the internet as they crossover across our screens and habituate our embodied responses (Aubrey, 2012). They inhabit and assimilate us becoming one with media and the technology.

### **Cultural Narratives in Reality Television creating an “American Identity”**

Reality TV constructs the nation as part of an everyday nationhood and acts as a pervasive force in the reproduction of the nation, challenging critiques that ‘television is seen as prime evidence for the loss of national distinctiveness’ in the United States (Bonner 2003. 171). The distinctive national context of each production provides clear differences in the ways in which the nation is reconstructed and is achieved by focusing more specifically upon performances of the self within reality TV and uncovering how these selves relate to particular performances of nationhood (Sender, 2015). American reality television cultural narratives is found to embrace difference as part of its rhetoric but performances of the self are heavily regulated for non-White American contestants who often failed at ‘performing American’ (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). *American Idol* hardly strays from American genre music no matter how popular (salsa, reggaeton, bachata, Hindi) and emphasizes on American genres such as pop, hip-hop and country. *The Bachelor* was sued for its lack of representation of minorities.

Reality television acts as a site for the cultural construction of the nation from within. Following Edensor (2002) and Billig (1995), in order to fully understand ‘everyday nationhood’, or ‘nationalism from below’ (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, 537), we must consider the role that popular culture plays in the process. Reality TV as a cultural governance of identity performance(s) parallels the discursively constructed notion of ‘everyday’ or ‘banal’ nationhood. This highlights the potential offered by bringing together these two sites of academic interrogation (Bondad-Brown et al., 2012).

Following the work of Anderson (1991), Billig (1995) and Edensor (2002), the nation is culturally constructed, that it is imagined and discursively ‘made real’ by those

that exist within its arbitrary borders. This is because, as Anderson has argued, ‘members of even the smallest nation will never know their fellow members’ (1991, 6). Through media discourse, particularly in the form of television, we can identify one of the key ways in which the concept neoliberalism merges into the cultural narrative of the “American nation” is normalized (Jin, 2007).

The everydayness of media is stressed in America that we can see how it is a primary medium through which to build the nation (Edensor 2002, 7), particularly given its ability to address ‘citizens’ directly in their living rooms. It is un-American to not participate and be aware of the cultural and national discourse (Kurtz, 2007). Furthermore, the familiar broadcast schedules of television connect viewers to the nation-state implicitly (Edensor 2002, 98, 2006, 536), creating an inherently collective experience (Schlesinger 1991, 300).

The everydayness of reality TV extends everyday nationhood further, occupying a special position in the articulation of common-sense views of the world. It is for this reason the cultural narrative of notions of nationhood are normalized and assimilated. Through the ‘deixis of little words’ identified by Billig, such as ‘here’, ‘us’ and ‘we’ (1995, 174), through habitual performances of the self (Edensor 2002, 84-88) and through wider culture such as ‘language, religion, diet and fashion’ (Inthorn 2007, 2). Given the habitual nature of both television and the nation, the intersection of these two areas provides us with a particularly fascinating site of interrogation.

Although ‘television is seen as prime evidence for the loss of national distinctiveness’ (Bonner 2003, 171), we can see how reality TV acts as a pervasive force in what Billig terms the ‘flagging of nationhood’ in his thesis of ‘banal nationalism’

(1995). Given the centrality of program formatting in reality TV, we can see how the reality TV genre can act as a central site of national identity construction. This is not only because the nation-state continues to remain the ‘final arbiters of the airwaves’ (Moran 1998, 7), but also because when given a choice, audiences usually ‘prefer television programs produced nationally or in the national language as against imported programs’ (Moran 1998, 5-6). This highlights the value that audiences place upon implicit nationhood, through the use of familiar words and spaces. The nation can therefore become commodified, with national sensitivities activated and reinforced through these media formats (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, 551).

One of the important features of format programming in relation to the construction of the nation is that it allows for what Moran terms ‘national colourings’ (1998, 88). In the instance of reality TV, these ‘national colourings’ can be achieved through the representation of the national way of life and performances of national identity. Furthermore, the ‘national coloring’ of format programs also provides space for regionalism. For example, the emphasis reality TV places upon ‘ordinary people’ gives space for the representation of everyday individuals from across the nation-state (Lorenzo-Dus & Blitvich, 2013).

However, ‘national coloring’ is only available due to the flexibility of the format in terms of adaptation (Hill, 2005). Shows that are adapted from other countries to the US may look similar, but it feels different because it has been adapted to have cultural relevance for the audience that it seeks to engage. And thus, while the nation is staged implicitly, the common-sense rhetoric that lines each version is distinct. As we shall see,

such differences are found at explicit levels such as in language, but also at the banal level, through ‘incidental, everyday references’ (Moran 1998, 137).

By adapting formats to the cultural specificities of particular nation-states, we can come to understand how reality TV plays a crucial role in fulfilling the need for locally produced shows (Moran and Malbon 2006), providing an important site for the representation of the nation. This highlights the political potential of the genre, as participants of reality TV formats are unified by their relationship to a national community. These ideas have been expanded by some theorists of media and national identity to consider television as a site for the branding of nation (Sinha Roy 2007), the emancipation of its citizens (Van den Bulck 2001, 66) or even the safety of the nation as a whole (Andrejevic 2011). We will discuss how this specifically relates to the 2016 electoral campaign later on.

This provides motivation for considering the relationship between the performance of national identity and this form of ‘reality’. The relationship reality TV has to ‘reality’ is therefore intrinsically bound to common-sense views of the world, with the judgment of ‘authentic’ behavior governed by a range of discursive norms and values (Miller, 2007). Performances that do not conform to our discursive understanding of ‘appropriate’ behavior can therefore be ‘Othered,’ drawing parallels to the ways in which Othering is utilized within the discursive construction of the nation (Triandafyllidou 1998).

This can be identified in the ways in which surveillance of performances of the self comes from not only from judges and fellow contestants, but also the audience. As Edensor has argued, ‘cultural elements must be credible and speak to common-sense if

they are to be accepted by national subjects' (2002, 8). While these performances of the self may not be spectacular, they do remind members of the nation-state the boundaries of acceptable behavior, of 'this is how we do things' (Edensor 2002, 19). This is heightened when we consider the intersection between gender, national identity and these performances in cultural narratives.

While national identity itself is complex and contradictory, it is not one that exists independently of its varying intersections, particularly gender. Thinking about nation and gender becomes significant when investigating a genre that is largely associated with 'the female sphere' (Frau-Meigs 2006, 39), and where the protagonists of the programme being investigated present themselves as female. In addition, the 'everyday' is also a space that is overwhelmingly associated with women (Edensor 2002, 21; Felski 1999).

This allows us to move our focus away from 'high cultural arbiters' or 'official sites' of nationhood common within study of the nation (Edensor 2002, 9) to one where women are firmly placed into these debates. This is crucial not only as discussion is often masculinized, but also because women or gender relations are often ignored as irrelevant (Ozkirimli 2000, 204).

When studies into this relationship have been undertaken, we can see that gender is often mobilized to 'anchor national identity in nostalgia and traditionalism' (Hogan 1999, 743), is unregenerate in the notions of femininity it predicates (Stevens, Brown, and Maclaran 2000, 418) or imagines women through the essentialist tropes of motherhood or reproduction (Ozkirimli 2000, 205; Yuval-Davis 1997, 21). I therefore aim to bring women, as active agents in the performance of nationhood, to the forefront of this study and encourage further scholars to do the same.

As the nation is relational, existing within a global community of nations, providing a fascinating juxtaposition to what appears to be a more secure and clearly identifiable American national identity. This is achieved by placing emphasis upon performances of the self and the discursive construction of difference and relationality (Lawler, 2013). Habitual performances of national identity are at odds with the dominant national discourse, highlighting the existence of these arbitrary national boundaries. And reality TV acts as a key site in the articulation and normalization of the nation (Osborne-Thompson, 2014).

First of all, many reality shows an explicit way in which the nation is presented is through the use of the word 'America': *American Idol*, *America's Got Talent*, *America's Next Top Model*, *American Chopper*, *American Gladiators*, *American Ninja Warrior*, *America's Best Dance Crew*, *America's Next Great Restaurant*, *Football Night in America*, *Good Morning America*, *Great American Road Trip*, *Iron Chef America*. These shows do not claim to be on the search for the next top anything, nor finding a regional winner. It is America's next winner. Like a political election.

Repetition of the word 'America', along with appearance on opening credits, at advertising breaks, and during judging, indicates the prevalence of the word within the programs. In this explicit signifier of nationhood we can see the way in which 'ideological consciousness can be seen to be at work' (Billig 1995, 4), inventing the nation when it does not 'naturally' exist (Anderson 1991, 6). By normalizing the American nation-state, it inherently constructs national citizens. This is due to the relational nature of nationality, whereby the audiences are constantly reminded that this is

an American show and are able to locate themselves in relation to this Americanness, one either is American, or is not (Wilson, Robinson, & Callister, 2012).

However, America has a complex history with national belonging, which can be exemplified through the discourse of and cultural narrative of “one from the many” (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). The playing through, and working out of difference to form the ‘one’, from the ‘many’, is an American discourse that has been widely adopted in reality television narratives. For example, there is diversity in the performance and casting of these shows, however, minority Americanness is discursively constructed in these programs through the experiences of second-generation immigrant contestants (Pardo, 2013). They are fluent, native English language speakers creating a cultural narrative of “one from the many” and not “one from the few” (Pardo, 2013).

This construction of ‘America’ show difficulties of minorities and are represented within the show through the spectacle of emotion, (personal anguishes, survival stories, etc.) and portray the American reality show as the end all be all for salvation and reinforces the arbitrary boundaries of the American nation-state and their very ‘real’ consequences for this individual (Pardo, 2013). The discursive construction of the nation in this narrative as Billig (1995) has illustrated, words such as ‘here’ and ‘we’ play an important discursive role in the construction of the nation, with ‘here’ in this instance referring to America and ‘we’ to American citizens. However, while these discourses are prevalent throughout these shows, fostering an inclusive understanding of the nation, allow us to see that the nation can also be marked through difference (Pardo, 2013).

Also, inability to ‘open up’ is telling of the way in which American national identity is articulated through these particular performances. In the cultural narrative of

American identity, non-emotional articulations demonstrate the ‘acute self-awareness of iterative performances where none had previously been experienced’ (Edensor 2002, 71). This highlights the ways in which ‘border-crossers’ often find themselves in situations where their performances of the stoic are not understood within new national contexts (Pavlenko 2001). Taken to gender, in this narrative women are not considered feminine if they are not emotional and men are considered boring or blasé. Therefore, if we understand the nation to be relational, this normalizes the idea that there is a cultural way to be an American woman and American man and this is something that either you fail or not (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). Thus, the centrality of authenticity within reality TV highlights the ways in which particular performances of national identity, when intersected with gender, can be rendered Other, reinforcing arbitrary Americanness as ‘normal’ (Pardo, 2013). Later on this concept of Other and Americanness will be explained with further detail as it relates to the 2016 electoral campaign.

While American reality TV normalizes an American national identity that embraces difference and internationality insofar as Americanness is performed appropriately, contrasts with global reality TV which works through difference at the regional level, constructing the cultural narrative of nations that is the ‘abstract, sum-total of these regional differences’ (Moran 1998, 135). In some cases this ‘regionalism’ transcends national borders, but the prevalence of German culture and language in these international cases can be seen as what Moran terms ‘accentual differences’ rather than national differences (1998, 135.). Thus, in other countries, an ethno-culturally narrow understanding of identity is reproduced.

By drawing on regional differences, we can see how these cycles construct a national identity that is rooted in a long-standing notion of regionalities performed within ‘symbolic spaces’ (Edensor 2002, 69). A result of such is that there remains little space within for the construction of a national identity that embraces non-national and regional cultures (Lawler, 2013). Unlike the cycles of American versions rooted in a particular American cities, other countries draw upon images of various cities and industries, normalizing an understanding the identity and construction of nation as the ‘sum-parts’ of these quotidian spaces (Pardo, 2013).

Authenticity is therefore communicated via the ability to perform in such familiar, global contexts, within ‘symbolic spaces reproduced by performers’ (Edensor 2002, 69), which is totally in different than in American reality TV. Such familiar spaces therefore not only normalize the nation through the visualization of its regional parts, but also emphasize performance of national identity within regional spaces. American reality TV recognizes cities, states, etc. but emphasizes the notion of online spaces as a place that supersedes the regional creating the Americanness of identity and cultural narrative online. However, to how much extent? Have online audiences made traditional audiences dwindle? Is television dead because of the internet, online videos and OTT Platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, Sling, etc.? This will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

## Chapter 3

### Television vs. Online Streaming

New technologies impact industry and audiences, reopening a wide range of debates about costs, control, desire, culture, and strategic directions. Some polemicists have gone so far as to proclaim that new viewing platforms signal the death of TV, as public discourse is underlined by the assumption that television's digital migration allows everyone to get what they want, when they want it, rendering traditional television irrelevant or redundant (J. Cha, 2013a). Rather, it is important to critically assess such popular and tempting claims in order to provide a thoughtful and fair analysis of what might amount to popularly exchanged "myths." These popular online myths rearticulate the importance of considering television convergence, conglomeration and consolidation in the online television discussion.

Portable screens, mobile viewing, and on-demand, in-control screen cultures have created a number of challenges and opportunities for the television industry and audiences. Some have gone so far as to proclaim that new viewing platforms signal the death of TV, as public discourse is underlined by the assumption that television's digital migration allows viewers ultimate control, rendering traditional television irrelevant or redundant (J. Cha, 2013a).

These highly create the public notion that TV is quite obviously being pushed aside by online environments. This discourse is sometimes replayed by television studies scholars, leading, for example, Derek Kompare (2010) to suggest that "television exists primarily as a metaphor (p. 80). " Here, academics and journalists, as well as product

developers and marketers, have been probing the relationships between and the power involved in technological change and changes in film and television viewing practices.

Undeniably, and predictably, new technologies impact industry and audiences, reopening a wide range of debates about costs, control, desire, culture, and strategic directions. Long-standing debates in media studies regarding both new technologies' impact on previous industries (see, e.g., Bettig & Hall, 2003), and crucial debates regarding tensions between the active audience (via the critical cultural studies tradition), technological determinism (of the Toronto School and beyond), uses and gratifications and diffusion of innovation (see e.g., Yang & Chan-Olmstead, 2009) and industrial/institutional power and Dallas Smythe's (1977) notion of the audience commodity resurface (see, e.g., Meehan 2005, 2007). In this supposed current online migration within these competing frameworks, offering the reminder that the political economic framework (Mosco 1996) should be foregrounded and if audiences go online, what do they talk about?

It would be absurd to suggest that television is not changing, that viewers are not afforded a level of flexibility and control over their viewing experiences with new platforms, or that many people do not enjoy new modes of viewing. In fact, in many areas of the world, particularly where strong public service broadcasters persist, this discussion is much less ubiquitous. This fact, along with other empirical evidence in the North American contexts, suggests that the death of TV is not nigh, nor has television been simply reduced to a "metaphor" (Kompare, 2010).

Rather, it is important to critically assess such popular and tempting claims and discourses in order to provide a thoughtful and fair analysis of what might amount to

popularly exchanged “myths.” Unpacking the contradictions in the admittedly enticing TV streaming and downloading myths will help prevent slippage into technological fetishism, the digital sublime (Mosco, 2004), or retro-avant-gardism (Spigel, 2004). Underlying this analysis is the nagging insistence that television is, after all, an industry, located in historically and geographically specific capitalist and commercial contexts that structure both content and access (Jin, 2007).

From a political economy perspective, reality television is instructive, then, not only as a national context, but also as a tool for thinking transnational about the political economy of online television, a move that may bring to crisis several popular myths and rearticulate the importance of considering television convergence, conglomeration and consolidation in the online television discussion (Miller, 2007). Essentially, this is a reminder that political economic realities need to be considered when futurist, technological fetishist, and tech-hype tend to shape public discourse and political, cultural narratives (J. Cha, 2013a).

If part of the myth surrounding online television were that “everyone is doing it,” it would be important to examine the myth of ubiquitous online viewing (J. Cha, 2013a). For example, a recent story on MSNBC, “Teens Tune Out TV, Log on Instead,” reports on a Yahoo-funded study that found that young people spend more time online than watching television (Weaver, 2011). This is echoed anecdotally by informal polls of university classrooms where a majority of students claim they do not have a television (J. Cha, 2013a). In this case, further statistics about viewing practices will help create an accurate and realistic picture of the online viewer, as well as patterns and geographies of online viewing. According to International Telecommunications Union (ITU) research,

the digital divide is still strong. The global Internet penetration rate for 2008 was only 23%; quite a low percentage of the world's population has access to the Internet (ITU, 2009).

Compared to the rest of the world, North America has the highest Internet penetration rate. However, this rate does not speak to nuanced in-country divides. Seung-Hyun Lee (2008) helps us understand the picture of an American online viewer using Rogers' (1995) diffusion of innovations model. The study shows that mobile TV's early majority (as well as late majority) adopters are college students. Nikki Porter (2009) demonstrated that within the US, one of the most wired countries in the world, only 2% of the population relies on the Internet for TV, with young people and those with higher incomes more likely to watch online. Porter (2009) has astutely dubbed this the "prime-time digital divide." In her words, claims about online viewing are "based on statistical outliers," succinctly naming this part of the myth's equation. Lee et al. (2009) further demonstrate fragmented online viewership choices based on age, income, and educational level. From these studies, we can consider that younger, more affluent viewers are more likely to be the "everyone" in the online viewing myth.

The same in-country divides could also be applied to internet access and computer ownership is tied to income, wealth of the country, social status, educational and skill level, and age, etc. This proves to create a multi-tiered global divide of users, perhaps best understood through the "hype" and "obsession" model, as demonstrated by Dimitri Schuurman et al.'s (2009) discussion of Gartner's Hype Cycle Theory, based on Rogers' diffusion of innovations approach. In this model, technology follows along a "peak of inflated expectations, slope of enlightenment, plateau of productivity....necessary to be a

profitable innovation” (p. 294). They argue that the world may still be witnessing the peak of inflated expectations of online viewing, hyped and obsessed over by small, yet influential, portions of the population (J. Cha, 2013a). Internet access itself cannot be equated with watching TV online, either in the potential to download, nor in actual downloading practices, and both geographical and in-country divides based on class demonstrate that “everyone” is not doing it (Bondad-Brown et al., 2012). Hence, there is a class divide in media consumption. This will be explained in further detail on how it relates to politics and the 2016 campaign.

Hence, interaction is also a myth. Labeling a couch potato “analog” makes a humorous distinction between old and new media, and old and new viewing practices, belying two related assumptions of television downloading: first, that online viewing is more active than traditional viewing; and second, that higher levels of viewer activity are preferred to lower levels (J. Cha, 2013a). Media studies has long heralded the “active audience” as a potentially resistant force (see, e.g., Fiske, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). While there may be some creative activity in and oppositional meaning made in particular media interpretations and uses, it is also important to consider the limitations, and the technological determinism, of assuming that digital equals active equals empowered. Not so.

Brown and Barkhuus (2006) attempt to explain changing viewing practices via their concept of the “television life cycle”—an evolution from channel surfing to a more “active approach” of downloading/PVR-ing. They claim that this type of activity involves “collecting an archive of shows that are watched at the viewer’s convenience” (p. 1).

Through data collected by interviewing early adopters of PVRs and Internet TV

downloading, they argue that viewership becomes a “more active approach in that the selection of shows to record, choosing what to watch, and collecting an archive of TV shows become activities in themselves. TV is therefore more than simply watching programs” (p. 663). However, complexities to this characterization must be considered. Is there something inherently more active about the described new activities?

Brown and Barkhuus (2006) themselves admit that there has always been lean forward, lean back, more active and more passive viewing. It was, and still is possible to more actively or more passively use any media technology and program. Perhaps there is nothing inherently “active” about online viewing, other than the action of retrieving or choosing a program. The amount of activity might have more to do with the viewer’s level of commitment to the program, especially in reality television (Sender, 2015). For example, serious fans of particular programs will likely demonstrate a more “active” viewership than a more casual viewer, whether in online viewing, DVD purchases, or on weekly scheduled broadcasts, not to mention other intertextual activities such as fanvids, fanfiction, fan message boards and chats (Hills, 2005; Jenkins, 2006). The same is true of fans in traditional television formats, where the broadcast is one of many intertexts, one that may be watched collectively with a fan group. This activity does not rely on online downloads. This will be explained further detail on how this activity can be translated into votes.

In addition, some viewers might not enjoy being particularly active or committed. Perhaps some viewers enjoy being “analog couch potatoes.” In this vein, one can argue that part of the “activity” in downloading programs is a type of labor (J. Cha, 2013a). In essence, it is work to carry out these “activities”--and hence more “activity” could also be

conceived of as more “work.” Some viewers still want to watch as leisure, for entertainment, and not be burdened with added labor of new viewing practices. Some viewers still find pleasure in stumbling upon a program, flipping channels during commercials to watch two programs at once, or the lower commitment of casual television in the background, or low-stakes viewing. These activities subside when searching a database replaces a traditional viewing context (Bondad-Brown et al., 2012). Brown and Barkhuus (2006) further categorize viewers’ online activity in relation to its impact on traditional viewing. Viewers are either supplementors or replacers. Supplementors watch traditional TV but use the Internet to supplement their viewing. For example, viewers in the UK watched their favorite programs on traditional television, but sometimes downloaded American shows that were not yet available on British television. In contrast, they argue that “replacers” watch all TV online and none on a traditional television set. It would be important to consider the extent to which people engage in supplementing or replacing traditional viewing—otherwise, all online viewing is treated as the same activity, with the same detrimental impact on traditional television, when this is not exactly the case. One empirical study shows quite an interesting trend. Waldfogel (2009) finds that while online viewing has increased, participants reported also watching more network television per week. Authorized viewing on the network’s site also outnumbered unauthorized viewing. “While conventional television viewing falls by about two percent, this is more than offset by increases in time spent on viewing network-authorized web programming. The networks’ own web distribution has effects that are smaller but similar to the effects of unauthorized distribution on conventional television viewing. ...” (p. 167). He pointed to *Two and a Half Men* and *How I Met Your Mother* as

examples where online viewing increased broadcast ratings. Thus, the online environment can act promotionally for television networks, similar to the argument that people who listen to music for free online will then seek out the actual album for purchase. It becomes clear that there are a variety of viewing modes, both with traditional television and online viewing. While it may be possible to discuss some shifts in type of activity, it is premature to announce a revolutionized, empowered, digital viewership (J. Cha, 2013b). By claiming that new viewing is active, thus privileged, an inaccurate picture of the audience ensues.

Following on the heels of the imagined uber-active online audience comes the popular myth of user control over all media, all content (Bondad-Brown et al., 2012). Popular phrases such as “Google it” suggest that the popular imagination assumes that most anything one could want can be found online, including television shows and news. This myth erases the power of the media conglomerates that choose what to produce, how to produce it, and how to distribute it, and reifies the already shaky notion of the active audience discussed above, through arguing that not only are viewers active, but that they are in total control of their viewing experience (Sender, 2015). A reiteration of research and political economic realities is an important antidote to this discourse.

It might be worth noting “what” people are downloading. Overall, streaming and downloading encompasses a wide variety of content, which includes movies, television programs, pornography, YouTube clips, MySpace videos, and other short-form video materials. In a recent study, Fox et al. (2010) demonstrate that viewers’ online video minutes increased by 50% in 2009 in the United States, but only half of that increase is due to long-form content viewing (p. 52). Instead, a variety of short-form content is

outpacing television viewing online. The content of those clips could either be user-generated or coming from television shows, news, etc.

To return to the predominant television form, long-form programs are still produced, distributed, and aired within the framework of industrially organized markets, in a news, film and television landscape discussed by political economists such as Janet Wasko (2003, 2001) and Eileen Meehan (2005). Hollywood and the major American networks still dominate television production in the United States, with billions of dollars circulated annually. The core networks and their parent companies still command expensive independent programs, but vertical integration allows them to produce and distribute their own content, and synergy through diversified companies with multiplex channels demonstrates that horizontal integration can also restrict available content (J. Cha, 2013b). These are the same programs that are placed, by their owners, into the online context (or accessed alternatively by viewers). The “what” of long-form content is the same on traditional television as on new platforms, which suggests the strength of the television industry in shaping “what” viewers have access to, including reality television and, especially, news.

Further, convergence and new technology owned by the major oligopolies, as well as their formal relationships with companies, clearly structure access (Miller, 2007). The industry has noted that in the context of convergence, different media industries competing for business “means that cable and broadcast networks must develop new models to counteract the potential slippage in viewers and migration of value to other players, such as online aggregators and device manufacturers” (Fox et al., 2010, p. 52). On official network websites, content can be, and often is, made readily available. This is

not the original model television utilized with the Internet since networks took time to warm to a web presence, eventually deciding that they had to incorporate the new technology to keep and grow viewers whom they feared would go off-network to “illegally” access programs, or go to newer, competing portals (J. Cha, 2013b).

Spoilers were a concern, but only in the context of the real issue, which was ratings and the ability of networks to command advertising dollars and thus profitability, as seen in the lawsuit of Viacom vs. Google over YouTube uploads, and the recent Pirate Bay ruling in Sweden (Sullivan, 2009). Thus, the television industry has not relinquished online control to the vast World Wide Web, but instead has incorporated online viewing into its distribution schemes, thus continuing to control and profit from this content through specific distribution deals, revenue sharing, and advertising deals (Skeggs & Wood, 2012).

Time also structures access. Kim and Park (2008) analyze the practice of windowing in television distribution, which is releasing content on different channels or geographic areas based on willingness to pay. Those who are willing to pay more are able to view it earlier in differential pricing schemas set to maximize profits; the strategy relies on firms with the market power to demand such prices and the prices discriminate, hence they bring in fewer audiences (Bondad-Brown et al., 2012).

They examine how digital technologies have forced the displacement of windowing as a primary distribution strategy for television dramas. Rather, they argue that “digital media have changed this basic logic of intertemporal distribution of media products in somewhat contradictory ways. Each additional distribution channel expands the potential market for TV programs, providing opportunities for exposure to yet more

viewers. However, because of digital technology, especially Internet streaming and downloads, the length of the life cycle of media content overall has been extended” (pp. 139-140).

What might be feared to be perpetual windows, though, are sometimes only opened a crack on network websites. Network websites only make a handful of episodes available at a time. Much like an on- demand menu on expensive pay-cable TV channels of video-on-demand, networks restrict availability to create scarcity for the programs, to protect original airings and thus advertising revenue. Rotating content also helps draw viewers back to the online portal, and thus renews their interest in other/new content, while re-delivering them to new online advertising. The major television networks restrict “what” viewers can get, in order to further deliver the audience to advertisers, and once again reminds us that the audience commodity is still at play (Meehan, 2005, 2007).

With the proliferation of Over The Top platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime there might be an assumption that online broadcasting has surpassed television. Not so. These OTT platforms offer slim choice of programming available compared to the wide array of television broadcasting which goes from sports, politics, news, etc. that are non-existent in standalone portals that are not affiliated with traditional television networks. On network portals, various distribution deals are made with other portals or aggregators, also structuring available content. Each deal is a unique legal contract with its own terms and conditions. This point cannot be downplayed enough. However, popular discourse tends to ignore distribution deals as a structuring mechanism, and instead has focused on either the popularity of the sites, ease of access, or their so-called challenge to traditional networks. This is a “challenge” that may not be entirely realistic,

since many of these aggregators agree to legal terms with content providers. Political economists have long pointed out the importance of distribution in the television and film markets (Bettig & Hall, 2003; Meehan, 2005; Wasko, 2003), and this part of the industry is important to consider when discussing online distribution.

It would be useful to consider several key examples, which will clearly articulate the structuring mechanism of aggregate content distribution deals, which will help demonstrate the many industrial decisions that structure international access and work against a strict reading of the active digital viewer. Blockbuster Canada Co. made a deal to distribute a digital film and television library through TiVo--not to the entire population, just to TiVo subscribers, greatly structuring access to that content (Stone, 2009).

Of course, Blockbuster then went bankrupt, first in the United States, then liquidated assets in Canada before filing for bankruptcy in Canada (Ladurantaye, 2011), thus eliminating all access to all content (“That’s a Wrap,” 2011). The bankruptcy might be for naught, as Blockbuster in the United States is recreating itself as New Blockbuster, which will offer online only service; they also plan to offer this service in Canada (“That’s a Wrap,” 2011).

Similar restrictions to content apply to the consortium Hulu, jointly owned by NBC Universal, News Corp. and Providence Equity Partners (a private equity firm), and later joined by Disney. Disney had previously refused to engage a variety of online video platforms, including Hulu; however, Disney later decided to make available some of its ABC holdings such as *Lost*, *Desperate Housewives*, and Disney kids’ and youth programming (Shields, 2009b) in order to capitalize and share in the revenues. It is still

not possible to download CBS or CW programming on Hulu—CBS’s own online content provider, TV.com, is in fierce competition with Hulu, thus does not avail its content to its rival (Shields, 2009a). Hulu clearly exemplifies structured access based on corporate alliances and the attempt to control and profit from one’s own content.

Even on third-party pay sites such as iTunes and Netflix, contracted deals are made between copyright holders and the distribution sites, with only some television content made available. And deals can be broken.

NBC was unhappy with iTunes’ 99-cent-fits-all download price, and for almost a year removed its popular programs such as *The Office* and *30 Rock* from iTunes’ catalogue. After Apple decided it would allow NBC to charge a higher price for HD programs, NBC returned to iTunes, forcing Apple into a tiered-fee policy. NBC later commented that it actually earns more money from free download sites than on pay-per-downloads such as iTunes, due to the advertising revenue gained by delivering so many free-TV-show seekers (Barnes, 2007; Stelter, 2007). This is a healthy reminder that the “real” audience for TV shows is often the advertisers, and that networks make decisions to please advertisers; viewers are to be pleased in order to better deliver them to advertisers. Notice that in all these deals, there is hardly any repercussions in the political and news realm. Television is the primordial medium in these areas.

In addition to corporate distribution deals, some government policies also structure online television access. For example, China decided to censor YouTube in March 2009 claiming political propaganda, but rather than block an individual video, the entire site was disabled, thus blocking all content to all videos (Helft, 2009). This is important to point out because in terms of reality television and news, American

networks have version of their shows **and** network affiliates throughout the world, i.e., CNN Latin America, CNN Europe, CNN International Asia Pacific, etc.

Further, Net Neutrality policy debates are highly related to television streaming. Whether countries decide to allow throttling and a fast lane will determine whose provision of television programs will prevail. Bandwidth is expensive and ineffective not only around the world, but in some parts of the US and the current pricing practices cause frequent downloaders of large files to pay-per-bit, resulting in bills as high as pricey cable subscriptions (J. Cha, 2013b).

Content is highly mechanized. Industry integration, convergence, practices such as windowing, the distribution deal, and government regulation are all-important determining factors in what is available for downloading. The orchestration and coordination of activity here suggests not a free land of user control, but rather, a highly controlled market populated by major television and other media giants (Miller, 2007). The audience and consumers who circumvent this are those who have the ability to circumvent the traditional industry mechanisms and utilize other approaches for locating and downloading programs is premised on the fact that first, one wants to do so; second, that one is skilled enough to do so; and third, that one is technologically equipped to do so (Bondad-Brown et al., 2012). These signs of educational and technological privilege, tied to class—are the “haves” in the digital divide and the minority in US society (J. Cha, 2013b). These are not only technologies of economic polarization, but of political control over media as property (see Bettig, 1996).

Despite the centrality of these facts, some popular discussions emphasize, instead, those acts of circumvention, rather than the limits to circumvention, thus downplaying

questions of access and overestimating online usage. Kompare's (2010) otherwise interesting article about reruns and online TV, exemplifies this tendency: "While there remain substantial digital divides of class, education, and geography in even the most internet-savvy societies, the ability of millions of individual users in most online societies to download and accumulate audio and video increased exponentially" (p. 81). However, communities of users and remix culture are extremely valid and media structures are strong and influential, which should not be overlooked, nor should remembering that the digital divide clearly still exists (J. Cha, 2013b).

If one were to think that online viewing is ubiquitous, and that you can get whatever you want when you want it and if not just pirate it, one might be prone to think that television is dead, and that it has been harmed irreparably by downloading, and irrelevant in the face of new platforms. In the world of news and politics it is so much the contrary. The main gatekeepers are cable news channels much more so than in the past. All new technologies inspire debates about the "death" of what came before, but we might note that books, news, magazines, movies, and music still exist, despite, and as a result of, changing technologies.

Television is still a multi-billion dollar industry, a major distribution outlet for film, new TV content, news, sports, and educational programs. Advertisers still spend billions of dollars trying to reach consumers, and ratings industry and programming execs still try to find new ways to count viewers to deliver to the advertisers, demonstrating the persistence of the audience commodity (Smythe, 1977). Union and non-union labor still work to produce shows, and producers and owners attempt to find ways of reducing costs and thwarting union organizing.

Television's liveness and shared-experience are still factors that have not been replaced by "on-demand" content. Local news, political shows and community access, while continuously threatened, are still a central feature of the TV system in a so-called democratic society (Jin, 2007). "Surfing" is still viable as well since not all viewers want high contact, searching. Some enjoy the flow of TV, programming, and the ability to make low-commitment choices (Bergan, 2011). These cultural narrative arguments should be remembered as well.

There are politics experiences and implications for accessing TV in new-media ways and within the political economy of global television, new technologies can facilitate and constrain, largely at the hands of the large conglomerates and that dominate the global media landscape (Jin, 2007). News stories ringing the death knoll for television, and overly optimistic celebrations of a globally active online audience need to be tempered with a stronger understanding of industry, regulation, and the strength of international conglomerates that shape technology, access, and sometimes regulation itself (Miller, 2007). That structured access, due to the strength of the American television industries, international distribution deals, and government regulation, largely structure the global online television context (Jin, 2007).

While hardly a revolutionary statement, this important fact sometimes falls out of both popular discourse and academic writing, thus masking a deep understanding of the contradictions of online television practices and processes, specifically the in-country and international digital divide that is either ignored or glossed over in North American discussions (Bergan, 2011). With a more critical understanding, journalists could more accurately inform the public about issues at hand, in terms of industrial workings, cultural

practices, and policy, and the public could more fruitfully make connections between their own media use, global television industries, and potentially, communications policies that impact all of the above. So it is important to analyze audience consumption patterns especially in regards to reality TV. This will be discussed in the next section.

## Chapter 4

### Television: Serialization and Globalization

#### The Serialized Reality Soap

The reality soap is defined as a hyper dramatized version of the docusoap. The participants act in artificial settings under extraordinary conditions, and the plot is formed by their interactions in a new situation. They have to get along with themselves, with the other participants, and with the role of the media. In many cases, competition between the participants is a central element, which increases the probability of conflicts among them. These conflicts are extensively discussed in the show (Thornborrow & Morris, 2004). Reality soaps with competing participants thus combine the agenda of a talk show with the style of a documentary and the format of a game show (Tincknell & Raghuram, 2002).

*The Real World*, bringing together different people in a new environment, can be seen as the prototypical reality soap, but the best-known format of the subgenre is undoubtedly the Endemol production *Big Brother*, first broadcast in the Netherlands in 1999 and subsequently aired in more than 40 different countries. The original concept consisted of 10 to 16 competitors living together in an apartment, isolated from the outside world, continuously watched by cameras, and trying to win a cash prize by doing their best in the games proposed by the producers and thus avoiding eviction by the viewers' periodic voting (Aslama, 2009).

This concept was refined and varied in later seasons by additional rules and elements provoking conflicts, such as the separation of the participants in “rich” and “poor” groups, the introduction of secret missions, moles, or identical twins pretending to

be a single person. Other gamedoc formats focused on rather specialized settings or aspects. *Survivor*, first aired two years before *Big Brother*, tested the participants' skills to get along in the wilderness of a tropical island. *Fear Factor* concentrated rather on game elements. The contestants had to face trials of courage testing their physical ability and stunts meant to challenge them mentally, e.g., eating vile animal parts, immersing one's head or entire body in animals considered to be disgusting or intimidating, or retrieving hidden objects in disgusting substances.

*I'm a Celebrity, Get Me out of Here!* combined elements of *Survivor* and *Fear Factor* by bringing together participants in a jungle camp where they not only had to struggle with the limitations of living in the wilderness, but also with mentally challenging games in the style of the *Fear Factor* stunts. Another characteristic of the format, the choice of celebrities as participants, brought two advantages: (1) viewers may be more interested in the show because they are already familiar with the characters, and (2) since prominent participants are presumably more aware of the role of the media and the consequences of their appearance on television than ordinary people, there are fewer objections against particularly sensational or disgusting show elements (Liinenborg et al., 2011).

A variation of the reality soap with less stress on competition is the swap documentary or "lifestyle experiment program" (Hill, Weibull, & Nilsson, 2007) such as *Wife Swap* or, as a celebrity format, *The Simple Life* with Paris and Nicole Hilton. Accompanied by cameras, the participants change their usual living environment for a new environment. The main idea of these formats is to confront different ways of life, which may result in funny or conflict-laden situations (Liinenborg, 2011).

The most successful of the reality soaps are casting shows. Their aim is to discover new singing, acting, or other talents presenting themselves in front of a jury through competition. In contrast to conventional talent contests, the depiction of the selection process has become much more important in modern casting shows. The programs do not only focus on the candidates' performances, but also on their behavior and emotions behind the stage, their families and their living environment, the discussions inside the jury, and the conflicts between jury and candidates. As a result, the casting show can be seen as a hybrid format merging elements of talent contest, docusoap, reality soap, and comedy (Liinenborg et al., 2011).

Strong "eventization" can be observed in many casting shows such as cross-promotion for spin-off magazines and merchandizing products, as well as extensive media coverage about the candidates and the jury are quite frequent. In addition to revenues from TV spots, sponsoring, product placement, and merchandising play big parts as it did in Donald Trump's reality show, *The Apprentice*. Voting may be an important source to finance a casting show, since many formats, but not all, are interactive, with the winner being elected by the viewers. From an economic point of view, casting shows are thus particularly profitable for media companies (Jenkins, 2009).

The first modern casting show was *Popstars*, developed by producer Jonathan Dowling in New Zealand and first aired there in 1999 before being franchised in more than 30 countries all over the world. The aim of the show was to cast members for an all-girl pop group. An even greater and longer-lasting international success was the *Idol* series created by Simon Fuller first aired as *Pop Idol* in the United Kingdom in 2001. All over the world, more than 40 adaptations of this singing contest with single artists

competing against each other have been aired, including *American Idol* in the U.S.A. and transnational versions in Africa, the Arab World, and Latin America (Livio, 2010). More recent casting shows for singers such as *The X-Factor* and *The Voice* lay more stress on the role of the jury members, who don't only evaluate the performances, but also act as coaches or mentors for the candidates.

While singing contests were the earliest and probably most typical form of casting shows, the subgenre soon diversified. The series, featuring young women competing for a contract with a major modeling agency, started in the U.S.A. in 2003 and became a similar international success like the Idol format. In the Got Talent series, in the U.S.A. since 2005, in the U.K., where the show was developed by Simon Cowell, since 2006, any extraordinary show talent can be presented in front of a jury. Casting shows have also been made for comedians (*Last Comic Standing*), dancers (*So You Think You Can Dance*), chefs (*Hell's Kitchen*), business jobs (*The Apprentice*), film (*The Next Action Hero*), fashion designers (*Project Runway*), sportscaster (*Dream Job*), etc. So if every job in media has a reality show competition, why not President of the United States?

### **Globalization as Cultural Market Adaptations**

One of the contemporary paradigms in comparative media research results from such a paradoxical coexistence of the differences and the universal in media structures and content across the globe (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009): National borders may no longer draw distinctions between one media culture and another, but diversities in media cultures might be based more on cultural, linguistic, or ethnic criteria, which may cross national borders.

Media system analyses resonate well with such an approach. Distinctive media traditions developed because of the dependencies of the media field on economic and political pressures (Benson & Hallin, 2007). Hallin and Mancini (2004) provide ample evidence that different philosophies have led to different concepts of media systems. Contrary to the U.S., western European countries have long been skeptical of a free media market and seek to improve diversity by assigning a specific role to the state as a regulative force to enhance the media's role as a social institution. Such media system differences are mirrored in media freedom rankings, which are annually published by non-governmental organizations such as Freedom House, for example. On the other hand, endogenous and exogenous forces of change are also at play. Privatization of television and convergence toward the U.S. model are affecting media systems, which has led scholars to conclude that distinctions have disappeared while a global ideal is appearing (Benson & Hallin, 2007).

Without a doubt, the success of television formats was dependent on the globalization of the economics of the television industry (Waisbord, 2004). After media systems were commercialized, economic interests stimulated an appeal to increase financial resources, an attractive move for media corporations to position themselves in a global market. Revenues no longer depended on a single market, but expanded to global markets. Furthermore, as soon as commercial principles dominated a wide global market, formatted programs could be adopted elsewhere.

For example, Britain's Pearson Television's hit *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* has been sold to over 100 countries including Afghanistan, Russia, and Saudi Arabia (BBC online, 2006). On the other hand, a number of non-Western companies also

became important producers and exporters of television programming. For example, Latin American started exporting products to Europe and the United States. But the U.S. influence remains strong. And, with new entrants participating in the global exchange of audiovisual products, enormous inequalities still exist on a global scale (Waisbord, 2004).

Global market logics consist of the aim of selling audiences to advertisers. The higher their audience share, the more attractive is their programming to advertisers, which eventually determines the organizations' position in comparisons to its competitors. If television stations buy a format, they, on the other hand, also save money as game shows or other reality TV formats do not require the acquisition of professional actors. For example, NBC's game show *Twenty one* costs three times less than an episode of *Law and Order* (Waisbord, 2004). And, they provide low risks for a media company since in a way they provide a history of success and knowledge because of their experiences with adaptation processes in other countries. Furthermore, they draw a lot of their fans onto their website, which increases audience engagement and attracts advertisers in a long run as previously discussed in the media rating profits.

Because media organizations are embedded in a particular culture, the standardization and adaptation processes of TV formats is also a battle among competing ideas to what extent a format should be adapted to a local culture or whether a global product should be part of a certain media culture at all. In fact, some European countries indeed have quotas that primarily aim to curb the import of Hollywood programs (Tunstall & Machin, 1999).

Therefore, similarities and differences that come with a globalization of TV formatting have to be looked at in their interplay, rather than deciding whether global or

local trumps in a particular case. As Waisbord (2004) argues, global media trends and the national are not antithetical, but integrated.

How can a global product then be integrated in a local culture and attract local viewers? This bears on the underlining question whether a global economy may transform a local culture into a globalized television culture. On the other hand, the local and national cultures may still pull the economy of TV formatting in an opposite direction by influencing its success in a local market. Such a discussion reflects internal struggles of a media industry of how “the globalization of the business model of television and the efforts of international and domestic companies deal with the resilience of national cultures” (Waisbord, 2004, p. 360). The contrast of how American reality shows have different cultural narratives and discourse from the rest of the world will be discussed later with further detail.

While economic global successes of TV formats are discussed widely, discussions on cultural adaptations seem to be more complex. To begin with, culture is defined as networks of knowledge (Hong, 2009). As a knowledge tradition, culture is shared among a collection of interconnected individuals, often demarcated by race, ethnicity, or nationality to form a common ground for communication. Culture is transmitted from one generation to the next while undergoing continuous modifications by newer social orders (Lawler, 2013). Such a definition prevents conflating culture with racial, ethnic, or national groups. While those groups are agents of culture, the causal potential does not reside in them. Rather “networks of shared knowledge are activated in a probabilistic manner in certain social contexts” (Hong, 2009).

Indeed, factual entertainment represents networks of shared knowledge and functions as a cultural transmitter, as a binding force in certain social contexts. In other words, embedded in a meaning, which may be understood only to members of a certain social context, particularly evident in humor used in such shows, their content offers representation of cultural values, beliefs, and processes of perception for a particular culture.

Research into intercultural communication has revealed that perceptions of cultural similarity affect with who people initiate and maintain communication (King, 1976; McCroskey, 1966; McCroskey & Young, 1981; Neuliep, Hintz, & McCroskey, 2005; Wheelless, 1974). Furthermore, research shows that consumers respond to advertising messages congruent with their culture and with people who reflect its values (e.g., Paek, 2005).

In a cultural context, a celebrity for example, functions as a cultural hero. Viewers identify with reality stars because such stars represent a high amount of culturally shared norms and values like national celebrities or heroes (de Mooij, 2010; Shearman, 2008; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). For example, Roger Federer represents such a prototype Swiss celebrity. He embodies values like modesty, being natural, and cultural diversity (by speaking a variety of languages), which are values praised and recognized in a Swiss culture.

However, in a global cultural context, when the term of “cult of personality” is used in invokes evoke dictators like Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, and Kim Jong-un today. Yet cults of personality can flourish in a variety of political contexts, as long as there is a charismatic leader and a coherent media strategy.

Vladimir Putin's goes with his position as President of an authoritarian bureaucratic state, but Silvio Berlusconi built his while he ran for office. That is why the concept can help us to understand Donald Trump's success as he seeks the Republican Presidential nomination.

In democracies, it helps if the politician in question already has a winning personal brand, like a reality TV star, so he can be independent from traditional political machines and finance his own media campaigns. Cue Berlusconi and Trump, worth 7 and 4 billion dollars, respectively. Yet cults of personality go beyond private money and public influence. They are about an emotional tie that is forged between the leader and his followers. For this reason, they can be hard to grasp for those not making the connection.

In cults of personality, the leader has to embody the people but also stand above them. He must appear ordinary, to allow people to relate to him. And yet he must also be seen as extraordinary, so that people will grant him permission to be the arbiter of their individual and national destiny. They are not about likeability. Leaders with cults of personality are usually aggressive. They keep audiences on edge with their outbursts and unpredictability. They create a bond that goes beyond agreeing with ideas and policies and people simply want a part of this person the same way audiences want to be part of the show.

Berlusconi is Trump's predecessor here. This media and sports entrepreneur could afford to be a maverick when he jumped into politics in the 1990s. His original party, Forza Italia (Go Italy), took its name from a soccer stadium chant. Berlusconi's ego-laden pronouncements outraged the Italian political establishment, but delighted his fans, as

when he described himself as “the Jesus Christ of Italian politics.” Berlusconi updated the cult of personality for a new age that blurs the lines among media, business, and political interests.

Putin, who has been friends with Berlusconi since the early 2000s, has learned from the Italian. Cults of personality have a meaning all their own in Russia. They fell out of official favor there in the 1950s, when leader Nikita Khrushchev criticized them after Stalin’s death. Putin has revived the practice, guiding a wave of nostalgia for Stalin as he advocates for Russian nationalism and anti-West sentiment. Putin has brought the leader cult into the 21st century, authorizing the creation of a Putin persona that has something for everyone.

Russia’s rich can buy Putin cologne, an Apple Watch engraved with Putin’s signature, or an iPhone featuring Putin’s head, in gold. For the rest, there are collectibles such as a 2016 Putin calendar. In it, the Russian President is an outdoorsman, a somber leader, a lover of animals, nature, and Russian female beauty, a churchgoer, a Commander in Chief ,and so on. Putin is an everyman, but one who stands above everyone.

How does Trump fit into this lineage? He’s unlikely to pose shirtless, but his name has long been written in gold. And like Putin and Berlusconi, Trump’s appeal is less intellectual than emotional. No matter if few of his political ideas are original. It’s the way he presents those ideas as an extension of his own personality and passion, rather than any party platform that wins people over. In Italy, Trump is known as “the American Berlusconi.”

All three of these men have mastered the double appeal that is essential to cults of personality. They advertise their wealth and glamour, but connect with people as populists, using language full of earthy sayings, insults, coarse and broad humor often directed at adversaries, and slogans. Part of the international elite, they are also quintessentially of their own countries. That is one reason they are much more loved at home than abroad.

Trump does not have the ability to muzzle the media, like Putin, and he does not own television networks, like Berlusconi. And yet Trump has been able to set agendas and influence the news cycle like no other Republican candidate as he has also built up a large grassroots following. Social media and the digitization of news have changed the equation between publicity and power that supported classic cults of personality. Berlusconi was ahead of the curve when he first ran for office. He fashioned a new kind of politics, and a new leader image, that was relevant for the media era of the 1990s-2000s.

Trump is playing an analogous role in our decade. We can look to the concept of the cult of personality to explain his appeal and know what to expect if he wins the Republican Presidential nomination. Donald Trump is the presumptive Republican nominee for the presidency of the United States, and the GOP certainly doesn't seem happy about it. It's not just the GOP that appears to be less than happy about Trump; pundits, politicians and prognosticators alike have thrown up their hands, cried to the heavens, and declared the Fates mad.

There is some justification to their distress. Trump is not, after all, what the GOP would typically want in a standard-bearer. He has little political experience, his positions

are all over the map, and his grasp on economic realities can be described as tenuous at best. So how did the GOP, Trump, and the voting public all get to this point? Well, there are several factors at play here, but the most important one is that Trump plays to the weariness of voters with the political process in general.

The bailout of the auto and banking industries, the slow economic recovery hallmarked by lower paying jobs and decreased purchasing power, the constant wrangling between the Obama Administration and his GOP counterparts in Congress; these have all led to a sense of malaise that has voters fed up with their current crop of elected leaders. Trump, who regularly and bombastically ridicules these career public servants has tapped into this dissatisfaction, and, much to the GOP's dismay, Trump has become a sort of cult hero or prophet to his loyal core of rabid followers.

This is an important distinction, as Trump does not enjoy the support of the majority of the voting population, or even the support of most of the voting members of the GOP. To GOP faithful, such issues as scuttling the Iran nuclear deal, abolishing the government-funded healthcare boondoggle known as PPACA, and scaling back affirmative action are all worthy positions for the GOP to take. Trump has come out in support of all these things, and his supporters don't care. The GOP, the political haven for the Christian right, naturally looks askance at the thrice-married Trump, who has also declared bankruptcy four times to avoid repayment on the debt he incurred in making bad business decisions. Again, his supporters do not care.

What the GOP failed to take into account prior to Trump's ascendancy is that Trump was shrewdly tapping into public dissatisfaction to build a personality cult. In discussing how Saddam Hussein came to dominate the political life of Iraq, Abdi noted

in the Journal of Social Archaeology that Hussein preached a “nationalist ideology , which further stressed the distinctness and ancientness of Iraq.” While America is by no means ancient, Trump has preached his own brand of nationalist ideology, complete with blaming foreigners and immigrants for America’s ills, and promising to make the nation great again. Even in a party such as the GOP, partially defined by a belief in American exceptionalism, this strain of nationalism is so foreign and virulent, that the advent of Mr. Trump threatens to fracture the GOP, perhaps permanently.

What Trump is doing, as previously mentioned, is not unique in other countries, but hardly common in the U.S. Trump’s candidacy more closely resembles that of Argentina’s Peron, Germany’s Hitler, or Italy’s Mussolini. More recently, one can point to Russia and Putin, or Venezuela and Chavez to draw obvious parallels. Polls indicate that Trump is not favored by the majority of the electorate, but he may not have to be.

While unlikely, it is still entirely possible that Sanders supporters will cast their votes in favor of fellow populist Trump come November, giving Trump control of the White House, and the direction of the GOP for the foreseeable future. However unlikely that might be, is it any more so than a cult of personality making Trump the nominee of the GOP?

## Chapter 5

### Audiences

#### Audience Perspectives

Why do reality TV formats attract a wide range of audiences? They claim to depict real people and real events, but their “reality” is manipulated for dramaturgical reasons by edited and reconstructed scenes, by careful selection of cast and settings, and sometimes by scripted elements. Our overview of studies dealing with reality TV from the audience perspective thus starts with findings on how viewers perceive and judge the authenticity of reality TV programs. Another important research field is the viewers’ motivation for watching these programs; numerous analyses have been made about the appeal of reality TV for viewers in general or concerning particular subgenres. Many of these studies are still exploratory, limited to specific social groups (often students or adolescents) or regions. Lots of research still has to be done, especially in the field of intercultural differences in the reception of reality TV formats. Data on audience representation and demographic makeup is very hard to find in terms of ratings.

Yet the existing studies provide a first overview of which gratifications may be obtained by watching reality TV. The final section of this part will focus on the role of reality TV programs in imparting particular values to their audience: Various scholars have discussed how the settings of these programs reflect and promote the principles of neoliberalism.

#### A. Perception of authenticity, criticism, and concerns about reality TV

It is often assumed that regular viewers of reality TV have become quite savvy and skeptical when judging how much is actually “real” in these programs (Murray &

Ouellette, 2009,). Although authenticity is desired by the viewers and earnestly promoted by the producers, various scholars argue that in the “postdocumentary context” (Comer, 2009) of reality TV, consumers are not so much interested in absolute truth, but enjoy “the ironic mixture of the factitious and the spontaneous” (Rose & Wood, 2005).

Empirical support for this position is provided by an Associated Press/TV Guide poll from 2005. The participants indicated that “they did not believe reality TV was real, but they also didn’t care that much” (Murray & Ouellette, 2009). In fact, 25% of the 1002 adults polled assumed that reality shows are totally made up, and 57% believed that they show some truth, but are mostly distorted. But only 30% said that it mattered for them whether the shows were truthful or not (Bauder, 2005). We will discuss this with further detail on how it applies to politics.

Alice Hall (2003, 2006, 2009) conducted focus group interviews in order to analyze the perception of the authenticity of reality TV programs more in-depth. Among the various criteria contributing to audiences’ perceptions of realism, she considered two as particularly relevant to reality programs: typicality, i.e., the perception that a media text portrays events or characteristics that are representative of a particular population, and factuality, i.e., the perception that a media text accurately represents a specific real-world event or person. In the discussion of typicality of reality programs, many respondents argued that the cast members and situations they represent were strikingly unrepresentative. They were more likely to accept the factuality of the programs, tending to expect non-factors in unscripted situations, but acknowledging that these situations were often contrived and that the presence of the camera may have influenced the cast’s behavior (Hall, 2009, p. 209).

In their study based on in-depth interviews with 15 adult reality TV viewers, Rose and Wood (2005) found that the programs are seen as a mix of authentic and fictional elements. In order to consider the programs as authentic, the viewers have to negotiate the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in the genre and to reconcile the tensions between what is subjectively real and fictional. The highest satisfaction with the authenticity of a program is reached if these contradictions are experienced as resonant and engaging rather than as bewildering or confusing (Hill, 2005). But the perception of the authenticity of a particular format can change in the course of time.

In group discussions with college students, Lundy, Ruth, and Park (2008) found that situations and characters in reality TV programs were considered as more and more unreal and exaggerated over the years. The participants explained this development as a strategy of the broadcasters to attract more viewers, but criticized that the original premise of reality TV was distorted. Still, they thought that “reality TV is set up to make people believe that these things on the reality shows can actually happen” (Kurtz, 2007).

Effects of reality TV such as a distorted perception of reality may be a concern for producers, but also for viewers and scholars alike. Regarding the concerns over the effects of reality TV often discussed in public, Cohen and Weimann (2008) also mentioned the power of reality TV to invade privacy, considering that viewers enjoy watching other people’s highly personal experiences, the commercial nature of the shows serving as marketing vehicles and attracting the audience to advertisers, and the “escape from reality” that such shows provide.

In their survey of television viewers in Israel, the authors found that the more people watched reality TV shows, the more they thought that these shows have an impact and should be regulated and limited. However, criticism of the shows was not related to the intensity of watching. The main criticisms were that the shows are faked, voyeuristic, and exploitative (Cohen & Weimann, 2008).

All in all, adult reality TV viewers can be seen as a rather “active” audience reflecting on the authenticity of the programs and expressing criticism and concerns. As already mentioned in Part 2, the consumers are also “active” due to the interactivity of many reality TV shows, participating in voting, and discussing the latest developments in online forums and on social media platforms. The authenticity of characters and situations is a widely discussed topic.

Viewers’ activities online may also influence the general perception and the outcomes of a show, which makes the show less predictable for the producers. As an example, Enli (2009) mentioned the case of singer Susan Boyle in the second season of *Britain’s Got Talent*. Boyle’s fame was largely based on viewers’ distributing the video of her stunning performance on social media platforms. She gained celebrity status even outside the United Kingdom, but soon some people questioned her status as a true amateur, and stories about prima donna behavior ruined her image. This may have been a reason why, in spite of all praise for her talent, she ended up being only second in the final competition; the audience preferred to award the members of a dance group who, after the media hype around Boyle, were obviously seen as more authentic representatives of ordinary people with an extraordinary talent. Could Trump be Boyle and play second fiddle to a media hyped candidate?

### B. Motives for watching factual entertainment content

The appeal of reality TV programs to viewers has been explored by various researchers on the theoretical basis of the uses and gratifications approach (Katz, Blunder, & Gurevitch, 1974; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1985), which assumes that viewers are frequently, but not always, actively engaged in the selection of media content. Their use of media programs can be either instrumental in order to obtain gratifications meeting cognitive, affective, or social needs, or ritualized, out of habit.

In an exploratory survey with 157 college students, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) found that habitually passing time was the most important motive for watching reality TV program. This activity had become a ritual in the daily routine of many respondents. So in many cases, the mode of engagement with reality TV was rather passive, and designed to fill time when no other activities are available. The second most salient motive was capturing the appeal of reality content and reality characters in opposition to fictional programs, followed by relaxation and social interaction (Hill, 2005).

Another general survey about the motives of watching reality TV programs was conducted by Ebersole and Woods (2007), who surveyed 530 college and university students in the United States and Canada and identified five factors that explained program choice preference: personal identification with real characters, entertainment, mood change, passing time, and vicarious participation. The authors also found that the most popular programs were watched by the viewers because they found them “humorous,” i.e., they were amused, or humored, by the “stupidity” of the characters and their actions (Aubrey et al., 2012).

Other studies also imply that superiority motives may drive the appeal of reality TV. Reiss and Wiltz (2004) centered their analysis on 16 basic needs and found that in comparison to non-viewers, reality TV viewers are in general more status-oriented, i.e., they have an over-average need to feel self-important. This need may be gratified by the feeling that they are more important than the ordinary people portrayed in reality TV shows, and they can fantasize that they could also gain celebrity status when they see people like themselves on TV. Furthermore, reality TV viewers are more motivated by vengeance than are non-viewers, a desire that is closely associated with enjoyment of competition (Ouellette, 2014).

In a more recent study focusing on teens and pre-teens, Patino, Kaltcheva, and Smith (2011) noted that adolescents striving for popularity and physical attractiveness are particularly likely to feel connected to reality TV, which leads to the assumption that satiating social and personal integrative needs may be an important motivation to watch reality-based programs, at least for this group.

Regarding the theory that reality TV is popular because it appeals to the voyeuristic nature of the population, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) and Nabi et al. (2003) in a similar study showed that voyeurism is present as a motive to watch these programs, but that it is not the key motive. This may be partly caused by respondents who are reluctant to report voyeuristic tendencies for fear that it might be perceived as socially undesirable, but Nabi et al. (2003) explained four reasons why voyeurism may in fact be less important than other motives.

First, viewers watch with some knowledge that the targets are generally aware of their presence; second, the potential of fulfilling a voyeur's sense of illicit pleasure is

limited by constraints on TV stations regarding the broadcast of explicit sexual material; third, the data of the survey indicate that people watch not to see sexual behavior per se, but to watch interpersonal interaction and because they are curious about other people's lives; and fourth, regular viewers often watch for motivations based on personal identity, which seems inconsistent with motives of voyeurs (Nabi, 2003).

However, the measure of voyeurism used for these studies emphasized sexual gratifications that viewers may derive from consuming reality programs and, as Andrejevic (2009) argued, there may be "much more revealing scenes of love and rage" in fictional formats. If a different conceptualization of voyeurism is applied, one that defines it not as a sexual deviance, but as a commonly occurring fascination with access to private details of other people's lives, a "non-pathological" voyeurism is likely to be an important gratification for reality TV viewers (Baruh, 2009).

As a result of a study combining a survey administered to television viewers and a content analysis of 15 different reality TV formats, Baruh (2009) suggested that scenes that adopt a "fly on the wall" perspective, take place in private settings, contain nudity, and/or include gossip contribute to the voyeuristic appeal of a reality TV program. These elements of gossip and infotainment as applied to politics and news media correlated to the Trump campaign.

In October 1958, Edward R. Murrow, delivered a speech before the Radio-Television News Directors Association. In it, Murrow spoke of journalistic responsibility and warned of the dangers of commercialism in the news. "One of the basic troubles with radio and television in the news," he cautioned, "is that both instruments have grown up as an incompatible combination of show business, advertising and news. ... Upon

occasion, economics and editorial judgment are in conflict. And there is no law which says that dollars will be defeated by duty” (Moy, Mazzoleni, & Rojas, 2012).

Murrow went on to add that television could "illuminate" or even inspire, but "only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise, it's nothing but wires and lights in a box. There is a great and perhaps decisive battle to be fought against ignorance, intolerance and indifference," he said. "This weapon of television could be useful" (Moy et al., 2012).

One could argue that such a battle against ignorance has existed throughout human history. Scientists, artists and political reformers throughout the ages have been bedraggled by those who would rather cling to the safety of the status quo. Yet, since the advent of moveable type in the mid-1400s, the forces of erudition have had a powerful weapon to wield against those of ignorance: the media (Athique, 2014). Murrow understood this as well as anyone. Yet, just imagine what the legendary reporter would think of today's 24-hour news cycle, with its "infotainment" structure and its tendency to seek out the sensational over the informative. Murrow, of course, achieved his legendary status by taking on the witch-hunting Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wis.) at the height of the Red Scare. He was not afraid to face the fire.

It was Murrow's ardent belief in the decision-making capabilities of the American people that drove him. He saw it as the media's responsibility to get the people the facts so that they could make informed decisions. In the battle against ignorance, the media was the vanguard. But a weapon is only as effective as the ones who wield it. Media can be used for good, for evil or for naught. The responsibility that Murrow spoke of is a grave one, and must be treated as such. If we entrust it to those who, as Murrow noted,

seek only to profit from it without regard to their moral duties, we will suffer the consequences of mass delusion.

Contrast now to Joe Scarborough or "Meet the Press" host Chuck Todd treating the presidential election as a horse race, evaluating the moves of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump from a political standpoint without considering them from an ethical one. Media has swooned over the bigoted demagogue, asking him exactly zero tough questions and thanking him repeatedly in the end as any celebrity, in this case a reality television star: continued ramblings without ever truly answering a single difficult question.

More important, neither Keilar, nor CNN, nor CNN anchor Anderson Cooper, nor Chris Matthews on MSNBC, for that matter, seemed to grasp the fact that a candidate was essentially dismissing a journalist and setting his own terms for the type of questions he's allowed to be asked. By viewing his actions purely in a political sense, they were able to avoid the more difficult task of actually informing the American people by questioning Trump on moral grounds. Their fear of him allowed him to dictate the terms of the media discourse and the narratives. This is infotainment.

Is this the best that we can do? Is this the sorry state that the American media have deteriorated into? Can a major presidential candidate dismiss the First Amendment's freedom of religion clause, advocate for the exclusion of an entire mass of people, consistently denigrate the opposite sex, speak with nothing but racist vitriol against our neighbor Mexico, and dictate the terms of debates without ever truly being called to the carpet? Have political gamesmanship and ratings taken the place of responsible reporting? Will someone in the media ever turn to Trump as Army counsel Joseph Welch

said to Sen. McCarthy exactly three months after Murrow's report, ask him, "Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?" In the infotainment world, decency is not a narrative. And it does not sell.

There is a differentiation to be made in this infotainment consumption between regular and casual viewers has to be made, since gratifications obtained from reality TV depend on the amount of TV watching. The more people watch TV for entertainment, relaxation, as a habitual pastime and as a basis for social interactions with others, the more likely they are to develop a greater affinity for reality TV programs. In other words, the reality genre is rather unlikely to attract new audiences or lead to high consumption of TV unless those tendencies are already pronounced (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007, pp. 367-368).

In comparison to casual viewers, regular reality TV viewers receive stronger and more varied gratifications; not surprisingly, parasocial interaction is a particularly important motive for regular viewers who have the possibility to develop parasocial relationships with participants in serialized shows (Nabi 2003). An important condition for positive parasocial ties is the ability to name a favorite reality TV character.

Ho (2006) found in her survey that respondents who had chosen a favorite character developed quite strong ties and found the shows much more appealing than people who didn't name a favorite character. The latter group scored higher in their beliefs that reality TV contestants are motivated by selfish goals, such as acquiring fame and winning prize money. Viewers who do not watch reality TV regularly enough to have favorite characters thus often have a stereotyped perception of the protagonists in

these shows, which may explain why they are not interested in the genre. This has to do with Donald Trump's cult of personality previously analyzed.

The appeal of reality TV shows also depends on how realistic they are judged by the viewers. People enjoying reality TV for its entertaining and relaxing value tend to perceive the content of reality shows as more realistic than people with less affinity to the genre. This implies that in order to obtain the gratification of entertainment by watching reality TV, people first have to accept the realism of its content (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). Although most consumers do not believe that the programs are entirely real, they likely find them more real than other types of programming (Nabi et al., 2003).

The uses and gratifications paradigm can be linked to another construct explaining the appeal of entertainment programs: the notion of enjoyment. In their study comparing viewers' enjoyment of fictional and reality programs, Nabi et al. (2003) considered not only a set of gratifications previously sought or obtained from TV programming, such as parasocial relationships or learning, but also other factors that might associate with the enjoyment of entertainment programs.

Program interest and enjoyment may be caused by perceptions of drama and suspense, as well as by emotional reactions as suggested by the mood management theory (Zillmann, 1988). On this basis, the researchers depict a differentiated view of emotional and cognitive assessments predicting enjoyment. While for fiction, suspense and pensiveness enhanced, and surprise detracted from enjoyment, for reality TV in general voyeurism, happiness, surprise, and relief positively associated with, and anger detracted from enjoyment (Nabi, 2003). A more detailed analysis however revealed that each

reality TV subgenre evinced different patterns of gratification, and that reality programs may differ as much from one another as they may differ from fiction.

In a comparative study, Barton (2009) analyzed a corporate-themed casting show *The Apprentice*, a serialized dating game show *The Bachelor*, and a gamedoc with contestants battling extreme conditions *Survivor* by examining the differences between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained by the viewers. The results show that personal utility (relaxation, escapism, uniqueness of the program) is seen as a more important gratification for all three formats than social utility (keeping up with others who watch the show, talking about it), which may reflect the fact that reality shows have become more and more individualized and specific with the ongoing diversification of the genre (Barton, 2009).

Perceived realism does not determine the appeal of each analyzed show to the same extent. While this factor is rather important in *Survivor*, this is not the case in *The Bachelor*, which features a highly unlikely plot of 25 women competing over one man. Conversely, the romantic elements in this show result in a higher level of obtained gratifications in terms of social utility than the minimalist conditions in *Survivor* (Barton, 2009). Hence, in *The Apprentice* it combines elements of *Survivor* and *The Bachelor* where participants are competing over one aspect of life that most audiences can identify with: employment. These elements of how the different shows compare themselves to *The Apprentice* and the 2016 campaign were previously discussed as Trump is the host, judge, boss and star.

Due to their high audience ratings and their combination of elements from various other genres, casting shows are a particularly popular research field. Researchers have

analyzed how adolescents as a very important target group (Hackenberg & Hajok, 2010) perceive these shows. According to Klaus and O'Connor (2010), the main functions of casting shows for adolescents are providing topics for conversation, providing topics for discussions about ethical questions, and satiating integrative needs in cultural and social fields such as nation, race, class, or gender. These attributes are very parallel to “adult shows.”

Seeking entertainment, fun and thrill, and avoiding boredom are the main motives for watching the shows; while girls have a stronger interest in the outcomes of the competition (Gotz & Gather, 2010, p. 53), boys like to watch the candidates' behavior and to trash talk about them (Hajok & Selg, 2010). Most 12- to 17-year-old viewers are aware of the commercial intentions of casting shows; pupils on a lower education level are more likely to believe that the producers want to organize a fair competition and to give the candidates “a real chance” (Gotz & Gather, 2010). This also applies to competition reality shows with confessionals such as *The Bachelor*, *Survivor*, *The Apprentice* and the 2016 electoral campaign.

Dover and Hill (2007) analyzed lifestyle and makeover programs by looking at their production and reception. Viewers associated such programs rather with light entertainment than with factual information and a didactic approach: “Those who enjoy makeover shows do so because of the programs' emotional and entertaining content; they do not tend to have high expectations of watching informative or true-to-life content” (Dover & Hill, 2007). In the reception of coaching shows such as *Supernanny*, cognitive motives seem to play a more important role. Viewers compare the protagonists' everyday life with their own one, feel relieved to see that other people have similar, or more

serious, problems, and like to know how other people can solve their problems.

Voyeurism and experiencing superiority over the helpless protagonists portrayed in these shows are also present as motives, but less important (Grimm, 2010).

Supernanny was also the topic of a study comparing the reception of a reality TV program in various countries. Grimm (2010) found that the recommendations given by the nannies did not represent the same parenting style in all analyzed countries and that the success of the format varied. The British original, propagating an authoritarian parenting style, and the German program with medium authoritarian and democratic tendencies were very successful, as well as the Spanish and Brazilian versions boosting rather democratic-permissive recommendations. In contrast, audience ratings of the Austrian program, recommending a distinctly more democratic parenting style than the program of the German neighbors, stayed below expectations, and the show was cancelled after three seasons. Viewers' expectations regarding the recommendations given by the nanny may thus depend on specific educational traditions in their country (Grimm, 2010).

### **Audience Gratifications and Belonging in Customized Consumption of Reality TV**

Since its origins, game shows, a precursor of today's reality TV, were about little else than enculturation into mass consumer society, and today's television is no exception (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). Early reality programming focused on individual stories only to determine the contestant most in need of one-size-fits all consumer products. Current programming, by contrast, allows the onscreen drama to unfold as contestants are shown

how to consume according to their individual needs and unique personalities (Skeggs & Wood, 2012).

An inability to construct oneself and one's belongings within the constantly updated and infinite range of consumer goods propels thousands of individuals to undergo makeovers ranging from the routine living room to the drastic body alteration. Houses are redecorated on *Merge* and rebuilt on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, cars are revitalized on *Pimp my Ride*, men are refashioned on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, and bodies are literally reshaped on shows like *The Biggest Loser* and *Extreme Makeover*. Like its predecessors, such programming teaches viewers to identify one's sense of self through consumptive habits; unlike earlier shows, this identification process is individually tailored, validating a full range of life choices (Skeggs & Wood, 2012).

Reality TV valorizes individuation by abandoning a culture in which the individual is forfeited to mass consumption and replacing it with a culture that preserves such individuality as the prerequisite for customized consumption (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). Two individuals, with their differing fashion senses, come together to form a newly married couple. With individuality as its premise, the show works to create a home decor that fits both styles; indeed, we are told that retail stores will accommodate all lifestyles. Because homes should reflect the different identities of their owners, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* customizes houses by literally rebuilding them from the bottom up.

No one is criticized for having the wrong kind of car on *Pimp my Ride*. Rather, the car owner's individual tastes are affirmed by incorporating particular aspects of his or her personality into the car going so far as to install cappuccino machines and fireplaces

inside vehicles. The cast of *Queer Eye* survey the personal and professional identity of their "straight guy" and then customize their advice to his work, romance, and leisure desires.

Epitomizing this customization are shows, like *The Biggest Loser* or the original *Extreme Makeover*, that provide dramatic weight loss, plastic surgery, and other reconstructive procedures specific to the contours of individual bodies and the contestant's desired imaginary (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). In short, reality TV signals the movement from a culture industry that ideologically "impresses the same stamp on everything" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1994, p. 120) to a culture industry that affectively "diffuses production (in subjectivity and consumption) throughout the extremities of the social factory" (Cote & Pybus, 2007, p. 95). In other words, the human being to an extreme becomes a cultural narrative of "reality." Across its many subgenres, reality television connects individuals and their divergent tastes to a larger community of similarly minded people, intensifying different life choices through properly channeled consumer practices.

As reality TV shows work to produce a new form of customized consumerism, they simultaneously necessitate and produce individuals open to the affective work of constant becoming and belonging (Tal-Or & Hershman-Shitrit, 2015). In order to get on any reality TV show, a contestant needs to apply via audition tapes, group casting calls, and/or personal interviews. The screening process for each show has basic bottom-line criteria, one must have a demonstrable need for a house, car, makeover, money, fame, partner or personal growth.

Beyond this minimal criterion, producers look for someone comfortable disclosing personal information and willing to reflect on and adapt to difference (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). The more willing they are in revealing, the more “real” they appear to the audience. Participants need to possess a general affective quality that enables them to receive and respond to various triggers, regardless of the particular stimuli or one's reaction to it. They must be open to change precisely because reality TV functions pedagogically to highlight the value of constantly evolving identities in perpetual need of consumer updates (Lorenzo-Dus & Blitvich, 2013).

Notably, contestants in all forms of reality TV programming describe their experience in exclamations such as “unbelievable,” “priceless,” and “like nothing else” because, for them, it is “life changing” (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 145). This linkage between reality TV and improved selfhood reflects affective energy and its potentiality for collective belonging. The value of these televised experiences, from such a viewpoint, proceeds through the affective labor circulating among contestants, whose rising energy levels seep into our home spaces and inhabit the embodied experience of viewers, compelling us toward new modalities and cultural narratives of belonging (Skeggs & Wood, 2012).

Also, the interactivity of reality television will be discussed later on in the social media section, but it needs to be pointed out now that telephone texting or going online, and thus submitting oneself to other forms of mediated individuation, has become a natural extension of reality TV programming and its cultural logic of self-expression. Web sites that give behind-the-scene narratives, follow-up information on contestants, as

well as product and production details cater to viewers savvy enough to acknowledge the artifice of reality TV, but who nonetheless fear missing some detail of its construction.

The increase in social networking spaces, the popularity of YouTube videos, and the rise of online purchases all indicate a burgeoning interest in fulfilling our individual desires through mediated activities (Trottier, Fuchs, & EBSCOhost, 2015). Reality TV plays a crucial role in the increase of these practices by circulating cultural narratives that animate audiences into action within the digital sphere. Online applications hold out a chance of participating on television; online or telephone voting offers an opportunity to shape the direction of current shows; adding comments to online blogs opens a space for all of us to be television critics; and online stores allow us to purchase copies of television shows as well as related paraphernalia suited to our individual desires. The circulation of people, information, and products among these spaces increases the affective potential that adheres to each site (Godlewski & Perse, 2010).

As reality TV participants and audience members learn to individualize themselves on television and online, they channel and fuel others to do the same. Ouellette and Hay (2007) argue, for instance, that this new wave of television rationalizes a society wherein individuals and private funds work together to solve the problems of community welfare, addressing diverse “values subcultures” to model behaviors for self-fashioning, community restoration, and general governance.

This rationale, they say, makes the self a conductor of power someone empowered to take charge of one’s life, and also as someone who can effectively conduct a charge (Osborne-Thompson, 2014). Reality television, which frequently engages at-home participants with tips, instructions, and confessions, functions as a medium for this

affective transmission. Perhaps more than other mediums, this “reality” feels palpable as the television commodity utilizes participants in their everydayness, addresses audiences directly, and encourages active viewer participation. In this complex of activities, affect the sensuous nonsensuous value of media production rises to the surface, nearly visible, as reality television merges worker, commodity, and consumer into an ecology of constantly intertwined production and consumption (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004).

The connective energy of reality TV habituates people into individuated forms of belonging patterned through a repeated movement between the television, telephone, and computer. Traveling through our embodied experiences, affect teaches us to repeat this movement with less and less direction. As Massumi (2002b) argues, “habits are socially or culturally constructed. But they reside in the matter of the body, in the muscles, nerves, and skin where they operate autonomously” (pp. 236-237). There’s a theory that American gangsters learned how to talk by studying Hollywood movies and not the other way around (Tryon, 2013).

Hence, when audiences participate in online extensions of these shows, when we build online communities, when we use our phones to record daily events, or when we entertain ourselves with interactive gaming popularized by Wii and X-Box, we train our bodies to find self, community, and life energy within online spaces and media (Baruh, 2010). From this perspective, the cultural value of reality television stems less from its aesthetic or ideological content than from the life practices it inspires. Reality TV constitutes individuals as projects to be enhanced, updated, and redirected toward the increasingly digital spaces of social networking, shopping, entertainment, and education (Aubrey et al., 2012).

We cannot say with any certainty what will happen online or which online spaces will become popular, but we can say that we are, indeed, becoming habituated into bodies that move within online environments, willingly provide personal demographic data, do Google searches on one another, and consume supposedly unique identities, all of which are recorded and digitally preserved for those with the power and the technology to access such information (M. Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto, & Gummadi, 2010). If television discourses simply worked to discipline ideological identification, there would be no need to customize our consumer identities, and if institutions demanded consumption, people would likely resist (Baruh, 2010).

Contrary to the cause and effect relationship of ideological or institutional power, affect motivates consumer actions because it individuates potentialities even as it directs them into appropriate spaces of valuation. Affect doesn't "just force us down certain paths, it puts the paths in us, so by the time we learn to follow its constraints we're following ourselves" (Massumi, 2002a, p. 223). As a physiological energy circulating among and between situations, affect concretizes that often fuzzy link between ideologies and lived material experiences and gives us reason to believe that as the market for reality TV becomes ever more commonplace, viewers will become more and more comfortable online and under surveillance. Audience seek these cultural narratives along the paths set before us, people who engage comfortably within the culture of reality TV will undoubtedly engage comfortably with the politics of its surveillance (Dubrofsky, 2011).

In these technologies of surveillance from satellite television and the storing of "cookies" on personal computers to video cameras in schools, grocery stores, and banks to the complex biometrics increasingly requested for cross-border travel, requires

widespread surveillance, audiences have been accustomed to this and see it as commonplace. In fact they embrace it as security, comfort and reality (Dubrofsky, 2011). Since the 1970s, such surveillance has become increasingly integral to reality TV programming, helping to redefine voyeurism as personal entertainment and self-empowerment rather than as an apparatus of institutional abuse (Calvert, 2000, p. 28).

This shift seems less like an abrupt turnaround from the binary of positive freedom versus negative surveillance within the “resonating levels” of stasis and change propelled by affective flows (Massumi, 2002b, p. 33). Unlike ideology that operates along a pole between the hegemonic and the oppositional, affect moves throughout all life spaces: It pulls people together or pushes them apart; it raises energy or lowers energy; and it fixes them within particular spaces or it opens them to the possibility of new spaces. Thus, the measure of reality TV's use of surveillance needs to focus not on binaries like negative oppression and positive resistance but on the ways it modulates affect within the disparate activities of watching others. In the lexicon of affect studies, we need to ask questions about how it pushes or pulls, what it strengthens or weakens, and where it opens or closes life potential (Baruh, 2010).

Later on, the role of social media and interactivity will be discussed with further detail, but it is important to point out now the role of surveillance in that interactivity. Audience members become involved in surveillance activities conducting the affective flows of reality TV, they simultaneously energize individuals, connect them to others, and open new lines of thinking. They see what other people are saying, texting, tweeting, etc. and reciprocally (Dubrofsky, 2011).

Illustrative of this complicated space of surveillance is *Big Brother*, which takes its title from George Orwell's 1984, wherein the characters live in a highly authoritarian society monitored by the panoptic and all-powerful Big Brother. Designed around the notion of 24-hour surveillance in an enclosed house over several months, *Big Brother* entertains almost completely through surveillance. In contrast to Orwell's characters, which feared Big Brother's gaze, monitoring on reality TV functions as a commonplace activity that helps one measure and assess risk. By watching others, we gain insight into their intentions and can determine our own actions in relationship to theirs, a skill that helps us manage our lives within an enterprise society in which marketable individuals are those who endlessly assess and adjust to the vicissitudes of the world around them (Dubrofsky, 2011).

The affective energies of programs like *Big Brother* habituate viewers toward collective belonging through surveillance (Dubrofsky, 2011). Viewers subscribe to 24-hour live feed, call-in their elimination votes, engage in online discussions with participants who have been voted out of the house, and write online commentary about each episode, crafting themselves into a collectivity defined by watching and commenting on each other.

Reality TV's politics of surveillance encourages audiences to find community through watching, recording, and discussing the events everyday lives. This affective labor binds togetherness and adds value to such activities even as it refrains from giving meaning to those behaviors (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). Because we house surveillance texts online where people can deliberate their meaning but not enforce a verdict, the final adjudication of justice cannot be predicted from the text of surveillance. The surfeit of

online deliberation, however, intensifies the affective experience and inspires repetition of other surveillance acts as a responsible means for managing contemporary life (Dubrofsky, 2011). The importance of this video lies in its illustration of how community forges itself through surveillance and not in the meaning, whatever that may be, of its content. In other words, even with a factual video there is neither reality nor truth to it until an audience gives meaning and life to it: perception over reality.

The tendency to record and watch everything that can be caught on camera makes an individual grievance or the outcome of any particular incident less important than our continued habit of watching and recording others (Baruh, 2010). We become immune to it. For example, in *Shulmand v. Group W. Productions*, a woman sued the reality-based *On the Scene: Emergency Response* for airing, without her consent or knowledge, a car accident in which she almost died. She claimed that the program had violated her rights by publicly disclosing private facts of her car crash. The production company defended itself, arguing that the accident and its details were within the public interest because they were newsworthy.

Upholding the liberal ideology of free expression and the neoliberal standard of deregulation, the California Supreme Court sided with the production company and asserted amusement as a criterion for newsworthiness (Calvert, 2000, pp. 145-147). An alternative reading, however, might suggest that the affective path between real-life surveillance and television audiences accounts for the presence of viewers more so than the newsworthiness of the accident. In such a reading, an entire range of practices connected by their affective circulation constitute part of the value-added labor of this event and its ability to attract an audience (Dubrofsky, 2011).

Elizabeth Wissinger (2007) explains that the affectivity of images does not depend on subjective content or meaning, but rather on their ability to attract a “televsual glance,” no matter how fleeting . . . this glance develops an attachment to being exposed to images, to watching television, hooking into the internet or browsing magazines, (pp. 265-266).

Apart from whether or not this accident was newsworthy, it tapped into our attachment to watching and being watched and further centralize cultural narratives within the sphere of surveillance (Dubrofsky, 2011). The affective value produced by watching consenting adults in various life circumstances stems from its ability to provoke other similar activities, which further enables other practices. Just as contemporary marketing produces “an affective intensity that can trigger a number of autonomous or ‘viral’ communicative networks among consumers and the public at large” (Arvidsson, 2007, p. 13), the increased surveillance of our contemporary world generates, in part, from the ripples of affective energy flowing throughout the spectrum of behaviors attached to reality television.

Audiences who watch reality TV participants perform under constant surveillance learn to document potentially noteworthy activities, whether entertaining, informative, or criminal, and thereby perform the double work of circulating affect and laboring under the porous governing apparatuses of neoliberalism which is a political economic terrain wherein constant assessment is the prerequisite for constant production and consumption (Miller, 2007). Hence, everybody else is accountable and there is a causality between the life of “others” and those of audiences.

Reality television positions the work of viewing and deliberating as the foundation for a public life played out at the intersection of material and virtual spaces, circulating affective patterns that connect our cultural, political, and economic practices and narratives. Consequently, we readily translate reality television viewing into an entire complex of feelings (Baruh, 2010). As we watch docudramas, we feel a sense of belonging; as we watch cop shows, we feel secure as a nation; as we watch talent shows, we feel pride in American meritocracy; and, as we watch makeover shows, we feel as though we are taking responsibility for those in need.

The actions triggered by these feelings do not stay within the viewing situation, but flow throughout a digital continuum that compels many of us to labor on behalf of the surveillance impulse. We record beatings and car crashes as frequently as the mundane events of our everyday lives (Dubrofsky, 2011). This comfort with surveillance invites participation in the embodied performance of watching others and thus reconstructs individuals within new dispositions. People who feel a sense of security through surveillance, for instance, may be less likely to fear participation in various "forms of interactive monitoring relied on by producers to reduce uncertainty in an increasingly diversified market" (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 68).

Politically, we engage in ever more forms of surveillance; economically, that surveillance transforms into productive labor: Normalized and unremunerated surveillance generates profits. Andrejevic calls this the online enclosure; in other words, it is free labor. This is something that has been seen since the inception of television programming and economic structure.

Borrowing its model from the magazine industry, television sells products to consumers below cost, but sells its audiences to advertisers at steep prices in order to garner an overall profit. As Dallas Smythe (1977) argued long ago, audience activities, although located outside the wage system, contribute to the production of surplus value because their labor produces a product, which are marketable viewer shares that are unremunerated. Unlike audience members who are uncompensated for their labor, television writers, actors, and production crews are paid wages (Jin, 2007). This system of paid and unpaid labor has become less and less profitable with the proliferation of cable channels, access to overseas programming, and technologies like OTT platforms that enable viewers to bypass commercials (J. Cha, 2013a).

Consequently, most television shows become profitable only after syndication and DVD releases. Reality television, however, forges a path beyond this economic crisis because its volunteer contestants are not paid wages as actors would be and its audience labors significantly more than traditional viewers. By increasing affective flows through contests, challenges, and life experiences of televised volunteers and interactive audience members, reality TV dramatically reduces wages from wage labor and increases surplus value, or the amount of unpaid, value-generating labor (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). This fits perfectly to politics and its coverage since it covers all these elements and it is susceptible to inexpensive production. As a matter of fact, in politics the politicians/reality television stars pay to have viewers, which increases significantly the surplus value.

This shift from wage labor to volunteer labor requires willing audiences. And participants. And these participants need to affectively engage viewers and audiences

through their repeated interactions with televisions, telephones, online mediums, and other digital spaces (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). Within this trans-situational experience, individuals subject themselves to surveillance for the payoff of experience, personal growth, and possible opportunity rather than an old-fashioned equation between time, labor, and wage (Dubrofsky, 2011).

In an uncertain economy, made more precarious by the recent economic crisis, individuals readily volunteer for reality TV shows that provide recognition for their diverse identities (*Big Brother* and *The Real World*), pseudo job interviews (*The Apprentice*, *Project Runway*, *Top Chef*, and *American Idol*), or potential prize money (*Fear Factor* and *Wipeout*). What characterizes this programming is its double production of surplus value. On the one hand, it produces surplus value through the labor of its volunteer contestants; on the other hand, it produces surplus value from the labor of its volunteer viewers (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). Viewer votes, blogs, and subscriptions to live feed all generate value in the sense that they add to the quality of the show.

*American Idol*, for instance, would not work without viewers willing to text message votes. In a different way, blogs that leak information about docudramas like *Big Brother* similarly enhance value through speculation about the show's outcome. Regardless of what form this viewer participation takes, such activities increase the intensity and energy of the television program, simultaneously habituating individuals toward specific affective pathways and increasing the market value of reality television shows without any accompanying costs in wages.

To be clear, the transmission of affect contributes to the economic cycle with varying degrees of proximity to the production of surplus value and thus all “free labor”

should not be theorized the same way (Jin, 2007). The transmission of affect exists both inside and outside economic modes of production. When it enters into this financial circulation cycle, it can be used to add surplus value; when it remains beyond the interventionist capabilities of profit, it produces value in the autonomist sense of self-valorization but not surplus value (Miller, 2007).

Specific labor practices, and not affect, produce surplus value. Andrejevic (2007), for instance, explores Web sites that discuss reality television and include a range of “fans” that both like and dislike the shows. What binds these fans together, and keeps them loyally tuning into the programs, is the online discussion. While this kind of viewership no doubt existed before, the difference is that the dialogue has been redirected onto the Internet, a space wherein these conversations can contribute directly to surplus value production.

During television’s earlier periods, determining the lines of discussion and the demographics of participants who deliberated in offices, at kitchen tables, and in the streets required marketing teams who worked for wages. Moving these activities online allows for a smoother assessment of such discourse, extending, argues Andrejevic (2007), the Fordist model of detailed production oversight into the detailed marketing of consumption (p. 55). Because labor must be organized and spatially mapped out by capital to create surplus value, the economic potential of affective labor lies dormant until it is oriented within the proper channels of financial production (Miller, 2007).

Not only does reality television create new forms of producing surplus value for the television industry and thereby secure the changing medium against crisis, it also constitutes viewers as neoliberal citizens capable of shouldering an array of other

economic responsibilities (Miller, 2007). Financial advice programming like *The Suze Orman Show*, *Mad Money with Jim Cramer*, *The Apprentice*, and *Million Dollar Listing* teaches audiences how to behave in the current economic climate.

For example, as Orman and Cramer personally address callers, their energetic and kinetic voice transmits affect that moves viewers. Repetitive commentary may reveal few new insights, but the live, unscripted nature of the shows provides space for the production and transmission of affective energies.

According to Wissinger (2007), this ability to modulate affect works like a sixth sense: people who have it are able “to open themselves to capturing something unexpected, something that moves beyond the norm, toward the unknown” (p. 260). Although Wissinger analyzes the modeling industry, her point is equally true of the voices and languages that bind to televisual images. The meaning of Orman’s directive to know your credit score, a statement heard numerous times in each episode, has little revelatory effect on callers who are also frequent viewers. The affective energies of her instructions nevertheless move from the televised Orman to the viewing bodies, directing them toward online spaces. Cramer does not merely give stock advice, he is a buddy letting in on the now in wheeling and dealing and taking gambles. This also applies in politics as so called pundits and reporters become media personalities and reality television stars.

This sparks audiences almost instinctually, to fluctuate among many different sites and mediums. They perform embodied practices routinized by the affect flowing throughout the television, telephone, and computer screens that litter our professional and personal landscapes (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). Even as they freely choose to participate

in reality television and its continuum of diverse value-generating activities, audiences do so because the circulation of affects within its triangulated digital world “gives the body’s movements a kind of depth that stays with it across all its transitions—accumulating in memory, in habit, in reflex, in desire, in tendency” (Massumi, 2002a, p. 213).

As reality television compels to travel from the television to the computer, checking *Big Brother's* live feed or one's favorite TV blog becomes as much a part of our morning ritual as coffee or email. If audiences are already in front of a computer screen and online, why not print out airplane or movie theater tickets? Why not purchase household products? Why not do our own banking or brokering? Why not do any number of activities subtly unhinged from the system of wage labor? When affect is directed along particular trajectories, such as those forged through reality TV's circulating energies, it creates a force: “the set of invisible, untouchable, self-renewing conditions according to which certain effects can habitually be expected to appear” (Grossberg, 1992, p. 160). In short, reality television directs our affective paths toward digitalized mediums, moving our life energies through observable spaces so that their potentialities can be valorized according to the economic logic of profit (Jin, 2007).

By connecting television viewing with productive and consumptive online behaviors, reality television sets the stage for further participation in the digital enclosure. Such interactive television invites viewers to move more deeply within the online world where, Andrejevic (2004) says, “every consumption decision represents a double value: that realized in exchange and that which can be generated by the information about that exchange” (p. 84). The extra value derived from this information comes at no cost to the

receiver and only a trivial cost to audience who must type their demographics at each new online interaction.

Extending the television experience into the online experience, reality TV constructs opportunities for individual movements and preferences to be tracked, recorded, and resold to marketers at the same time that it habituates participants into the practice of free labor (Baruh, 2010). When audiences provide information that can be catalogued and sold for a profit, when we fill our own soft drinks, when we check out our own groceries, and when we swipe our own credit cards, we are providing our labor for free, marking our successful transformation into neoliberal citizenship (Jin, 2007).

These activities generate relative surplus value, a temporary increase in value due to technological innovation within production, because they are externally controlled by corporations, which no longer have to pay for this work (Miller, 2007). Yet we go online, revealing personal marketing information to companies, and we eagerly perform consumer labor, in part, because reality TV has normalized free labor by affectively reconstituting unpaid work as a crucial component of our subjective belonging in late capitalism.

The cultural narrative on reality TV rests on two assumptions. First, critical cultural theorists can interpret texts, like reality TV, “trans-situationally” and with simultaneous attention to their cultural, political, and economic implications, and second, theories of affect that emphasize the transfer of life energies among people and things need not abandon an economic theory of valuation (Jin, 2007). Using this double lens, survey of the affective flows surging throughout the myriad spaces of reality TV suggests a tripartite legitimation of belonging within late capitalism (Mueller, 2004).

Culturally, reality TV instructs us to embrace customized commodities as a means of expressing our individualities, as do contestants on its shows, reimagining consumerism within the neoliberal sphere of the all-powerful self rather than the masses (Mueller, 2004). Politically, viewers learn to embrace surveillance, the cornerstone of reality TV (Dubrofsky, 2011). Just as surveillance becomes the condition for audience constitution so does it forge neoliberal subjects whose constant monitoring and assessments contribute to the diffusion of affective labor (Dubrofsky, 2011).

Economically, reality TV reinforces the widespread de-wagification of labor and forges online communities. By replacing paid actors with on off-screen volunteers, reality TV programming legitimates various ways people work for free. Mutually imbricated, these three vectors of reality TV constitute a force that energizes multiple affective moments and persuades us to adapt our sense of belonging through practices commensurate with a constantly evolving capitalist valuation process (Jin, 2007).

In this analysis, affect travels throughout the disparate exchanges among television participants and viewers. Both external and internal, affect challenges the very notion of a unified, self-contained subject who persuades an audience to a specific end and reciprocally with rational argumentation (Osborne-Thompson, 2014). Refusing the liberal subject of rational deliberative theory, affect reconfigures agency so that it encompasses individuals bound together by a rhetorical situation shot through with excessive and irrepressible affective energies (Tal-Or & Hershman-Shitrit, 2015).

Rather than calling us back to a rational subjectivity by escaping or countering these energies, theorists espousing critical affect studies need to concentrate on tracking the potentialities inherent in the uncertain and open field of their circulation (Osborne-

Thompson, 2014). By following affect from one situation to another, our traditional methodologies, the close reading strategies of cultural studies as well as the empirical research of communication studies, simply unravel. Affect, that is, stages the scene for reflecting on and reinvigorating our critical practices beyond ideological and political economic methodologies (Mueller, 2004).

Although still very much alive, methods of ideological or political economic analysis rely on modernist notions of agency wherein the critic and the consumer are obligated to see correctly and then act accordingly, creating what Ronald Walter Greene (2004) calls a permanent anxiety. Greene suggests that we replace these political-communicative visions of agency with communicative labor, which he defines as “a form of life-affirming constitutive power that embodies creativity and cooperation” (p. 201).

Communicative labor, premised on the belief that affect flows throughout the entire range of life practices, requires methodologies able to pursue these energies as they move people and things. Individuals who are compelled by the power of commodities can no longer be considered passive ideological dupes or agents of unique semiotic decoding (Jin, 2007). According to this conception, the power of commodities derives from and participates in the circulation of capitalist value as much as the circulation of life energy; processes that should be theorized together.

Methodologies based on the assumption of traditional agentive power work through fixed categories and equivalences between otherwise diverse human beings that do not account for affective flows. But, if we replace agency with affect, we tie cultural participation to the life energies that connect diversity rather than sameness, opening cultural studies to its as yet uncharted immanence.

### **Reality Television Audience Consumption Patterns and History of Consumption**

It is important to examine the audience's rationale for watching reality shows, their perceptions of the situations portrayed on these shows, and the role of social affiliation in their consumption of reality television. While audiences perceive a social stigma associated with watching reality television, they continue to watch because of the perceived escapism and social affiliation provided (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). As previously mentioned, while the phenomenon of reality television lacks clear definition (Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003), it pervades contemporary network and cable programming. In contrast to scripted television, reality television portrays people in their natural settings. "As a presentation of non-actors in legitimately natural settings and situations working without a script, reality TV stakes its claim with viewers to regard its depictions as unadorned and spontaneous truthful documentation of natural reality" (Bagley, 2001, p. 1).

Reality TV began to emerge as a distinctive genre in the late 1980s (Hill & Quin, 2001). Mead (2005) defines reality programming as "as an unscripted program that shows real people, not actors nor athletes, active in a specific environment" (p. 3). The assumed realistic nature of reality TV programming is commonly associated with the television talk-show genre. Both of these television genres are similar in that they "create audiences by breaking cultural rules, by managed shocks, by shifting our conceptions of what is acceptable, by transforming the bases for cultural judgment, by redefining deviance and appropriate reactions to it, by eroding social barriers, inhibitions and cultural distinctions" (Abt & Seesholtz, 1994, p. 171). The influence of reality television is in its ostensibly accurate depiction of social experiences (Joniak, 2001).

Reality TV shows still enjoy a solid place in the line-ups of network and cable channels. Reality shows were also a reliable source of programming for the networks during the recent Hollywood writers' strike. For a phenomenon that blossomed a few years ago, reality programming is still widespread in broadcast television (Joniak, 2001; Kronke, 2004). According to Hight (2001), most assumptions about the psychology of reality TV viewership are derived from textual analyses of reality-based programs, rather than research involving audiences. Thus, Hight calls for investigations of reality-based programming based on the assumption that such programs may implicate a network of social, economic, and political changes in modern society.

Viewers have conceptualized reality programming by the approach taken to various content areas of documenting real-world events (Hall, 2006). Viewers in Hall's (2006) study further clustered reality programs by characteristics such as the show's objective or prize, the format, the level of manipulation or intervention by the producers, and the message. Hall suggests this clustering of shows reflects distinct themes, ideological messages, and content areas. According to Pecora (2002), reality TV is, the expression of a powerful, and increasingly unbridled, tendency within democratic society, one also embedded in academic institutions, to reveal the norms and limits of individual responsibility and group identity, however exaggerated (and commercialized) the settings that reveal such knowledge may be. In effect, television is now doing the kind of social psychological research our universities no longer permit, (p. 356) Nabi et al. (2003) offer a definition of reality-based television programming, which also includes news programs, talk and interview shows, and nonfiction narrative programs.

Audiences refer to several characteristics of reality TV: characters are real people (not actors), programs are not filmed on a set, but in natural living or working environments, programs are not scripted, events are unplanned, but evolve from narrative contexts, and the primary purpose is viewer entertainment (Sender, 2015). In uncovering these characteristics, Nabi et al., conducted a study of randomly selected city residents to determine their construction of the reality TV genre. They found that respondents perceived some reality programs as more realistic than others. In Hall's (2006) study of viewers' perceptions of reality programs, she also found inconsistencies in participants' conceptualization of reality programs. Some participants highlighted competition as a key element of reality programs, while others emphasized unpredictability or a focus on negative circumstances or behaviors.

Following the uses and gratifications perspective that Nabi et al. (2003) offer, the present study attempts to explore the choice of reality TV and the gratifications sought from reality TV viewing. In explaining media choice and the types of gratifications that result from that choice, Lazarsfeld and Stanton (1944) developed the uses and gratifications theory. At the core of extensive communication research, uses and gratifications theory has been the focus of research on understanding audience needs and motives for using mass media. Uses and gratifications theory also aids in understanding audience consumption patterns of specific mass media channels. Considered a sub-tradition of media effects research (McQuail, 1994), Wimmer and Dominick (1994) suggest that uses and gratifications originated with the interest in audiences and why they engaged in certain forms of media behavior. Early studies of uses and gratifications include the contexts of quiz programs and the reasons people listened to soap operas

(Herzog, 1942), the interest in music on radio (Suchman, 1942), the development of children's interest in comics (Wolfe & Fiske, 1949), and the functions of newspaper reading (Berelson, 1949).

Although uses and gratifications has been used in varying communication contexts, Rubin (1986) confers that uses and gratifications research is best applied when exploring specific links among attitudes, motives, behaviors, and communication effects. In a summary of Katz and Blumler's contribution to this theory, Lin (1996) suggests that the strength of this theory is its ability to allow researchers to study mediated communication situations via a single or multiple sets of psychological needs, psychological motives, communication channels, communications content, and psychological gratifications within a particular or cross-cultural context, (p. 574) Katz et al. (1974) describe uses and gratifications as having three main objectives: to explain how people use media to gratify their needs, to understand motives for media behaviors, and to identify functions or consequences that follow from needs, motives, and behavior.

As a major communication theory, uses and gratifications is based on five basic assumptions (Katz et al., 1974; Palmgreen, 1984; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1985; Rosengren, 1974; Rubin, 1986): Behavior is purposive, goal-directed, and motivated. People select and use media to satisfy biological, psychological, and social needs. Individuals are influenced by various social and psychological factors when selecting media. Media consumers are aware of their needs and whether they are being satisfied by a given media option. Different media compete for attention, selection, and use.

According to Reiss and Wiltz (2004), individuals act to satisfy one of 16 basic motives: power, curiosity, independence, status, social conflict, vengeance, honor, idealism, physical exercise, romance, family, order, eating, acceptance, tranquility, and saving. Reiss and Wiltz studied the motives for watching reality TV under the premise that these motives may be achieved vicariously through television characters. The romance motive may be achieved through watching a romantic movie. Reiss and Wiltz found status to be the most significant motive for watching reality TV. The authors infer that viewers may perceive themselves as better than the characters portrayed or feel that the portrayal of ordinary people in reality TV elevates their own status. Reiss and Wiltz also found vengeance to be a significant motive for reality TV viewers as compared to nonviewers. Vengeance is closely associated with competition (Reiss, 2000). The authors also found viewing reality TV to be negatively associated with the motive of honor or morality. All these genres and tropes can be applied to the political motivation of audiences also (Aronczyk, 2015).

In a quantitative study in 2002, Wei and Tootle found two unique gratification dimensions for reality TV viewing: life-like format and vicarious participation. Wei and Tootle's findings in understanding the uses and gratifications for reality TV viewing explored audience consumption, patterns, rationale, perception and social affiliation of reality TV. They found that audiences are at most watching and at least very familiar more reality TV shows to at least partake in a discussion and conversation over them (Sender, 2015).

Escapism is also a major factor for audiences who feel that reality TV offered the viewer a "glimpse" into another world, which for a moment could take the viewer away

from their own reality (Hill, 2005). Although it can be extreme, it is amusing, as opposed to watching either fiction based genres or the other end of the spectrum which are documentaries and news. Audiences have reached a happy medium of a perceived reality tailored to appeasement (Hill, 2005). Hence, fiction and news have then moved their boundaries and have acquiesced to this new reality construct made by audience consumption. In other words the artificial “reality” of reality television has become the standard for the news in order to fulfill audience consumption. Basically something that is depressing as opposed to something, while ridiculous, is entertaining and an escape from some of the negative reality that people deal with day in and day out.

This theme is escapism is even more important to discuss in terms of reality TV and politics as it merges into voyeurism. Audiences put themselves in the shoes of the characters and see themselves in the shows. It is not real life but that is the point. Real life is boring and audiences watch reality shows to live vicariously through others. Reality television is given the verisimilitude of reality not because of the characters or the production, because as viewers can see themselves in that situation and because they pass judgment on themselves on what would they do in those situations (Hill, 2005).

This disparity between reality, perception and consumption of reality TV assimilates audiences into watching train wrecks without being able to look away and numbs them to normalizing watching train wrecks. While Nabi et al. (2003) hesitated to characterize viewers as voyeuristic, they stopped short of generalizing reality viewers as innocent, which supports this finding. Although listing many reasons for watching reality TV, audiences most commonly watched because they are bored, it was humorous and entertaining, they liked to see other people fail, or the shock factor (Hill, 2005).

Audiences also watch reality TV because “it doesn’t require full attention,” or “it is something that you do not have to watch every week to understand what is going on” (Sender, 2015).

This voyeuristic quality of reality TV reflects not only in entertainment but also on the addictiveness of following on the life of strangers and discussing about it with other audience members. Much like sports and politics, the motivations for watching are much more than simply watching but on the cliffhanger qualities of outcome and discussion afterwards (Sender, 2015). Although audiences are hooked in their reality TV consumption, they discern and differentiate between “good” and “bad” reality TV (Godlewski & Perse, 2010).

Audiences believe that “good” reality TV Good vs. Bad Reality TV When discussing opinions toward reality TV, participants described certain elements of reality TV shows. From these descriptions, “good” reality TV materializes as being beneficial because they give the viewer useful ideas or advice; give people a second chance; are entertaining or funny; and can be applied to the viewer’s actual life (Sender, 2015). Good reality shows are commonly associated with home or personal appearance improvement that provide a “happy” and “uplifting” perspective of reality (Wilson et al., 2012). These shows make audiences feel good and they attempt to educate the viewers about something, often a skill. Other aspects of “good” reality TV included shows that improve participants’ appearances or self-esteem, that are funny and entertaining without a personal expense to participants, and that give the viewer a positive glimpse into the lives of others (Sender, 2015). They choose so-called “normal” people that for whatever reason

want to boost their self-esteem or their lives as opposed to the shows that are all about the money or 30 seconds of fame.

Audiences bring a concept of morality and American righteousness to these judgments and perceptions. Conversely, “bad” reality TV is commonly linked to concepts of immorality. Bad reality TV, also referred to as “junk TV” by audiences, though indicated as entertaining at times, included television shows that were based on deception, ridicule, contempt, and physical or emotional harm (Sender, 2015). Audiences use words and phrases such as “humiliation”, “gone too far,” “unrealistic,” “just plain mean,” “misrepresenting reality,” “obvious attempts to spur controversy,” “ridiculous situations,” “manipulated and exaggerated,” and “driven by the shock value” (Sender, 2015).

Audiences also have the perception that the “bad” is getting “worse” such as the exploitation of children in beauty pageant reality shows and poor families. But they keep watching. This line going from “bad” to “worse” has moved the distinctions and classifications between “good” and “bad” reality TV appear ambiguous. Then the “not so bad” becomes “good” for some audiences. Nonetheless, it was noticeable that each participant had his/her own established notions of good versus bad reality TV and that each made their viewing decisions based on these notions (Sender, 2015).

The deception and lack of morals is common concern for audiences and the moral implications of reality TV when judging its collective impact on society (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). Audiences might even find reality TV programming as “morally corrupt” but yet they keep watching and know about it. The neoliberal narratives confirming the negative impact money has on the morals of reality show participants teaching lying and

deceit to get rid of other participants to win money, a spouse or a house. But yet they keep watching. To the point that the narrative becomes as acceptable and encouraged because the end all and be all is winning and the eye on the prize.

As a result of the “moral corruption” demonstrated through reality TV programming, audience have concerns about the impact the popularity of this television genre will eventually have on society (Sender, 2015). Trash in, trash out. However, is reality television influencing society or is it merely a reflection of it? For this point, audiences fall back on the definition of “truth” on reality TV and the distortion of reality and perception (Sender, 2015). Audiences already know the extents to which these shows go to attract viewers and distort the premise of reality. Audiences feel that many of the shows have gone “overboard” in order to attract viewers but because the networks are making so much money on this genre, they are willing to go as far as they can (Sender, 2015).

Audiences believe that these things on the reality shows can actually happen. This sets up a mindset of hyperrealists that will believe anything or believe nothing (Sender, 2015) Characters become exaggerated over time and react to unreal situations. Coupled with this exaggeration or “drawing the line” quality of reality TV, the discussions also focused on the accurate portrayal of reality due to the excessive amount of editing that was believed to occur in the development of the shows.

The Nabi (2003) study voiced similar frustrations. Several participants mentioned watching television programs that provided behind-the-scenes views of the reality TV show production. Participants indicated that these behind-the-scenes shows provided proof to the large amount of editing that takes place during the final production phases

for a reality TV show. A common belief was that the program's producers, "don't show everything," but rather only what they want the audience to see.

In addition to the editing process, many participants believed reality TV is "staged," "contrived," "exaggerated," and "fake." One participant summarized the realism debate in saying, I think it has always been staged because I mean, who do you know that would get up in front of a TV and really act as if they were not in front of a camera, comfortable. I think it has always been fake to a point, but we are now beginning to notice it more 'cause there are so many television stations and so many reality shows out there to watch (Drayer & Dwyer, 2013).

Audiences already assumed that reality TV does not represent reality. Overall, reality TV is perceived as a "misrepresentation of reality," which audience already suspect is becoming more scripted and contrived in an effort to boost ratings and derive profit for the producers and networks (Sender, 2015). So the audience's suspensions for disbelief are heightened to a disbelief in reality. However, audiences have a social connection that reality TV provides in several different ways, including the way in which they watch reality TV shows, the conversations that result from reality TV viewing, and the involvement that they experience while watching reality TV.

Audiences rarely watch reality TV "alone" and watch in groups, with roommates, friends, family and live social media interaction such as Twitter (Wilson et al., 2012). This is an audience rationale for watching reality TV giving it social value. This social value and serialization becomes a ritual for audiences. In Hall's (2006) study, audiences referred to groups watching reality shows to guess the outcome together, noting the unpredictability of reality programs as an attractive attribute. The social connections

provided by reality TV also include the conversations that reality TV motivates between viewers. This social value is not age-specific, allowing the topic of reality TV to establish common ground between any two people in a conversation (Drayer & Dwyer, 2013) very much so like sports, and even more than news and politics.

This social influence makes audience be familiar with reality TV in order to feel familiar with what others were talking about and to be able to participate in the conversation (Wilson et al., 2012). So having a peripheral knowledge of some programming to not feel left out is a social motivator. The feeling of being left out in a reality TV conversation by audiences supersede their own knowledge of the how shallow,” “just in passing, or “nothing in-depth” of these conversations but they engage in discussion about “a memorable episode,” the “stupidity of the characters,” or “what was going to happen next week” on the show (Sender, 2015). There is also an element of shame and a “guilty pleasure” in this consumption by audiences. This is not any different than from any movie, sporting event or show, but when segueing into the world of “reality” it also transcends to realm of news and politics as said earlier in the Omarosa quote.

Audiences, as mentioned earlier, are influence by being able to make decisions affecting the show’s outcome, like voting, gives the viewer a connection, a feeling of belonging and importance to the show (Sender, 2015). Additionally, audiences feel that the “real” context of some reality shows makes it possible for them to participate and get involved with the characters and situations on the show. This feeling of audience belonging and influence is tied into consumption in segueing from passive watchers to active voters. Reality TV gives people a connection since they are more involved because

they have some kind of say with its outcome. This will be discussed in further details as it relates to the 2016 electoral campaign.

Audience consumption of reality TV appears to be a complex phenomenon that offers many opportunities for further study. Audiences progressed from initial denial, or underestimation, of reality TV consumption to the shocking realization of the actual amount of reality TV they consume. While reticent to characterize themselves as reality TV viewers, audiences appeared to be watching a great deal of reality TV (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). Modesty and guilt over reality TV consumption appears to be caused by the social stigma that surrounds reality TV (Sender, 2015). Audiences seem hesitant, as well as embarrassed, when they revealed the amount of reality TV that they consumed; their reactions of guilt coupled with their responses insinuated that it is bad to enjoy watching reality TV (Sender, 2015).

The researchers attribute one of three possible explanations for the underestimation of reality TV viewing. First, it is plausible that the audiences did not realize that the shows they watch are considered reality TV. It is hard for audiences to define whether certain shows were “reality television shows.” In fact, Mead (2005) suggests that reality TV is different from other genres of television due to the numerous subgenres that exist, making the genre diverse and sometimes difficult to define and/or classify.

Second, it is plausible that audiences were embarrassed or hesitant in disclosing the actual amount of reality TV that they watch in the beginning of the focus group because of the social stigma associated with reality TV. This explanation would be consistent with the findings from research investigating the soap opera genre of television. Blumenthal’s (1997) focus on the “social devaluation” of soap opera

viewership explains this notion of female viewers being embarrassed or apologetic about the pleasure they find in watching soap operas; moreover, Whetmore and Kielwasser (1983) found that these feelings were commonly caused by the social stigma of soap opera programming being “silly” and “inconsequential.”

Similarly, Lemish (1985) investigated college students and their consumption of soap opera programming and found that their “awareness of publicly held opinions about soap operas” is what caused their feelings of embarrassment and, thus, their caution in revealing their viewing habits. Finally, another possible explanation is students simply forgot or had a hard time recalling all the reality TV shows that they watched throughout the year, implying that they did not omit the information on purpose. Regardless of reasoning, the underestimation of time spent watching reality TV programming is not unique to the reality TV genre in that numerous studies suggest that individuals tend to underestimate the amount of television they consume (Seiter, 1999).

Audiences refer to the “great escape” provided by reality TV and feel it offers an opportunity to sample other lifestyles and realities than their own more than in fiction genres (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). Audiences live vicariously through the characters in reality programs and offers an opportunity for them to contemplate and discuss how they would respond or behave in the situations portrayed in the programs. Many of the situations characters face in reality programs—dating, family issues, racial tension, and moral decisions— are particularly relevant for audiences. Therefore, the reality television phenomenon plays integral part in the lens of social learning theory in determining how the decisions or actions of reality TV characters are impacting the decisions or actions of viewers politically and economically (Aronczyk, 2015).

Another rationale given by audiences for watching reality TV is their perception of the discrete nature of each episode. Audiences felt they could watch a given episode at their convenience and out-of-sequence (Sender, 2015). They also felt watching reality TV did not require their full attention, unlike scripted television dramas where they fall behind if they miss an episode; therefore, the reality TV genre seems to fit well with the changing schedules and active lifestyles of audiences. The convenience of reality television programming appeared to be a major gratification of reality television consumption (Sender, 2015).

Audiences perceive two types of reality TV, “good” and “bad” reality TV. They characterized “good” reality TV as giving viewers useful ideas or advice, giving characters a second chance, and providing entertainment or humor. They also included in “good” reality TV shows that improve audience’s appearances or self-esteem, shows that are funny and entertaining without a personal expense to audiences, and shows that give the viewer a positive glimpse into the lives of others. In contrast, audiences characterize “bad” reality TV as shows based on deception, ridicule, contempt, and physical or emotional harm (Skeggs & Wood, 2012).

While audiences might disagree on some of the “good” and “bad” characterizing traits, each audience have their own established notions of “good” versus “bad” reality TV, and that these perceptions influenced their viewing decisions (Sender, 2015).

Audiences also expressed concern regarding morality in reality TV. They expressed a shared sentiment that reality TV’s collective moral impact on society was negative.

These findings of “good” and “bad” television are consistent with the findings of Ang (1985) in studying the pleasure derived from watching the soap opera, Dallas. Ang

found that many viewers classified the soap opera program as “bad television” in regard to quality but still found an attraction, while other viewers gave numerous reasons for why the show was “good” television and thus deserved their attention. This perception of polarization has transcended into politics and news and will be discussed in further details later.

The college students in this study do not watch reality TV alone. Social affiliation appears to play a significant role in reality TV viewing for the audiences in this study. Audiences watch reality TV with their roommates, friends, and family members. Television is sometimes criticized for breaking down social connections where people watch television rather than spend time developing interpersonal relationships (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Reality television, for the college students in this study, seemed to have the opposite influence. reality TV appeared to bring students together, not only for watching the shows, but also in conversations resulting from reality TV viewing. In fact, audiences even acknowledged watching reality TV shows they do not particularly enjoy because of the social affiliation of reality TV viewership. They do not want to be “left out” of conversations about reality TV, which coincides with the findings of Babrow (1987) that suggest one of the many motives for college students in watching soap opera programming is the social interaction it provides; interaction in the form of watching the programs together but also the interaction of conversing about the program at a later time.

Hall (1980) posits that in the encoding and decoding process of media discourse, the meaning of the text is located between the producer and the reader, or in this case the viewer. According to this theory, the producer (encoder) frames the text by giving it a certain meaning based on their personal background and cultural perspective, while the

viewer (decoder) will adapt the textual meaning by decoding a different version of the text based on their personal background, various social situations, and frames of reference (McQuail, 1994). This perspective on audience theory and research is especially useful in determining how individual circumstances like gender, age, ethnicity, and cultural affiliations affect the way a reader or viewer receives and interprets text.

Clearly, in this case, defining characteristics of audiences could have some affect on the way they receive and interpret the meaning, specifically the realism, of reality TV programming. For example, Brasch (2006) suggested that unique to audiences is the appeal of content involving relationship issues and their ability to identify with the no-name stars that appeared on the programs. In addition, reasons cited for this appeal been the high volume of interactivity that attracts a generation absorbed in a multimedia world and the structure of reality TV programming that compliments the shortened attention span and lack of patience of the young adult audience (Hiltbrand, 2004). Finally, the view that the reception and interpretation of reality TV programming in this study is unique to supported by the original proposal of Katz, Blunder, and Gurevitch (1974), that media uses and gratifications differ across age, gender, and lifestyle.

Hence, reality TV is and will continue to be a significant part of audience consumption. Even though they might be confused about what constitutes reality TV programming, they are absolute in their opinions and perceptions toward this growing genre of television (Sender, 2015). Due to the amount of reality TV consumption by these viewers, there are implications for advertising and product placement, sitcoms and traditional television programming, and extreme reality TV consumption on morals and behaviors, especially among younger viewers. Through the uses and gratifications

perspective, reality TV programming provides a unique genre of television to study. Not only does reality TV have the attention of television networks and viewers alike, but also as Oullette and Murray (2004) suggest, it provides the gratifications that viewers seek. “What ties together all the various formats of the reality TV genre is their professed abilities to more fully provide viewers an unmediated, voyeuristic, yet often playful look into what might be called the ‘entertaining real’ ” (p. 4).

Although the findings are similar to other studies that investigate the gratifications sought from audiences through reality TV programming (Brasch, 2006; Frisby, 2004; Hiltbrand, 2004; Mead, 2005), these studies can also be used as a foundation for reality TV consumption. Future research should investigate its influence on decision making, perceptions of reality, reactions toward specific programs and program content, exploration of good versus bad reality TV and association with viewing behaviors, exploration of the third person effect in reality TV viewers, and comparison of perceptions toward reality TV of high vs. low consumption/viewers and the future repercussions in terms of political and economical choices of audiences due to reality TV consumption. Because reality TV can be considered a popular culture phenomenon, future research in this area can significantly contribute to the growing and diverse field of cultural studies by uncovering how different audiences, in this case young adults, receive, interpret, and consume cultural texts. However, as previously mentioned, this audience consumption is not merely passive as it also segues into interactivity online. Audience interactivity and activity is measured in other ways and forms this will be discussed in the following section and how it relates to media, television and especially reality television.

### **Audience Activity and Participation in Reality Television**

Audience participation is a central agent to the shared experience or lived reality of the program. Audience activity represents how selective people are when they approach media use and how involved they are with the content (Rubin, 1993). It is an important concept in media research because activity influences gratifications derived from media use, as well as media effects (e.g., Kim & Rubin, 1997; Perse, 1990; Rubin & Perse, 1987).

Unlike many genres of television programs that allow the audience to watch without ever requiring interaction with the television program, reality programs, as previously mentioned offer the audience a participatory experience. These programs encourage activity while watching, as well as after the programs are over. Because of the nature of the programs, they encourage viewers to attend to and become involved with ordinary people in extraordinary settings (Hall, 2006; Nabi et al., 2003; Nabi, Stitt, Halford, & Finnerty, 2006).

Therefore, audiences are more likely to become mentally and emotionally involved with them as they watch, and identify with the participants. The proliferation of Web sites allows viewers to review program video, watch unaired video, learn additional information about the program and the participants, discuss aspects of events and strategies with other viewers, and vote in various polls. A few interactive programs allow viewers to direct the program by voting. The focus of this study is on two types of audience activity: identification with participants and post-exposure online activity, but contrary to online videos and content as previously mentioned this is done through social media (Trottier et al., 2015).

Audiences of reality programs have viewing motives, identification with the participants, cognitive and emotional involvement while watching the programs, and online activity after watching these programs (Sender, 2015). Based on the uses and gratifications perspective, higher levels of cognitive and emotional involvement during exposure and identification with the participants will be associated with more post-exposure activities (e.g., communicating and interacting with related program content and others via social media) (Sender, 2015). Audience activity and participation are linked to audience's satisfaction with viewing the programs (Godlewski & Perse, 2010).

As an audience-centered approach to mass communication research, audience activity is important of uses and gratifications. Audiences are active because they select media content that they believe will provide the gratifications that they are seeking. Therefore, viewing motives predict activity (Levy & Windahl, 1984; Perse, 1990; Rubin & Perse, 1987). Based on his analysis of television viewing patterns, Rubin (1984) identified two general types of television viewing: ritualistic and instrumental. A ritualistic viewer is a habitual viewer. The ritualistic viewer watches television out of habit; to pass time; for companionship, relaxation, arousal, and escape; and is characterized by a nonselective, uninvolved, and less-active use of television. In addition, ritualistic viewing focuses more on using television as a medium and less on the specific program content (Rubin, 1984; Rubin & Perse, 1987). We will discuss how this activity translates to votes and active participation in the 2016 electoral process later in further detail.

Instrumental viewing, on the other hand, reflects selective and purposive exposure to specific television content. Research supports the idea that instrumental television is a

more active and involving viewing experience (Perse, 1990; Rubin, 1984; Rubin & Perse, 1987). In other words, an instrumental use of television is reflected in planning to watch specific program content, attention to program content, cognitive and affective involvement with programs, and increased post-exposure activity (Perse, 1990; Rubin & Perse, 1987).

Research has found evidence for both ritualistic and instrumental viewing of reality programs. Nabi et al. (2003), for example, found that regular viewers of the programs were more likely to watch because they were bored than were casual viewers. Other research, however, finds that reality television viewing is an instrumental experience. Hall's (2006) participants watched the programs for social utility and entertainment. Nabi et al. (2003) found that, compared to casual viewers, regular viewers of reality programs were more likely to watch the programs to learn, to compare themselves to the participants, and for entertainment.

Taking into consideration what was previously stated on neoliberal cultural narratives, audiences obtain political thought and nation identity through them (Jin, 2007). Individuals are variably active along several dimensions and at different times in the media use process (Blunder, 1979; Kim & Rubin, 1997; Rubin & Perse, 1987). More specifically, audiences exhibit different levels of selectivity, utility, and involvement before, during, and after exposure to media content (Levy & Windahl, 1984). Different types of activity, then, contribute to different outcomes (Kim & Rubin, 1997). As related to news and politics, activity and participation is assimilated into passive viewing to active social media participation and voting.

Thinking about message content is a sign of cognitive involvement (Rubin & Perse, 1987). Cognitive involvement involves attention to the program, including allocating mental effort directed toward the program and to evaluating messages during reception (Perse, 1990). Elaboration—or the way in which audiences interpret, attach meaning to, and respond to messages—is a deeper dimension of cognitive involvement (Eveland, 2001; Perse, 1990; Rubin & Perse, 1987). Both attention and elaboration are suggestive of an instrumental use of media (Levy & Windahl, 1985; Rubin & Perse, 1987). Reality program viewers can be quite cognitively involved with the programs because of the suspense involved in the unfolding of the action, the novelty of the events, and the ability to peek voyeuristically into others’ lives (Hall, 2006; Nabi et al., 2006).

A distinctive aspect of reality television is that the programs allow us to vicariously experience the “real” world through observation of others’ trials and tribulations. As a result, audience members become not only cognitively involved, but also emotionally involved with the programs (Nabi et al., 2006). Emotional involvement involves a range of emotions from satisfaction and happiness, to frustration and anger (e.g., Nabi et al., 2006). Nabi et al. (2006) found that feeling happy, surprised, and relieved while watching reality programs enhanced enjoyment, whereas feeling angry lead to less enjoyment. Mixed with cultural narratives of American identity, this creates a political mindset of audience assimilating media with policy.

A distinctive aspect of reality television is that the programs allow viewers to vicariously experience a “real” world through observations of others’ trials and tribulations. These programs focus on the development of personal relationships, engagement in personal competitions, and the resolution of personal conflicts. Audiences are

encouraged to become involved in the participants' lives and to identify with them.

Viewers' natural curiosity about others is an important factor in the appeal and enjoyment of the programs (Nabi et al., 2003). In a political race, the candidate becomes the embodiment of a character and everything around them is a cultural, reality television narrative.

Identification is a fleeting relationship that audiences form with a media character during exposure (Cohen, 2001). Cohen defined identification as having several aspects: imagining oneself as being the media character, adopting the perspective of the media character, becoming caught up in the action as experienced by the character, and viewing the media content from the perspective of the character. Eyal and Rubin (2003) posited identification to be linked with perceived similarity. Identification with media characters is a critical aspect of viewing involvement, and is a possible effect of active and purposive (i.e., instrumental) media use (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999).

Identification is a sort of vicarious experience that occurs during media use, and is especially encouraged by reality programs. Through identification with characters, viewers experience suspense (e.g., Zillmann, 1980). As a vicarious media experience, identification is functional because it is a dimension of audience activity that signals that people are involved with the content (e.g., Rubin & Perse, 1987). Identification and suspense have been linked to heightened pleasure while watching media content (Zillmann, 1980) and satisfaction of arousal needs (Lawrence & Palmgreen, 1996). Hence, identification with reality program characters and political candidates can be predicted by (a) more instrumental viewing motives, (b) greater exposure to the

programs, (c) perceived realism, and (d) cognitive and emotional involvement with the program (Trottier et al., 2015).

Reality programs offer several points of interaction using social media. This interaction, in turn, might influence the gratifications viewers receive from these programs (Tincknell & Raghuram, 2002). Indeed, reality programs offer new forms of post-exposure activity and opportunities for additional gratifications previously unavailable to television audiences. This includes seeking additional gratifications using the Internet to participate in online activities or even through voting to influence the program's outcome.

As such, interactivity creates involving experiences through the viewer's active control of the media and regarding politics, the electoral process (Trottier et al., 2015). In addition, the use of reality programs involves not only active traditional participation of selecting and processing media messages, but also active participation in creating them as well (Trottier et al., 2015). This translates to political campaign in converting television audiences to being participants in rallies, campaign volunteers, etc. (Aronczyk, 2015). Therefore, in terms of voting, viewers who vote must exhibit higher levels of mental engagement in thinking about and paying attention to which they chose to vote for. Viewers are now able to have a dialogue with the programs they watch and are no longer only message receivers, but are also active message creators and create other audience members in the convergence to voters (Liu & Schrum, 2002).

In addition, prior research has shown that viewers are behaviorally affected based on feelings of identification. Viewers who identify with media characters are thus likely to be influenced by the character, are more satisfied with their viewing experience, and

act as a result of this identification (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). Therefore, because instrumental use is marked by greater affective, cognitive, and behavioral involvement, viewers who vote should exhibit instrumental viewing motives. Moreover, those motivated to explore social media activities after viewing the programs would also identify with the people they see on reality programs (Trottier et al., 2015). The real or “ordinary” people on these reality programs might stimulate a type of involvement that allows for deeper emotional and cognitive reactions, which, in turn, might lead to post-exposure online activity such as voting, campaign involvement, etc. (Aronczyk, 2015).

Therefore, post-exposure activity will be predicted by (a) more instrumental viewing motives, (b) greater attention, (c) greater cognitive elaboration, (d) greater emotional involvement, (e) higher identification, and (f) greater perceived realism of the reality programs (Hill, 2005). Satisfaction is an affective reaction to media use that reflects the gratification of viewers’ motives for viewing television programs.

Satisfaction is an important concept because it is associated with personal fulfillment (e.g., Hecht, 1978), pleasure, positive evaluations of the program, and greater exposure to television (e.g., Perse & Ferguson, 1993).

Research has shown that satisfaction is typically the result of more instrumental and active television use (Kim & Rubin, 1997; Perse & Rubin, 1988). Therefore, the more effort that viewers invest in watching certain programs, the more satisfied they are with viewing. Television reality programs encourage higher levels of audience activity than typical programs, primarily because of their focus on ordinary people competing for prizes, romance, and success (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). Hence, audiences can become more emotionally and cognitively involved with the programs. Reality program

producers have also made good use of social media resources, encouraging various types of online activity after watching the program (Trottier et al., 2015).

Reality programs encourage audiences to become actively involved with program participants. In addition to the theoretical interest in identification as a facilitator of media effects (e.g., Cohen, 2001), these results offer some insights to television producers. Identification appears to be an aspect of program involvement. Prior research points out that involved audiences are less likely to skip advertisements (e.g., Perse, 1990) especially during live events such as sports and political rallies. The relationship between identification and mental engagement also suggests that audiences who identify with the characters in reality programs might be more likely to respond to ads imbedded in programs (i.e., product placement). And in this section, audience activity and participation in reality TV was analyzed. In the next section, the personality traits of these audiences will be analyzed.

### **Personality Traits of Reality Television Audiences**

Current research stresses that viewers' predispositions guide, filter, or mediate media usage patterns (Finn, 1997; Hall, 2005; Reiss & Wiltz, 2004; Rubin, 2002). To explain how personality characteristics are related to television viewing patterns, Reiss and Wiltz introduced sensitivity theory, which they described as a variant of the U&G framework. According to this perspective, people pay attention to television content that satisfies their most basic motives because it provides a convenient, minimal effort means of vicariously satisfying these needs (Skeggs & Wood, 2012). For example, people with the basic desire for vengeance will be attracted to violent television programs because

doing so arouses feelings of vindication, which are felt as joyful to these individuals. Indeed, the results of a number of studies support the hypothesis that personality traits are linked to audiences' use of various types of television including news (Perse, 1992), violent television content (Krcmar & Kean, 2005), religious programs (Hoover, 1988), and reality-based crime shows (Oliver & Armstrong, 1995). Hence, people interested in their everyday lives will be interested in politics.

In two separate articles, Nabi and colleagues examined personality correlates of reality television exposure. In the first article, Nabi et al. (2003) examined relations between reality television viewing and voyeurism, impulsivity, and need for cognition and found that these three traits were not correlated with reality television exposure. In the second study, Nabi, Stitt, Halford, and Finnerty (2006) examined the influences of need for cognition and emotional intelligence and again found no relation to the enjoyment of reality television. Still, they found that voyeurism did predict enjoyment of reality programs, but it did not predict enjoyment of fictional programs (Dubrofsky, 2011).

In contrast to Nabi et al.'s (2003; Nabi et al., 2006) approach of choosing personality traits that might be conceptually related to reality television, ours was to examine global personality traits that are meant to represent fundamental elements of human personality. For this endeavor, we chose the Big Three model of personality (Eysenck, 1985), which includes (a) extroversion—one's degree of sociability, (b) neuroticism—a tendency toward anxiousness and loneliness, and (c) psychoticism—a cluster of traits including egocentricity, a lack of concern about social norms, and impulsivity. Eysenck argued that these three factors exhaustively cover the major aspects

of personality. Psychoticism is hard to analyze, but would be interesting to in further studies, so the other two factors of personality, extroversion and neuroticism, will be analyzed.

A typical description of a neurotic individual is that of an anxious, worrying, and moody person, who is inclined to avoid conflict (Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Bragason, Einarsson, & Valdimarsdottir, 2004). Based on this profile, researchers have hypothesized that neurotics will be motivated to use mass media as a form of escape (Katz & Foulkes, 1962), as a countervailing source of positive affect (Anderson, Collins, Schmitt, & Jacobvitz, 1996), and as a relief from nervousness and anxiety (Hall, 2005).

Although previous research has found essentially no relation between neuroticism and general media use variables (Finn, 1997; Hall, 2005), this is not to say that neuroticism would not be associated with reality television viewing due to its unique ability to provide escapism for audiences (e.g., Hall, 2006). Indeed, audiences find reality television rather enjoyable, presumably because it satisfies their need for voyeurism (Nabi et al, 2006) and because it is unpredictable in the sense that nobody knows what will happen next (Sayre & King, 2003). Thus, if reality television is perceived by viewers as relaxing or an escape from daily life, those who are high on neuroticism might choose to view it. Also, because loneliness is a characteristic of neuroticism, neurotics might be attracted to reality television because it serves as a preferred substitute for direct relations with others (Shim & Paul, 2007).

A typical extrovert is sociable, active, dominant, warm toward others, and assertive; he or she has needs for social interaction with others (Costa & McRae, 1992; Gudjonsson et al., 2004). Finn (1997) reasoned that extroverts would seek activities that

provide direct social contact and would avoid television viewing because they would rather be doing the activities they see on television, rather than vicariously observing them. In support of this assumption, research has found that extroverts avoid television (Finn, 1997; Krcmar & Kean, 2005). Based on the findings of these studies, it is possible that extroverts will avoid reality television because they would balk at simply observing “real” people’s lives and would seek, instead, to experience those activities for themselves (Sender, 2015).

However, other researchers have found a positive relationship between extroversion and media use—in particular, media use that has the potential of providing social interaction, such as going to the movies (Weaver, 1991) or listening to music (Hah, 2005). Both of these media activities are often done in the company of others. Thus, to the extent that watching reality television is a social activity, we might expect extroverts to be attracted to it. In fact, a study by Shim and Paul (2007) showed that extroversion was positively correlated with attention to reality television viewing. Their explanation was that reality shows have a realistic feel and look, as well as unpredictability, and both of these characteristics provide extroverts “with a stronger sense of ‘being’ in the real world” (Shim & Paul, 2007, p. 300). In addition, Reiss and Wiltz (2004) found heavy reality television viewers reported watching the genre in order to have something to talk about with others.

Given the diverse themes and characters portrayed, it is possible that personality characteristics will relate differently to sub-genres of reality television, including romantic, competition, surveillance (i.e., shows that follow people’s “real” lives), and makeover reality shows, to name some sub-categories that have been investigated in

previous research (Everett, 2004; Hall, 2006; Nabi, 2007; Nabi et al., 2003; Nabi et al., 2006). A main tenet of the U&G framework is that people select and use media to satisfy their needs or desires. These viewing motivations have been found to be differentially related to television viewing and content selection (for a review, see Rubin, 2002). For example, research has shown that using television to gain useful information is associated with watching talk-interview formats, news, and game show programming, whereas using television to pass the time or to be entertained is associated with fictional program viewing (Rubin, 1983).

From a cultural narrative perspective, Andrejevic (2004) argued that reality television appeals to audiences' voyeurism fetish, which is really the performance of a desire for power. Being a voyeur enables audiences to exert control by occupying the "position of the master" (p. 174) over the reality television subject. In addition, reality television provides access to the "real," unscripted, authentic nature of the reality television characters. Similarly, Bignell (2005) also claimed that reality television appeals to viewers' sense of voyeurism, but his argument rested on the assumption that this voyeurism allows audiences to stigmatize and differentiate between themselves and reality characters.

From a U&G perspective, viewing motivations are often classified into two major categories of use: television for time consumption and entertainment (i.e., ritualized viewing), and television for information-seeking purposes (i.e., instrumental viewing; Rubin, 1984, 2002). Ritualized viewers are likely to use television out of habit and for diversion; viewing motivations classified as ritualized include the motivation to be entertained, to relax, to have companionship, to pass the time, and to escape (Rubin,

1984). In contrast, instrumental viewing is purposive, and includes the motivations to learn about events, to be aroused, and to facilitate social interaction with others.

Nabi et al.'s (2003) study found that regular viewers of reality television watched it because of its entertainment value, but did not watch reality television to gain useful information. Similarly, Barton (2006) found that people who were attracted to reality programming were motivated to pass the time. Based on the Nabi et al. (2003) findings, we might expect instrumental viewing to be negatively related to reality television viewing. However, Hill's (2005) findings from focus groups of reality television viewers complicated this picture somewhat. Although reality television can teach audiences about their own behavior by watching how other people behave, adult reality television viewers in Hill's study were hesitant to acknowledge that they indeed learn from reality television because such a claim implies a lack of knowledge about social behavior. So although reality television viewers realize it is not desirable to admit that reality television lets them learn about the way people live, they might learn nevertheless. Furthermore, Hill's data revealed that younger viewers were more open to learning about life as a by-product of watching entertaining reality programming.

Contemporary U&G models emphasize that media selection is a multistage process. First, personality factors appear to generate certain audience needs (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). An example of this link is evident in a study by Weaver (2000), who found that extroversion was associated with watching television for social interaction. Second, these needs contribute to gratifications sought, influencing media selection and use (Haridakis, 2002; Kremer & Kean, 2005). For example, Reiss and Wiltz showed that viewers who have the need to feel self-important are regular viewers of reality television.

Marrying these two lines of research, we propose a two-stage model in which we first investigate the relations between personality traits and viewing motivations, and then the relations between viewing motivations and reality television exposure.

This conceptualization has support from scholars who have investigated links between personality traits and media selection. For example, Finn (1997) argued that between the psychological origins that characterize the input variables in his analysis and media use that served as the outcome variables, there are two other contingent conditions, needs and expectations that must be implicitly bridged to establish the hypothesized connections. Similarly, in characterizing the findings of her study, Hall (2005) concluded that the “pattern of findings of this study suggests that the roles that audience members’ personalities play in shaping media use patterns may be played out in the context of specific gratifications that media texts are perceived to offer” (p. 396). Shim and Paul (2007) also commented on the rather small effect size of the personality variables on genre selection; they argued that examining intervening variables in this process might increase the amount of variance that researchers can explain in television selection.

Because extroversion is associated with a need for social contact (Finn, 1997), the instrumental viewing motivations would be predicted by extroversion. In contrast, given that neuroticism is associated with a need for escapism and relaxation (Katz & Foulkes, 1962), those needs are most closely aligned with the ritualized television viewing motivations. It is plausible that ritualized viewing motivations might be a particularly viable mediator for neuroticism, whereas instrumental viewing motivation would be a mediator for extroversion (Sender, 2015).

Analogous personality-motivation combinations are portraits of personality and motivations (Sender, 2015). Additional research for each viewing motivation to explore the relationships with the corresponding personality-motivation combination of instrumental viewing motivations will mediate relations between extroversion and reality television selection and ritualized viewing motivations that will mediate the relations between neuroticism and reality television selection.

It can be interpreted that as reality TV goes further and pushes more boundaries, so do audiences' consumption and behavior patterns. However, how diverse are these audiences? And if they are how polarized are they and how does this translate politically? The next section will discuss that.

### **Political Diversity and Polarization of Media Audience Participation**

The concept of diversity has always been an underlying principle in media policy-making and the era of participatory media has not changed that core concern (Pardo, 2013). However, dramatic changes in contemporary media systems suggest a need to reconsider how this complex principle is conceptualized and applied. Social media have brought about a seemingly infinite amount of sources and content by lowering the barriers to participation in the fields of media and communications (Trottier et al., 2015). Much hope has been attributed to their democratizing potential.

However, empirical evidence indicates that much digital media consumption focuses on content provided by few actors, and is becoming polarized (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008). And while the rapid diffusion of new media technologies facilitates more participatory communication, persistent digital divides hinder opportunities for access

and production. Diversity as a policy-making principle needs to be refocused to address these opportunities and challenges regarding the role that media systems can play in fostering citizenship, civil society and participation (Aronczyk, 2015). Based on existing academic and public/policy discourses, there are frameworks of participatory modalities and relationships with the conventional dimensions of diversity, as well as their relevance in terms of audiences with policies and regulation (Giles, 2002).

Assessing the performance of media systems is a fundamental dimension of the work of a variety of stakeholders, including policy-makers, policy advocates, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public media organizations and media scholars. Such performance assessments need to stay abreast of the technological characteristics and capabilities of the media system, in order to effectively reflect the range of activities that can be engaged in by the system's various stakeholders (content providers, distributors, audiences, etc.) (Jin, 2007). One of the defining characteristics of the contemporary media environment is the extent to which it can facilitate a greater array of audience participation (Carpentier, 2011). Much has been written about this increasingly 'democratized' media environment, in which media platforms are becoming increasingly interactive; in which the barriers to entry in new media contexts are dramatically lower than those that characterized traditional media; and in which opportunities to produce and distribute content are much more widely available (Benkler 2007).

Given the extent to which assessments of media system performance are often grounded in democratic theory (Karppinen 2013), it is important for contemporary assessment efforts to effectively incorporate this increasingly prominent participatory dimension. What is unclear at this point, however, is how to structure a robust and

meaningful evaluative framework that can be imposed on this evolving, increasingly participatory media environment. In an effort to conceptualize such a framework, it is important to discuss the concept of participation as it relates to contemporary media systems and examines how a more participatory media environment connects with relevant strands of democratic theory and assessments of media systems for the perspective of participation (Giles, 2002).

Media scholars, critics and policy-makers have long drawn from various aspects of democratic theory in support of both normative claims with regard to how media systems should operate and more empirically oriented efforts to assess whether media systems are meeting specific performative standards (Miller, 2007). From a democratic theory standpoint, at the most basic level, a well-functioning media system has frequently been associated with the extent to which it facilitates the dissemination of a diverse array of ideas and viewpoints, from a diverse range of sources, in order to facilitate an informed citizenry, an environment of inclusiveness, and, ultimately, stable and effective self-governance (Napoli 2001).

Translating this imperative into media system assessment has often taken the form of efforts to assess the range of sources and viewpoints represented in traditional mass media outlets (Napoli 1999). Such efforts have guided policy-makers, and have been the source of legal, methodological, definitional and normative disputes for decades (Webster 2007). Under this diversity model, the diversity required under a democratic theory framework was driven largely by, and thus assessed primarily in terms of, the structures and outputs of traditional media organizations, under the recognition that the opportunities for participation in the mechanisms for producing the necessary diversity of

ideas and viewpoints were fairly limited and largely concentrated within the hands of these organizations (Karppinen 2013).

However, in today's increasingly neoliberal media environment, diversity of ideas and viewpoints can now potentially be more forcefully driven by the kind of increasingly widespread audience participation in the media system that is at the core of certain prominent articulations of democratic theory. Specifically, deliberative and participatory models of democracy emphasize direct and widespread citizen engagement with the processes of governance and policy-making (Barber 1984; Pateman ([1970] 1999) as a means of protecting against power imbalances, facilitating better-informed decision-making and experiential learning that strengthens the citizenry (Carpentier 2011). From this theoretical perspective, a media system in which deeper and more widespread participation by citizen-audiences (Butsch 2008), as well as citizen-consumers (Lunt et al. 2014), is possible to represent an improvement over traditional media systems in which meaningful participation was more limited to an elite few. This in theory is a media system model more reflective of the representative model of democracy championed by democratic theorists.

This discussion represents a brief and superficial overview of the complex linkages between media and democratic theory. However, the goal here is not to provide a comprehensive discussion of this relationship, but rather simply to illustrate how the 'participatory turn' in media system evolution creates an opportunity for stronger linkages with certain areas of democratic theory such as political involvement and economics than has been the case throughout the decades of traditional mass media prominence and dominance (Carpentier et al. 2014). Within this context, then, of a

migration to a potentially more participatory media system, understanding the dynamics of audience participation and the technological and institutional structures that both enhance and impede this participation at all levels of media system operation becomes central to determining the extent to which the democratic potential of the media system is being realized (Aronczyk, 2015).

From this standpoint, it becomes important to determine whether this 'participatory turn' facilitated by media evolution is a superficial or limited representation of the participatory capacities of the contemporary media environment; or whether it is indeed taking form in ways that meaningfully reconfigure the relationship between media and audiences, and between citizens and consumers and political and economic institutions (Miller, 2007). A diversity model is one in which the dynamics, mechanisms and representations of citizen participation move from the periphery to the core of how contemporary media systems should be assessed in an effort to determine whether technological promise and capabilities are being delivered upon in the form of genuinely more participatory media systems (Jin, 2007).

Citizen participation in media is not unique to the Internet age, despite tendencies in some quarters to treat many of the characteristics of our contemporary interactive, multi-platform media system as unprecedented. As Griffen-Foley (2005) has pointed out, "audience participation" has existed at least over a century as a part of mass communication, as letters to editors, and the like (Carpentier, 2007). And as Napoli's (2011) historical overview illustrates, the history of traditional media is one in which, early in their development, many of these media sectors actively encouraged various forms of audience participation, only to gradually marginalize such opportunities and

their associated institutional structures over time. New media seem to have, to some extent, reversed this trend (Lunenfeld 2011). Consequently, the mechanisms for, and representations of, audience participation are moving from the periphery towards the center of how media systems operate and, consequently, how they should be assessed (Sender, 2015).

As Stein notes, participation is a slippery and contested term, particularly when applied to the media” and the notion that online political participation is not only geared towards specific goals, but is about expressive agency of values and belonging, adds to the complexity of developing a democratic theory-grounded approach to operationalizing mediated participation (Aronczyk, 2015). However, as it relates to the relationship between media systems and audiences, Carpentier (2011) emphasizes on two primary realms: the production of media output (i.e., content-related participation) and media organizational decision-making (i.e., structural participation) providing a useful set of parameters.

A key point of contention is the extent to which the concept must take into consideration a leveling of power relations among actors within technological systems (Stein, 2013). Carpentier (2011) differentiates between minimalist and maximalist forms of media participation. Maximalist forms involve direct participation in content production and media organizational decision-making, whereas in minimalist forms a narrow range of media professionals retain strong control over the process and restrict broader participation to more limited forms of access and interaction. According to Carpentier (2011), only maximalist forms of media participation can contribute to

meaningful redistributions of power relations between stakeholders in the media system such as audiences and content providers; audiences and policy-makers, etc.

As Carpentier (2007) argues, most discussions about the participatory potential of new media have glorified the power of media technologies as if specific technologies are inherently more participatory than others and consequently diminished the focus on the power of old media, as well as on the power of media companies as content producers. Reflecting such concerns, work by Hindman (2009) has compellingly illustrated how many of the power dynamics and distribution of audience attention that characterized traditional media appear to be replicating themselves in what is, in theory, an increasingly democratized media system. Findings such as these raise the question of whether mechanisms for participation genuinely matter if they do not result in meaningful reformulations of the institutional dynamics that characterized traditional media.

A similarly critical stance has characterized recent scholarship that has examined the nature of the forms of participation that are being facilitated on new media platforms. Schaefer (2011), for instance, characterizes many of the most visible forms of audience participation as mere 'pseudo-participation', in that they contribute to no meaningful redistributions of power or decision making authority in the operation of the media system. Along similar lines, Stein's (2013) recent analysis of the forms of participation facilitated and impeded by the policies implemented by social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia illustrated that, in many cases, audience participation is fairly superficial, only in some instances like Wikipedia, extending meaningfully into the realms of site content and governance that represent more robust forms of audience participation (Giles, 2002). Critiques such as these further highlight the need for an

assessment approach that identifies meaningful forms of participation; that is, those that reflect the values and relationships in democratic theory.

In an effort to provide a conceptual framework for assessing participation regarding media systems, we draw upon Clegg's (1989) idea of the "circuits of power". Originally, Clegg theorized about the context in which power is being used and in which it potentially appears. He views power as a process that has several circuits. The first is the overt, or macro-level, circuit of political decision-making. The second is the systemic-economic circuit of power that contextualizes policy-making decisions. The third, social, circuit describes cultural meanings, membership and belonging and elements that also provide context to the macro-level circuit.

An activity of the micro-level circuit of power where it is manifested as interaction by people as individuals or collectives, to create meaning, membership and belonging; a meso-level modality of conventional media institutions and different, more or less institutionalized, hubs of new digital media, where systems of participation are created for, or not for, profit; and a macro-level, structural concern of media policy-making where decision making power most concretely manifests itself (Clegg, 1989). It follows that participation can be understood as an active position that people take in the micro-level; as a modal position that is produced and offered by media institutions in the meso-level; and as a policy position in that it is a concern in policy-making, and increasingly also the aim of civic groups dedicated to engaging in media-related policy-making (Clegg, 1989). According to Clegg (1989) these circuits offer both a conceptual and an analytical framework and they are conceptual in that they define participation in

three distinct ways, related to power, and analytical, in that they offer a frame in which participation can be operationalized and examined from three different angles.

The circuits of participatory power are interlinked and influence one another. As an example, certain policy decisions may support technologies that inspire production of new services and content, which in turn prompt an individual to take part in a debate on politically and socially relevant issues (Giles, 2002). Participation may also be realized in different degrees of intensity. For instance, an individual may participate in a political debate by actively witnessing it via media, or by participating and acting in online and offline forums. A medium may address its potential audiences as information-seeking, active citizens or create opportunities for joint content creation (Aronczyk, 2015). A policy decision may merely allow or actively support participation, whether in terms of policy decisions pertaining to media, or in terms of supporting multi-stakeholder, civic participation in media policy-making. These circuits, when mapped, can cross national borders or be locally situated (Jin, 2007).

To be sure, the circuits represent mere potential power of participation and that potential can manifest in different forms. For example, as Carpentier has noted, 'the participatory potential of media technologies remains dependent on the way they are used' and 'web 2.0 technologies can perfectly well be used in top-down non-participatory ways' (Carpentier, 2007). Consequently, it can be argued that the idea of three circuits of power related to participation is important if the ethos of the media fostering democratic societies is to be taken seriously in the new media environment. The circuits illustrate that participation, and especially participation connected to citizenship and media, is indeed not a question of an active blogger or tweeter, but can and should be facilitated in

different stakeholders of power and, ideally, in dialogue between those circuits (Carpentier, 2007).

To begin with, conceptual discussions are currently emerging about how media audience members position themselves in the context of the internet and social media (Trottier et al., 2015). The polarized audience positions that often have been linked to public service and commercial media of citizens versus consumers still seem to linger, however some researchers have come up with additional roles or meanings of audience activity (Livingstone 2005). For instance, Preston (2001), in considering the emergence of new media at the turn of the Millennium, noted that there are multiple ways by which ‘communicative communities’ are discussed by labeling these positions as ‘Civic National’, ‘Affective National’, ‘Postmodern Cultural’ and ‘Global Information’.

The notion of the civic national identity is based on citizenship and being part of the political process (Aronczyk, 2015). Identity means rational, critical members of a political community that collectively form a public sphere. The affective national identity, in contrast, is a combination of a political identity and particular cultural or ethnic identities (Boylorn, 2008). These various identities take distinct national and other civic and social formations. In contrast, the predominant identities of the postmodernist cultural view are those of active audiences, in a situation where national and other modern social identities have collapsed (Jin, 2007). These identities, then, are individual and multiple, and the key actors are active audiences, sometimes called ‘socially situated’ audiences (Carpentier, 2007). Finally, the global information society view in its neo-liberal version sees the key actors of public communication as consumers of media products in the marketplace (Miller, 2007). From these definitions it is clear that potential

participatory motivations and activities would be seen very differently for different communicative communities.

The ideas around audience activities are becoming more evident and from the perspective of the media economy, as Xie et al. (2008) argue, a consumer of any product could be understood as a prosumer, that is, as a co-creator of the value of that product. Thus, the traditional notions of mass communication and ‘the work’ of its audiences are still valid concepts, when appropriately reconfigured (Napoli 2010): Audiences are indeed ‘working’ in the user-generated environment, if not exactly referring to the theoretical vein of thought of the 1980s, that audiences ‘work’ for programmers and advertisers by watching (Jhally and Livant 1986).

An example of this, as previously mentioned is reality programming. Many point to the notion that cultural studies made popular, of ‘active audiences’, and the emergence of mobile and Internet-enhanced reality media products that prompt such activity (Tincknell and Raghuram 2002). Because reality programs often rely on participation, they could be seen as a particularly poignant example of mediated ‘prosumerism’, as in value production by audiences. Indeed, many empirical analyses seem to indicate that a part of that ‘authenticity labor’ by audiences around reality programming deals very much with the work on the self-development, discovery, identification and the like (Aslama and Pantti 2012).

Yet, audience participation can hardly be forced, only facilitated, and that is the essence of assessing the situations and contexts that not only support participation as an active position of audiences, but support ‘meaningful’ participation (Jenkins et al. 2013). That meaning can be looked at in terms of the immersive nature of audience activity, as

well as in terms of the ‘value’ that participation creates (Shirky 2010). As for instance, a study on viewers who took part in an online activity involving a television series (Costello & Moore 2007) revealed that there are degrees of intensity of participation. In ‘the lower end of the activity continuum’ were audience members who merely wanted to share their experiences with other fans and viewers. Participation for them meant a more informed and pleasurable position as a consumer of a media product. However, they were not interested in influencing a program or the entertainment industry in general. They were indifferent about influencing the direction of a program or the entertainment industry. On the other end of the scale were those who wanted to inform the production process and create their own, ‘improved’ versions of their favorite program (Costello & Moore 2007).

Similar classifications of the levels of intensity and commitment regarding online participation are popular today, especially in the parlance of digital marketing professionals, as well as in the hierarchies of audience engagement that are being developed in the field of media impact assessment (Napoli, 2014). Lately, scholars have also sought to classify participants of online communities on scales of participation beyond ‘contributors’ and ‘lurkers’ (Wang & Yu 2012). Understanding these different positions on any continuum of participation also means understanding underlying motivations.

As Shirky (2010) suggests, the value in online activities is for many simply individual: people like to share what they know and experience. But often the idea is also to create and maintain communities of interest, be it fans, hobbies, location based or professional groups. Some forms of participation, such as reviews and recommendations,

are informative and geared to address a wider public, anyone interested (Godlewski & Perse, 2010). Finally, some forms of participation are motivated by civic interest. From political debates to fund raising campaigns, to online organizing of massive protests and forms of activity seek to have a social or political impact, to promote change.

It is evident that this micro-level circuit of audience activity entails much powerful potential in terms of democracy, but that power is not automatically embraced and used (Boylorn, 2008). The fundamental questions for a diversity model relate to its definitions are the following. What is the 'participatory culture' of a media system? Who are its participants and how do they participate? Where does participation take place? What is its 'value'? Can we distinguish between participation that supports the civic role, rather than merely the postmodernist identity seeker or the consumer in the global information society? The secondary issue is: how does the meso-level circuit initiate, motivate and support participation? (Aubrey et al., 2012).

The new audience positions depicted above offer a diverse array of starting points in terms of how such positions foster participation and engagement (Tal-Or & Hershman-Shitrit, 2015). However, in this circuit of power the slogan of participation, audiences as participants and in partnership with the media, is also a marketing strategy of sorts for both conventional and new media organizations. A body of research from the past decade has shown how various media offer several kinds of participatory positions to their potential audiences. Ekstrom (2000), in depicting modes of current television journalism, argued that the imagined recipients of journalistic contents are addressed as knowledge-seeking citizens, listeners (of stories) or spectators (of spectacles). Syvertsen (2004) suggested that broadcasters have indeed begun to address audiences not only as

citizens and consumers but also, for instance, as customers and players. Costera Meier (2005) advocated for the ‘enjoyer’ as a legitimate position for audiences, in terms of quality programming of public broadcasting. Lowe (2008) characterized the public service media audiences in Europe as ‘traditionalists, universalists and collectivists’, while audiences of new on-demand content and services in America are ‘acquirers, hedonists and independents’.

To bring participation to a more concrete level, the concept can refer to specific platforms, content and services offered by conventional, non-conventional or new media. The term ‘participation media’ is frequently used to refer to cross-multimedia content production and products, as well as to interactive possibilities for consumers to take part in the production (Bondad-Brown et al., 2012). Most often, the presumption still seems to be that specific, conventional media institutions provide the framework of participation, and professionals produce a great part of the content (Bergan, 2011).

Legacy media are embracing online formats. In terms of journalism and most conventional content, blogs and options for commenting and sharing have become standard. But, for example, a Pew Research survey from 2009 of citizen-based media in the United States verified that citizens have mostly been used as sources rather than given opportunities to really produce journalistic content (Anderson, 2004). Similar to legacy media, the participatory modalities of online communities are, to a great extent, defined by the purpose of the communities. Brandtzasg and Heim (2009) categorize digital communities as: person-oriented communities where social interactions between individuals are in focus; professional communities that focus on business networking; media-oriented communities such as YouTube that focus on the distribution and

consumption of user-generated multimedia content; virtual-world communities such as video games that are essentially a virtual world; and mobile communities such as Twitter that make it possible to have direct and indirect contact with community and allow users to make updates on the move (Trottier et al., 2015).

Whether functioning as a platform of their own, facilitating grassroots participation, or used as a part of a media product created by institutionalized media, these communities clearly offer different kinds of options, and limitations, for participation. The same also goes for technological considerations, such as the so-called ‘mobile leapfrogging’: Can mobile Internet access allow equal participatory opportunities as, for instance, PC/laptop-based broadband access? (Napoli & Obar, 2014).

Yet, many outlets outside of the legacy media seem to fare better in offering opportunities for participation. For example, to follow Carpentier’s (2007) model of social change-oriented media organizations, one can distinguish membership or non-membership organizations that offer modal positions of access and interaction. Examples of the former include community Wi-Fi projects, and of the latter, blogging and social network sites. In addition, his model includes membership or non-membership organizations that facilitate access, interaction and participation. Examples of such membership-based organization entail alternative radios and community radio stations.

It seems evident that non-traditional, non-legacy media outlets and social media tools have taken on many tasks of mass media. Today, there are daily examples how this kind of non-professional and/or informal communication facilitates serious political activism from the Arab Spring to war reportage, to political whistleblowing (Boyd, 2008). Some have called these phenomena a ‘Networked fourth estate’ (Benkler, 2013).

And there have been earlier but similar instances where the production by amateurs has outdone mainstream media output in relevance and speed of communication and such as the diving sites in the case of the Tsunami news coverage in 2005 (Kivikuru, 2006).

It could be argued that in between old media-led participation and relatively spontaneous, informal use of social media are other variations of the theme of user-generated content production that is systematic yet independent from mainstream media: participation as in non-commercial, non-institutional blogging and participation as systematic crowd-sourcing (Aronczyk, 2015). With the latter, the central aim is the joint production: while there is a hub that gathers the information, the production is not facilitated by and/or channeled through conventional, professional means of media production and distribution. The Wikipedia online encyclopedia is possibly the most famous and established crowd-sourcing activity. However, there are also experimental projects that include everything from collaborative global translation services for TV shows to fan-fuelled human rights activism (Qenkins, 2012), to ‘digital humanitarianism’, including crisis mapping efforts in platforms such as Ushahidi (Aronczyk, 2015).

All of these non-conventional media activities could be seen as participation of the micro-level, but at the same time they can be political or ‘proto-political’ (Dahlgren 2009) contributions that extend to the meso-level: there is a mediation that is in some way institutionalized and directs information, participation and creativity for a cause. The question for assessment would entail examination of how different platforms and media institutions function in terms of facilitating participation, what kinds of opportunities do

they offer to the participants, not only as consumers, but for instance as stakeholders in policy-making (Aronczyk, 2015).

Participation in the structural level has often been associated with visions of governance and citizenship, which is how new technologies, can assist, enhance and support the interaction between the public sector and an individual citizen (Miller, 2007). The concrete ideas and experiments have ranged from accountable, transparent and easy access to public information, to voting via Internet. For instance, Finland has had specific government strategies for the 'Information Society' since 1995, including considerations for e-commerce and Finnish competitiveness, as well as concerns for participatory possibilities of specific groups such as elderly and disabled people. An illustration of the meso-level issue of participation would be the question of universal access to the Internet. The latest Finnish Information Society strategy includes a goal for universal broadband access at equitable speeds throughout Finland, and the Ministry of Communication decided in October 2009 that this had to be realized, at a speed of 1Mbps by the summer of 2010. The ultimate aim of the decision has been related to regional disparities in access, and thus in the possibilities to participate. The United Nations has followed the suit in 2011. Recently, in its effort to attract stakeholders to think and design the 'Digital Agenda' of the region, the Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology of the European Commission has launched an online platform called Futurium. This website 'combines the informal character of social networks with the methodological approach of foresights to engage stakeholders in the co-creation of futures and policy ideas that matter to them' (European Commission, 2014). The platform

offers its users specified, different modalities of participation from “visionary thinker” to “message multiplier”.

At the same time, it must be noted that media policy initiatives and practices in Europe and elsewhere seem to have no consensus on how to tackle networked media and the Internet era. The development of national and transnational (EU) approaches has so far differed greatly (Moe, 2008). For example, regarding the policies on public service media organizations taking on new media platforms, there is an entire array of policy solutions from restricting public broadcasters to enter some areas of new media, to requiring them to provide content and services in multiple platforms since the concrete support for such activities, however, varies country by country (Trappel, 2014). Such macro-level policy solutions can be seen to have direct relationships with the diversity of opportunities for participation in meso and micro-levels in the United States (Boylorn, 2008).

In addition, people’s awareness of, and participation in, media policymaking could be seen as a crucial aspect if participation is understood in a broader, all-encompassing sense of the media system. The so-called media reform or media justice movements are not very typical to Europe but alive in North America, in the United Kingdom, and becoming increasingly global. These civic organizations are specifically concerned with diversity, whether in reference to ownership concentration and alternative media outlets, diverse voices presented in media output, access to media technologies and content, net neutrality and so on (McChesney, 2007).

As suggested by Hasebrink (2012), audiences have long been the neglected party when thinking about media governance. Hasebrink posits that media systems can be

assessed in terms of the value of media content and services to and for many and diverse individuals, and for a social collective. For him, several levels of value exist: is social value safeguarded, and how to identify even police, misinformation, harmful content and trampling on the human rights of a public? How is public value in the promotion of democracy and support for cultural diversity and vitality both envisioned and realized? Finally, do media policies support variety, pluralism and diversity, and the ability of members of “the audience” to co-create a diverse range of content?

The importance of public participation in media policy deliberations and in media governance is also a topic of European-wide discussion. This was evident in a report from the Council of Europe in 2009 (Scifo, 2009). In terms of internal organizational governance, the recommendations urge media organizations on every platform to redefine their relations with their audiences and open their processes to real conversation in order to build and maintain a constant dialogue with clear and accountable procedures (Scifo, 2009).

Following Clegg (1989), then, the macro-level circuit of power is the most obvious one, as it refers to political decision-making. Hence, this level offers the most apparent opportunities for assessing the diversity model is how does the macro-level power circuit of policy-making restrict, allow or support, and protect the creation and maintenance of those meso-level institutions and platforms that foster different modalities of participatory culture?

While this circuit of power may be easy to conceptualize, participation as a policy position entails its own challenges. For example, recent years have brought about the question of how the policy-making realm can ensure that participation is “safe” and will

not be used against the participants in unintended ways by corporations in the form of unsolicited data-gathering for commercial purposes or by governments in the form of surveillance (Morozov, 2012). In addition, the question of how to evaluate, challenge and possibly change, macro-level power becomes ever more complex when mediated participatory actions can take local, national, global or issue-driven, borderless forms (Clark and Aufderheide 2009).

Much media policy-making bears the history of the mass media era and is still media sector-specific and nation-based. Issues such as net neutrality and intermediary liability of platforms (MacKinnon 2012) potentially can affect all forms of media from streamed public service television content to Twitter campaigns and are still a matter of national regulation and power. It is no wonder that global non-profit, civil society watchdogs outside of the formal governance systems, such as Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders- or research efforts such as “Mapping Digital Media” by the Open Society Foundation, are monitoring this circuit of power nationally and urging for some regional and global standards on media freedom.

Similarly, national regulation may have an international reach. This is, for instance, the case with many US-based sites and services that are also popular elsewhere in the world. The realization of national and global circuits of power intertwining in a very concrete way has not been lost on civil society. The situation has fuelled Internet-based global movements ranging from privacy activists to Internet Freedom groups. Perhaps the most powerful example of grassroots-driven and social media-facilitated participation in the policy realm was activism around the anti-counterfeit and anti-piracy legislation initiatives SOPA, PIPA (United States) and ACTA in 2012. The many forms

of activism, from corporate responses such as the platform shut-downs by Google to blogger commentary on YouTube, highlighted the mediated nature of participation and activism around policy-making (Powell 2012), and manifested itself in infinite forms all around the world, connecting the local and the global.

Audience participation across multiple dimensions needs to move from the periphery to the center of assessments of media system performance. Today, the potential for increasingly democratic communication exists in most media systems (Aronczyk, 2015). And, as Clark and Aufderheide (2009) note, “the people formerly known as the audience now are at the center of media” and present a model of new “public media” as “people-centric”. At the same time, new forms of public interest content are emerging that are specifically participation-based, such as wikis and crowd-sourced crisis mapping. Finally, content and functions from other than media institutions are migrating to digital media platforms, such as in the case of online education (Giles, 2002). While old institutions might not be replaced, participatory platforms can potentially offer new opportunities. Participation is directly linked to the diversity of those opportunities.

Finally, while the creative innovations and practices of the micro and meso-level may evolve and feed one another, it is the task of the macro-level power to assess and support relevant developments (Jin, 2007). If the main aim of diversity policies still is, as it has been, to guarantee a diverse media system to support a functioning democracy, then the obvious participatory position to be supported would be that of the citizen. And if participation is understood not as a buzzword, but as a true opportunity for democracy, then the macro-level power should indeed focus on the dimensions of participation that foster contemporary citizenship. The paramount strategic policy task, then, would seem

to be deciding what participatory positions are being marginalized and should be supported, and how those positions translate into concrete participatory opportunities.

However, this macro and micro levels of participation depends on a diverse media system. Also, what if those media participations are low depending on the type of media. The message created under these audience participations and media channels will be discussed later now and how has this affected the 2016 electoral campaign and the surge of the Trump campaign. However it is important to discuss the role of Twitter in politics in the next section.

### **“The Troll Election”: Twitter Reality Television Narratives**

The increasing use of Twitter by politicians, journalists, political strategists and citizens has made it an important part of the networked sphere in which political issues are publicly negotiated. The growing number of studies investigating the relationship between Twitter and politics supports this claim. It is important to analyze the interrelation of individuals on the basis of their professions, their topics and their connection to mass media. In the so called “Twittersphere” networks are formed by the United States’ most relevant political Twitter users and are dominated by elite political professionals but open to outside participation (Aronczyk, 2015). The emergence of niche authorities and the periodic divergence of the political discourse on Twitter has become a significant extension of mass media and this phenomena relate to political participation (Aronczyk, 2015) using reciprocal neoliberal narratives of reality television (Wilson et al., 2012).

The rapid growth of the Internet has led social practices to become increasingly digitized. This digitization has also affected the political sphere by transforming the speed and scope of communication (Castells 2011). Not only has analogue communication become digitized, but many new practices have also become mass phenomena. To name a few examples: citizens have launched accountability and crowdsourcing platforms, politicians have blogged from investigation committees and journalists have published their sources online to increase the transparency of the editorial process. This will be discussed in more details as it relates to the Trump campaign in 2016.

These developments and others flow from the web's unique publishing environment that allows people to both publicize and link to content, thus diffusing information to a vast audience. The web also incorporates all forms of traditional media and enables many-to-many communication in real time. Twitter is one consequence of the web's unique characteristics. The speed, the public nature of communication and the manifold possibilities to link messages to users (@-mentions), external content (hyperlinks) and topics (hashtags) have attracted many different actors.

As the 'second most important social media platform' (Bruns 2011), it is becoming an increasingly important channel for digital communication and, like other Internet technologies, has lowered barriers to participation (Anduiza et al. 2009). In many countries Twitter is used to campaign, to coordinate protests and to disseminate and discuss news. The action of its users may enable the new forms of accountability that Dutton (2009) refers to as the 'Fifth Estate'. On the other hand, tweeting may intensify the relationship between political actors with other stakeholders, as it facilitates an easy

and continuous discourse free from the constraints of official and unofficial gatherings. This does not mean that the messages are free flowing and uncontrived. So how, exactly, are these new possibilities for participation being used, if at all?

For years, scholars have debated the Internet's impact on politics and what it means for democracy (van de Donk et al. 2004; Benkler 2006; Sunstein 2007; for a current review see Farrell 2012). While the Internet has facilitated broader public discussion, in many regards its 'virtual public sphere' still mirrors existing social structures. Political professionals talk amongst themselves, and the gap between them and the public will not be bridged unless they want it to be (Papacharissi 2002). Work by Davis (2010) on the Internet use by British political professionals has shown that new bridges may have been built between actors within the political network, but rarely did they extend beyond it to engage citizens.

The relations between political actors and citizens using Twitter, how they are using the service and the networks of political communication they are formed, are very different in the Twittersphere than in conventional media (Aronczyk, 2015). The discourse on how the Internet's networked public spheres affect political participation are very analogous to the cultural narratives previously with audience participation, motivations and user gratifications in reality television: not to be left out, can affect outcome, very involved in results and outcome, voyeurism, surveillance, neurosis, character identity, etc.

By providing a means to both diffuse information and interact with others, Twitter creates the possibility, and illusion, of networked conversations unaffected by social constraints or the physical constraints of space and time (Boyd et al. 2010). It is a

networked public space incorporating ‘networked publics’ that Ito (2008) has described as simultaneously bottom-up, top-down as well as side-by-side. Twitter publics are interconnected through fluid conversations, and the ability of tweets to link to other media content and vice versa makes Twitter an integral part of the ‘networked public sphere’ that emerges alongside the mass-mediated public (Benkler 2006).

While the Twittersphere itself is open-ended, the way people experience it is individually structured. The content of a user’s ‘window’ into the Twittersphere is based on tweets from accounts the user chooses to follow, and is thus bound to the individual networks they choose to maintain. Given the sheer number of accounts, the audience on Twitter is more divided than the audience for mass media, but despite this, it is still highly concentrated (Wu et al. 2011), as there are huge differences in the number of followers between accounts.

The follower count can be a measure of influence in the Twittersphere because it defines how many users receive a user’s messages, but followers can be bought or increased with special scripts. Another indicator for influence is involvement, which can be measured by received addressings (@-replies, @-mentions and retweets). The more people mention or retweet a specific account, the more authority is attributed to it. ‘Having a million followers does not always mean much in the Twitter world. Instead it is more influential to have an active audience who retweets or mentions the user’ if addressing is a measure of influence (Cha et al. 2010).

Political actors use Twitter to spread information about political events and to state their opinions (Larsson & Moe, 2011) and in some cases having that message circumventing and not being filtered by mass media (Small, 2011). A number of research

studies showed that politicians and political institutions predominantly employed Twitter for campaigning, for self-promotion and to spread information rather than to engage in conversations (Golbeck et al. 2010; Grant et al. 2010; Waters & Williams 2011; Vergeer et al. 2011). However, Grant et al. (2010, p. 579) showed that those who did interact with other users appeared ‘to gain more political benefit from the platform than others’.

In addition to politicians, citizens also make use of Twitter for political purposes. This use has been particularly examined in the context of political events. For elections, Jurgens and Jungherr (2011) as well as Bruns and Burgess (2011) revealed that political tweets are often event-related and that their numbers increase in proximity to those events. Twitter attracts a great variety of actors, cutting across and connecting diverse networks, users and locations (Segeberg & Bennett 2011). In that case, Twitter’s transparent boundaries create situations in which the ‘internal’ communication between the movement’s organizers attracted ‘outsiders’ who were then integrated into the conversations (Maireder & Schwarzenegger, 2012). These types of ‘open’ debates may expose participants to a diversity of opinions that might yield more towards empowerment and mobilization in participants rather than the previously discussed polarization amongst media audiences (Yardi & Boyd, 2010).

When Twitter is used to spread and comment on the news, it results in a stream of information, opinions and emotions related to current events (Oliveira, 2012). Hermida (2010) refers to this phenomenon as ‘ambient journalism’ which is journalism derived from the absorption and negotiation of micro-content within complex media environments. This can also be seen as user created context that follow the same narratives discussed in reality television where audiences become engaged actors.

These “broad, asynchronous, lightweight and always-on systems [like Twitter] are enabling citizens to maintain a mental model of news and events” (Hermida, 2010).

Twitter also helps journalists to research stories, to establish and maintain sources, to connect increasingly with their audiences and, of course, to promote their work; unsurprisingly, journalists use Twitter to a large extent and use it a source (Cision, 2011).

While the official Twitter channels of most news organizations mainly link to content on the company’s website (Armstrong & Gao 2010), journalists use their personal accounts to engage and interact with others. Neuberger et al.’s comprehensive study of Twitter and Journalism (2010) produced similar results. Their content analysis confirmed the findings of Bruns and Burgess (2011) that technology topics dominate the agenda on Twitter. As the popularity of the service has increased, this dominance has weakened but still remains, but it is readily apparent, that political participation topics, rather than only politics, receive much more attention than they are given by mass media (Aronczyk, 2015).

From a macro-perspective, political conversations on Twitter can be viewed as spheres of communication. In these Twitterspheres not only are traditional political actors important, but new influencers also emerge, for instance, bloggers, activists and tech-savvy backbenchers. Furthermore, users are grouped in different sub-networks and clusters that may be connected through very active users acting as hubs (Bruns & Burgess 2011). The majority of Twitter users participate in geographically local networks (Quercia et al. 2012). The United States has a notably higher adoption rate and more active Twitter communities with more than 65 million active users (comScore 2016).

Comparing user trends across several countries, the fame and celebrity of users, whether it be in entertainment, sports or politics, tends to strongly influence the popularity of Twitter. In the United States, for instance, celebrities who use the service to interact with fans and to promote their careers enjoy huge followings (Socialbakers 2012). What these trends seem to indicate is about the American political Twittersphere is that actors within the political arena are among the most followed users but represent not the center of political power but its second and third tiers (Aronczyk, 2015). The political Twittersphere was less concerned with its relationship to power than it is with elucidating the specific 'biotope' of users who use Twitter to participate in the political arena (Trottier et al., 2015).

This Twittersphere was mostly relegated to celebrities as active participants and audiences as passive observers. However, this permeated into the political realm into Twitter, which is a network medium that ties between users and establishes status among them since connections do not have to be reciprocal (M. Cha et al., 2010). Research in these fields clarifies the general role that Twitter plays in political communication and participation establishes that there is an interconnection of brand, message and interaction (Trottier et al., 2015).

A complete picture of a political Twittersphere requires one to know not only who the leading figures are and how they interact, but also which topics preoccupy the whole sphere. Clarifying this larger context may provide concrete insights into the relationship between Twitter and mass media, especially how their agendas and topics influence one another. Every act of communication illuminates not only the relationships between humans but also the role that technology plays in uniting them (Latour 1991, 2005).

Therefore, on the web every hyperlink, every thread, every tag or bot is a digital actor that in some small way shapes the environment ‘formerly known as the virtual’ (Woolgar 2002). This is also true for Twitter, whose technology and users form an open, dockable actor- network created by the actions of human and non-human participants. With methods employing digital tools, one can study ‘culture and society with the Internet’ (Rogers 2009, p. 29). How exactly participants co-create this reality can best be discovered using the web’s own means.

It is also important to distinguish the different types of actors in the Twittersphere as they relate to politics. They are categorized as either (1) politicians, (2) journalists, (3) so called experts or (4) citizens (Aronczyk, 2015). Categories 1 — 3 are ‘professional actors’. In respect to Twitter these are the definitions. Journalists are professional communicators, who research national politics on behalf of a publishing house and publish their findings through mass media; experts are political actors who are neither politicians nor journalists but are professionally occupied with politics, for example, political consultants, lobbyists, NGOs, activists, political scientists, pundits, etc.; and citizens are users who are not professionally active in politics but express political opinions or comment on events (M. Cha et al., 2010). Includes, for example, non-domestic political journalists, social media consultants, bloggers, etc.

The interaction is intense since it is non-stop and multidimensional in time. Many users do not use Twitter as a passive one-way broadcasting tool and some do not use it in real time. They interact with each other intensely, addressing and retweeting, and thereby referring to the tweets and accounts of others (Trottier et al., 2015). Among experts, lobbyists and professional activists, mention others and the more often a user addressed

others, the more often this user was mentioned by others (Trottier et al., 2015). The number of followers have little influence on the number of mentions by others and nobody plays an influential role in conversations only by accumulating followers; taking initiative and addressing others was key (M. Cha et al., 2010).

Even though Twitter runs non-stop, there are many Twitter conversations happening during the evening and night where direct addressing (@-replies) is the most common type of tweet (Chen, 2011). During the day, retweets are the most common tweet type with a peak around noon. These observations support the claim that daytime Twitter use functioned primarily as a channel for broadcasting and forwarding news. Journalists were the primary beneficiaries of these daytime broadcasts, as their tweets are retweeted more often than any other groups' (Chen, 2011).

For the most part, citizens talk to fewer users than political professionals which is unsurprising given the public role of the latter while journalists are the most self-referential group among professionals (Chen, 2011). Most journalists tweet to other journalists, experts and politicians and politicians to a lesser extent tweet to journalists, but politicians are only slightly less self-referential (Chen, 2011). This was the research and this is was the custom before the 2016 electoral campaign and the Trump surge in the polls.

All professional groups are open to conversations with people from outside the political system, as indicated by the high percentages of addressings directed towards citizens or users outside the network (Chen, 2011). For the most part, these tweets from citizens are ignored although it represents substantial interaction by citizens (Chen,

2011). The relationships between the different groups become even more evident in the following network analysis.

This participation creates subnetworks within the Twittersphere. As previously mentioned, a criterion for determining influence is how intensely people are addressed. Therefore, the basis of authority on Twitter is addressed by other users (M. Cha et al., 2010). That said, it must be noted that these addressings have very different functions, including (a) directly addressing another user (the tweet starts with '@name'), (b) quoting a tweet of another user ('RT @user', 'via @user' or "'@user: quoted text'") or (c) mentioning someone in a tweet ('@name' within the text). However, these different mention-types indicate a relevance of a user to a particular discourse or conversation. This is important since before Trump, most of these interactions were mostly held by citizens. Trump combined all these interactions to not only be a politician, but to be a journalist, an expert and a citizen.

The interaction network of professionals (politicians, journalists, experts, strategists and lobbyists) is distinguishable from a greater network that includes non-professional, but politically interested citizens (Trottier et al., 2015). Many of the politicians, journalists and experts are oriented towards each other, thereby forming a dense networked sphere of professionals. Few professionals are equally or more engaged with non-professional citizens. On the other side, only those few citizens who actively engage professionals manage to participate in their subnetwork (Trottier et al., 2015).

Central to these was the fact that citizens played more minor roles in a discourse dominated by political professionals in general and by journalists in particular. There are still identifiable subnetworks, but the dense distinguishable subnetwork of political

professionals has vanished and been replaced by a looser network of citizens and politicians and by a network of journalists and experts (Trottier et al., 2015). If the topic is politics, the clearest interactions occur between citizens and politicians on the one hand and journalists and experts on the other. This result is remarkable as it demonstrates that the political Twittersphere is not just an echo chamber of a political elite, but a conversation that can be joined by outsiders (Trottier et al., 2015).

The issue networks derived from the tweet classifications revealed that private citizens, especially bloggers, emerged alongside journalists and political pundits as central information hubs and connectors to subnetworks concerning specific topics as 'niche authorities' (Trottier et al., 2015). And what stands out about this, is that all four types of users have about the same amount of influence in agenda setting. This is important since the agenda on Twitter differs from the agenda of political newspapers and television broadcasts (Trottier et al., 2015). To give an example of the 2016 campaign, the DNC hack by Russian hackers has been hardly mentioned by mainstream media and has been very prevalent on the Twittersphere.

Another criterion for a topic's success on Twitter seems to be a short news life cycle. While topics such as the financial crisis were massively represented in the newspapers and on TV, hardly anyone tweeted about such topics on Twitter. A similar phenomenon could be observed with the ongoing coverage of corruption-related investigations which mainstream media hardly follows, about which many users tweet about. A further explanation of why these topics are more popular on Twitter than in mass media is that activists use the service not only to discuss but also to facilitate their activities (Trottier et al., 2015).

There are a number of insights concerning both how national politics are discussed on Twitter and how participants in conversations networked within its public sphere. There are certain structural changes in the nature of political participation, namely that politicians, journalists, experts and, to a lesser extent, citizens interact intensely with one another through Twitter (Trottier et al., 2015). In general, their tweeting practices conform to the pattern of 'broadcast by day, chat by night', and with every act of communication they update their connections to others.

A good part of professional users forms a highly connected but distinguished subnetwork in which only a few participants branch out to connect with citizens (Trottier et al., 2015). Other subnetworks, noticeably those of left-wing activists and a social media/marketing cluster, are also distinguishable from the rest of the network. All type of addressings on Twitter (@-replies, @-mentions and retweets) were used to calculate influence. One could argue that not differentiating between different types of addressings helps conversation-oriented accounts (as @-replies happen more often than retweets). While this is true, this effect may be balanced by the fact that users who provide original and relevant content also get retweeted and credited more often (M. Cha et al., 2010). As a result, not distinguishing between different forms of addressings is a practicable way to determine the influence of actors embedded in a Twitter network.

In general, famous journalists, experts and politicians are central actors within the political Twittersphere and form their own, dense and influential subnetwork within the broader sphere. Non-professionals may participate in this network, provided that they engage receptive members of the elite who act as 'bridges' between subnetworks. However, when the discussion involves certain topics, niche authorities emerge, and

these authorities, including a few activists and bloggers, join other political professionals as central information hubs (Trottier et al., 2015).

Concerning the Twittersphere's agenda in relation to mass media, research identifies different ways in which the service is used, especially with regards to political events. In these instances, people used the service to report new developments, maintain communication, coordinate action, and react to the broadcasts and publications of traditional media outlets. In many tweets these different functions coincide. In other words, people become their own agenda setters, market their content and in some ways interact in the same cultural narratives as previously mentioned in reality shows. They are prosumers of their own thought and content.

It seems reasonable to conclude that as a medium of political communication, Twitter is another arena for already established actors. However, results clearly show that Twitter facilitates links between the political center and the citizenry, giving 'ordinary' citizens more chances to engage in the political discourse. Whether citizens feel they are more involved in politics and how this engagement affects the political or editorial processes is what Trump has taken advantage of. More channels of communication may be necessary to develop a more inclusive public sphere but are not sufficient in and of themselves. Trump shows that Twitter is used in the everyday life of citizens, politicians and journalists and shapes political and editorial decision-making and discussion.

Trump has encompassed all this into combining the way the Twittersphere works with reality television neoliberal cultural narratives. Trump created the first "troll" election. Donald Trump has a groundbreaking leadership style. He does not demonstrate

gravitas and intelligence with measured remarks and diplomacy. He succeeds with brutal populism and personal attacks. He seems to relish being nasty and even sadistic, at times. This is not that different from private citizen Twitter users and celebrities who engage in “Twitter fights” like Kanye West, Amanda Bynes, Perez Hilton, Alec Baldwin, Chelsea Handler, etc.

Trump plays to the reality television audiences or, considering what was said before, this translates into online audiences and both mainstream media audience. In this way, the election shows that the balance of influence is shifting. Power no longer centers on leadership but on followership. And the norms of the Internet, where cruelty is amplified, escalated and encouraged, have now jumped into the so-called “reality of real life” which are the cultural narratives of reality television previously discussed.

Online users know how incredibly quickly comments can escalate. Researchers in cyberpsychology, which studies how technology impacts human behavior, have observed the greatest attention-seekers online, who identify themselves as “trolls” (Chen, 2011). Some have pointed the motivation for trolling behavior appears to be a combination of boredom, revenge, pleasure, attention and a desire to cause disruption and acquire power and attention (Chen, 2011). Trolls relish a chance to compete in a kind of one-upping of cruelty. For example, on multiplayer gaming sites, they delight in teasing and taunting children, then post video or audio of their victims crying. On dating sites, trolls are capable of anything from cyber-stalking, lewd comments, name-calling or cyber-exhibitionism to sexual harassment and threats. It is clearly aggressive and sometimes sociopathic.

Trump's success as a presidential candidate is a vivid example of cyber-socialization (Chen, 2011). Leading by building followers, he employs many of the tactics of a malicious online bully, from his use of taunts and name-calling of fellow candidates ("Crooked Hillary" and "Crazy Bernie" and "Lying Ted") to his obsession with the physical appearance ("Little Marco") and special hostility for women ("dogs," "pigs" and "disgusting"). On Twitter and the campaign trail, as soon as the roar dies down from one of his outrageous comments, he quickly posts another to excite his followers. As Nate Silver, the American statistician and campaign prognosticator has declared, Trump is "the world's greatest troll."

Psychologists have found a relationship between individuals who comment frequently online and identify themselves as "trolls" with three of the four components of what is known as the dark tetrad of personality, a set of characteristics that are found together in a morbid cluster: narcissism (the characteristic not included), sadism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism. The researchers concluded that trolling was a manifestation of "everyday sadism" (Chen, 2011). This psychology equates to traveling to a new country or just moving to a new neighborhood across town, and experiencing the ways that a different environment can impact behavior, and eventually what is perceive as "normal" and "real" (Chen, 2011). The same goes for the new environments that are created by technology. Norms evolve quickly online. And once they change in one place across a broad population, they can migrate elsewhere easily. If the world seems suddenly crueller, more juvenile and sadistic, the impact of cyber effects are the probable explanation (Chen, 2011).

Cyberspace, where Trump with his 8.19 million followers on Twitter dominates the social media landscape of the election, has become an environment where pathological behavior is gaining ground and becoming normalized. Studies show increasing evidence that there is a loss of empathy online (Chen, 2011). A heightened detachment from the feelings and rights of others, seen in extreme cyberbullying and sadistic trolling. Anonymity online, almost like a superpower of invisibility, fuels this sense of detachment, along with another powerful cyber effect called the online disinhibiting effect, which can cause individuals to be bolder, less inhibited, and judgment-impaired in cyberspace (Chen, 2011). Desensitization is another cyber effect, a result of access to endless amounts of escalatory, violent and extreme content on mainstream and digital media.

Once these norms have cyber-migrated, the norming process continues. In the case of the U.S. presidential election, we have seen how Trump's schoolyard taunts and cruelty have changed the conduct of other candidates. How Jeb Bush was provoked, how Rubio became meaner. Recently, Senator Elizabeth Warren, a distinguished former Harvard Law professor, met the challenge by competing in day-long tweetstorms, employing aggressive jabs at Trump. Like in this exchange:

But here's the thing. You can beat a bully — not by tucking tail and running, but by holding your ground.

— Elizabeth Warren (@elizabethforma) May 7, 2016

Goofy Elizabeth Warren didn't have the guts to run for POTUS. Her phony Native American heritage stops that and VP cold.

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) May 11, 2016

Do you think you're going to shut us up, @realDonaldTrump? Think again. It's time to answer for your dangerous ideas.

— Elizabeth Warren (@elizabethforma) May 11, 2016

Yet trolling has worked for Trump and this seems to be changing how Americans elect their leaders. Historian Richard Hofstadler once referred pejoratively to “The Paranoid Style” of political candidates of the 1950s and 1960s, who employed conspiracy theories and fear mongering to gain notice, fuel passion and drive agenda (Aronczyk, 2015). Technology has enhanced this into “trolling”.

Once established as a norm and used by revered public officials, this behavioral shift could unfortunately prevail in other aspects of life. In this way, and others, the digital revolution is having a monumental impact on our lives. These changes are occurring so quickly that it has become difficult to tell the difference between passing trends, still-emerging behavior and something that’s already become an acceptable and established social norm.

For those trying to eradicate cyber-bullying and online harassment, and educate children and teenagers about the great emotional costs of this behavior, the job becomes much harder when high-profile leaders use cruelty as strategy and win elections because of it. While NBC, which used to run Trump’s two reality shows *The Apprentice* and *Celebrity Apprentice*, announced it was cutting all ties to Trump after the Republican presidential candidate doubled down on comments he made about Mexican

immigrants, Trump gained more followers and gave more ratings to MSNBC in the Trump coverage.

Trump said in the announcement for his candidacy that Mexican immigrants to the U.S. are “bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” But the inflammatory and statistically wrong comments are not shocking given their source. However, in audience reception message is successful just as the reality TV show participant that “tells it like it is.”

Trump has long been a real-life version of an Internet troll. He has been rude, uncaring, ubiquitous, and desperately confusing attention for affection. Like many Gamergate aficionados, Trump is willing to be offensive and derogatory if it means more people will see him, fostering a cycle that forces attention not only from followers but from all media.

But Trump resembles trolls in more than abstract ways, too. His media campaign for most of his public life has utilized the same methods to grab the attention and, at times, admiration of the American people as bored teenagers online. The Media Literacy Council cites seven “tried-and-tested tactics” of online trolls and, upon examination, it's as if Trump used the report as a handbook. “Trolls try to lure others into off-topic conversations,” writes the Council, “and frustrate them with its pointlessness and circularity” (Chen, 2011).

Apart from his most recent comments, Trump has a long history of pulling the national conversation into political ephemera. Perhaps the most famous instance is his crusade for President Barack Obama's birth certificate, itself predicated on the racist birther movement. For nearly a month in the spring of 2011, Trump appeared on cable

and morning news shows calling for the president to release his long-form birth certificate. And the media loved it.

His racist pursuit of a truth everyone already knew put him in the lead of the 2012 GOP field despite the fact he hadn't officially announced a campaign and wouldn't until this cycle.

Within his diversionary tactics are several other trolling methods cited by the MLC, including "antipathising," which is when the troll takes an unfavorable position and defends it poorly, "aggress" which is making an offensive comment without need in order to garner retaliation, and "crossposting" which is spreading their off-topic hatred through as many forums and sites as they can (Chen, 2011).

In his battle for the birth certificate, Trump played winking firestarter and touted an unpopular opinion—only one in four Americans supported the conspiracy theory at the time—that was simultaneously a needless act of aggression toward the president. He then spread these tactics through as many media outlets as he could, and diverted all sorts of national attention his way.

One of the most common trolling methods is shock. Trump, spends much of his public credit attempting to defend things he says purely for shock value. Aside from his recent comments about Mexico, Trump has blamed crime in New York City on blacks and Hispanics, said that well-educated blacks have superior opportunities to whites, and theorized that Obama's only route to Harvard Law School was affirmative action. These are all public statements that are tied together by no ideology other than the racist assumptions of a rich man. They are not a public figure voicing his opinion but attempts at public attention. Like fellow trolls Andy Kaufman, a professional wrestler or a reality

TV character, any remark is spewed explicitly to get a reaction from the crowd, Trump directly feeds off of retort and will do anything to gain it. Just like a competitor in Survivor, Big Brother or even in his show The Apprentice and audiences as voters gets to decide who they want to keep on the show.

How this will affect his presidential campaign is best surmised by another trolling tactic: endanger and criticize. Trolls will often give poor advice to naive questioners under the guise of trying to help them. The existence of Trump's presidential campaign is evidence of this. He says it is an attempt to better the Republican Party and the country but his bloviated personality will in fact alter the campaign in a negative way for the latter and might sabotage the chances of the former. His recent rise in the polls has the GOP terrified that Trump could derail the electoral process in the name of serving his ego.

The GOP is also concerned with how Trump treats his fellow Republicans, often taking to hypo-criticism in doing so. Trolls online will often criticize someone while purposefully showing their own lack of skill, attacking someone's grammar while not using any punctuation, for example. Trump consistently hammers his GOP brethren for their lack of "competency" and business know-how. Of Fiorina, a former CEO for Hewlett-Packard, Trump said she "ran a company and got viciously fired," citing a supposed rise in HP stock the day she left her position.

While Fiorina's record at HP is certainly questionable, Trump is not one to be throwing barbs about business life. His real estate company has filed for bankruptcy four times in his life. In 2013, the state of New York sued Trump for supposedly defrauding attendees of his online for-profit business school Trump University. He mostly retains his

status as a rich man by keeping his personal funds far away from his businesses, indicative of showing lack of faith in his own professional acumen.

One of the reasons these aren't typically brought to the front of conversations about Trump is because the man in front of cameras and podiums is not Trump The Business Man, and it's definitely not Trump The Politician, but Trump the Populist Reality Television Star. Trump The Troll, a reality TV star has no shame and does everything for attention. Much like an Internet troll, he cares not for detailed policy debates or a finessed and complex worldview. He only needs to feel observed. And like any effective troll, they lack self-awareness to stop with the "whoever tweets, texts or speaks last wins" attitude.

There's no question that conversation, debate, or discussion with Trump is in fundamental ways pointless. From his perspective at least, the only goal is to keep the conversation going as long as it possibly can, and in directions he prefers. Consider this Tweet from Trump that came out during a CNN Townhall:

Why is this reporter touching me as I leave news conference? What is in her hand?? [pic.twitter.com/HQB8dl0fhn](https://pic.twitter.com/HQB8dl0fhn)

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) March 29, 2016

The not-at-all mysterious or sinister object in the hand of former Breitbart.com staffer Michelle Fields was a pen. When asked whether he should can Corey Lewandowski, his thuggish campaign manager who has also been filmed apparently pulling the collar of a protester at a different event, here was Trump's response was, "it would be so easy for me to terminate this man, ruin his life, ruin his family...and

say you are fired. I have fired many people, especially on 'The Apprentice,'" Trump told moderator Anderson Cooper. "The problem is everybody dumps people when there is a sign of political incorrectness." Later on, Trump fired Lewandowski who later got hired by CNN.

After CNN showed the 21st-century equivalent of the Zapruder film in super-slow motion for the thousandth time, Trump also polled the audience, at one point even asking only the women to respond, "come on, did anything happen?" he said. She said she was yanked down hard! She didn't fall! She's changing her story. And the crowd, like a reality television audience cheering for a character was with him.

One of the reasons Trump draws the attention of critics and fans alike is not simply what he says but how he says it. In the exchange with CNN's Anderson Cooper quoted above, Trump neither fully engages nor deflects the question in the ways accustomed to be seen in politicians. He doesn't blow it off, the way pols always do when they don't want to answer something specifically, and he never launches into pre-scripted, pre-rehearsed lines like Bernie Sanders or Marco Rubio did so notoriously in one of the debates and the way that Ted Cruz and Hillary Clinton seem to every time they open they open their mouths.

Instead, Trump ingests the question and spews out something semantically related but not quite on topic. Suddenly, he goes from talking about a potential assault by his campaign manager to a discussion of Trump's signature line from a canceled reality show and a bragging about how he's actually taking the hard road by not firing Lewandowski. He then goes about how he has started the terms of the next exchange, which is now

about political correctness and how most politicians (and others) dump their loyal staff at the first hint of trouble.

This isn't conversation or even debate. It is twitter chatter where the goal is not to actually have a meaningful discussion about anything or even dispense information. It's to see whether humans can be fooled by computer-generated talk and to see how long it can be kept going until we get bored or the back-and-forth falters due to lack of a next topic of conversation.

An example of how successful this is, for both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, is the recent "Delete Your Account" that swept Twittersphere. Hillary Clinton isn't usually one for jaw-dropping insults, but when Donald Trump insulted her on Twitter, calling her "crooked" after Obama endorsed her, she had a few – three, to be precise – words for him.



**Hillary Clinton** ✓  
@HillaryClinton



Following

Delete your account.

**Donald J. Trump** @realDonaldTrump

Obama just endorsed Crooked Hillary. He wants four more years of Obama—but nobody else does!

RETWEETS

481,134

LIKES

618,579



1:27 PM - 9 Jun 2016

“Delete your account” may seem like a funny retort, but it’s got some cultural weight to it. The phrase has been a long-running meme, particularly in the Black Twitter community, and is used as a combination of insult and advice. Sometimes, if someone says something so stupid that it is beyond redemption, people will gently, or harshly, advise them to remove themselves from the Internet. Or: “Delete your account.”

Ira Madison, a writer at MTV News, has an entire column called “Delete Your Account,” where he takes the concept to its logical conclusion and explains in detail where the offender, usually a celebrity, in question went wrong, and whether or not their transgressions deserve a revocation of Internet privileges. Donald Trump’s infamous taco bowl tweet, for example, got a “yes” – in gif form.

Which is why we’re taking a look at Clinton’s tweet. Of all the things that Trump has tweeted, is his calling her crooked “delete your account”-worthy? With this tweet, Clinton has thrust yet another bit of niche culture into the mainstream, where it may well suffer the same fate as the dab. However, it also takes into question and perception of Hillary Clinton: Did she tweet or did her vast social media team? Trump has admitted that he is the one tweeting from his account, but Hillary Clinton’s account has memes, quotes from her that end with her initials such as “-HRC” and links to other politicians and experts similar to what was explained before in the use of Twitter by politicians.

Make no mistake, the tweet is funny. But it’s also indicative of Clinton taking a casual-looking approach to reaching young people and communities of color online. However, it brings the perception of “reality” as previously mentioned on reality television cultural narrative. Is it real or is it scripted?

Trump's outreach toward minorities has been low-touch for some time and doesn't require much in the way of money or resources. Post a snapshot of yourself eating tacos and move on. If you like Trump, it will make you smile. If you don't, it's probably for a bigger reason than tacos. Clinton, on the other hand, has made more direct attempts at reaching out to minorities online. But they haven't always gone over well.

Consider an attempt to reach out to young Latinos last December, when her site posted a list article called "7 ways Hillary Clinton is just like your Abuela." The move was immediately criticized in online circles. Instead of being celebrated, it generated a trending hashtag called #NotMyAbuela, with people recalling the actual hardships that their grandmothers had endured as a result of racism and a broken immigration system. Clinton, many complained, knew nothing about those experiences. Some people labeled the campaign "Hispandering." However, is this attributed to her or a clueless social media team that embraced similar social media campaigns online?

Some of Clinton's attempts to reach out to young black people online have also backfired. On Dec. 1, when her campaign modified her logo – easily the most innovative of all the candidates' – in celebration of Rosa Parks, the reactions were mixed. A BuzzFeed poll of 10,000 people found the switch "wrong" and inappropriate. To be fair, putting Rosa Parks in the back of the bus was probably a bad idea. Later that same month, the campaign changed her Twitter logo in celebration of Kwanzaa – this time, inspiring more ridicule than anger.

The #NewHillaryLogo topic trended, with users mocking what they saw as more racial pandering. The backlash was so bad the campaign changed it back within hours. Clinton's adjustments online have become something of a running joke – President

Obama made fun of it at the White House Correspondents' Dinner, saying that she's like "your relative that just signed up for Facebook." Observers might find any digital missteps funny, but Clinton's campaign seems to be taking seriously the backlash she suffered in late 2015.

So instead of gambling with direct visual ads that might fall flat, she seems to mirroring her recent ad campaign and positing herself as the anti-Trump online. There was no logo change for Black History Month. In May, she did not risk a Cinco de Mayo tweet herself. Instead, less than an hour after Trump made his Cinco de Mayo taco bowl tweet, Clinton's account tweeted the presumptive Republican nominee in his own words.



**Hillary Clinton** ✓  
@HillaryClinton



Following

"I love Hispanics!" — Trump, 52 minutes ago  
[hrc.io/1XaTPHx](https://hrc.io/1XaTPHx)

"They're gonna be deported." — Trump,  
yesterday

Hence, Hillary Clinton has become a troll. Clinton's social media account has become quite nimble recently with the "delete your account" retort was made only five minutes after Trump. When he says something off-color, her social media managers can simply flip him onto the Twitter timeline for her followers to lampoon. It may be a bit passive, but it's less risky than another ethnic-themed logo.

To be sure, Clinton's social media mishaps pose little danger of inadvertently sending young people, especially those of color, running to the Trump camp. But perceived cultural slights might add up, and make a young voter of color less excited about Clinton. Currently, Clinton holds a significant edge among black and Latino voters, who have traditionally voted Democratic in presidential elections. Increased voter participation of young minorities should also be on Clinton's mind. In 2012, blacks showed up to vote at a higher rate than whites overall, and black voters aged 18-24 were more likely to vote than their white peers. In the 2016 elections, millennials will make up almost half of all eligible Latino voters. Trump has clapped back, in his own way, at Clinton.



**Donald J. Trump** ✓  
@realDonaldTrump



Following

How long did it take your staff of 823 people to think that up--and where are your 33,000 emails that you deleted?

**Hillary Clinton** @HillaryClinton

Delete your account. [twitter.com/realDonaldTrump...](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump)

RETWEETS

171,284

LIKES

285,123



Republican National Committee Chair Reince Priebus also tweeted.



This troll campaign has been catered to audiences and media being accomplice in search of ratings and attention also. However, it is rather simplistic to assume that most audiences are subservient to these narratives by assuming they are “stupid, uneducated or racist.” Why are voters and audience susceptible to these messages? What role does media play? There is historical reference for this than were foreshadowed in Elia Kazan’s 1957 *Face In The Crowd* and in 1998 with Peter Weir’s *The Truman Show* and Warren Beatty’s *Bulworth*. This will be discussed in the section.

## Chapter 6

### Looking Back: Analyzing Culture Through Film

#### “Face In The Crowd”

Donald Trump’s meteoric rise to the Republican nomination for the presidency has been the result of a frenzied celebrity following. Trump’s candidacy and his celebrity status have mobilized new voters, many of whom are young and voting for the first time. As the subject of countless hours of media coverage, magazine covers, and iconographic imagery, Trump has become the most celebrated politician in recent memory. However, his appeal has been highly contested, and his popularity has also been described as both ‘celebrity-like’ and ‘cult-like.’ Trump’s popularity and the worldwide attention to his presidential campaign itself has become as a media event and a site of maximum visibility and maximum turbulence.

The intense media interest that is garnered by such phenomena however, qualifies it as a conflicted media event with the added quality that such cases also appear to tap into deep-seated conflicts that normally remain subterranean, whether such subtexts includes race, national origin, or class. Trump’s popularity and meteoric rise from a businessman to a reality television star and to a presidential candidate is a conflicted media event that has insatiably attracted contending discursive forces that seek to construct through popular media outlets and ‘truths’ about Trump’s popularity and candidacy.

Trump’s appeal and popularity can be analyzed through the critique of mass culture found in the narrative of Elia Kazan’s 1957 film, *A Face in the Crowd* offers prescient perspective on celebrity culture’s influence on politics and is instructive with

Trump as a “contested media event.” There is cultural significance of specific mediations in the construction of the discourse surrounding Trump and his campaign for the presidency of the United States.

Beginning in the 1950s, television was rapidly becoming the choice for mediated entertainment and communication. Conversely, radio’s popularity would precipitously decline as television became the country’s most popular entertainment medium. As Hollywood director Elia Kazan noted, “Television had won first place in the entertainment field” (Kelley, 2004). Television however, was not just limited to the entertainment apparatus, as evidenced by the early political uses of television during the 1950s, from Nixon’s Checker’s speech, to the Kennedy-Nixon presidential debates.

Director Elia Kazan and writer Budd Schulberg wanted to collaborate on a project that addressed the issue of how power has become attainable through media technology, particularly in the form of television, and how this medium would forever change American politics. That project became *A Face in the Crowd*, which opened in 1957. This underrated film was more than just an expose of the television industry; rather, as Leonard Quart points out, this was “a truly prophetic work on the ominous political power of the medium and the merging of political and entertainment values—a coupling that would ultimately change the nature of American politics (1989). The narrative of the film exemplifies how charismatic individuals can exploit commercial television and the media apparatus in general to influence, persuade and fool the masses.

*A Face in the Crowd* is a major film that most people mistook at the time as a minor or at least inconsequential. It was born out of a conversation where writer and long time collaborator with Kazan, Budd Schulberg had with Will Rogers, Jr., son of the

famous celebrity as film's beloved homespun American philosopher. Rogers, Jr. was at the time running for a congressional seat largely on his father's name. Roger's Jr. said: "My father was so full of shit, because he pretends he's just one of the people, just one of the guys... but in our house the people that ever came as guests were the richest people in town, the bankers and the power-brokers of L.A. And those were his friends and that's where his heart is and he [was] really a goddamned reactionary" (Kazan, 2000).

This gave way for Kazan and Schulberg to see a figure like a Rogers-like character: a good natured hillbilly with the common touch who works sly political commentary and when and wealth and influence grows becomes a menace to liberal minded society. They also saw how that figure in the new age of television, a power undreamed of by Rogers, could change all the equations of mass communications. For Kazan, it was fascinating how the manipulative power of television could be a social menace.

Kazan and Schulberg were also concerned at the commercialization of television in the second half of the fifties, a period in which serious journalists such as Ed Murrow felt that the public service role in broadcasting was being marginalized by an increasing emphasis on celebrity and entertainment. A figure mentioned a number of times in Kazan's notes is the radio and early television star Arthur Godfrey. With his Southern folksiness and apparent spontaneity on live television, Godfrey generated millions of advertising dollars for the CBS network, and was described in Vance Packard's classic study of the 'American Advertising Machine', *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), as 'the most powerful salesman of our times'.

In the ending used in the film Schulberg and Kazan also refer to the story of children's broadcaster Don Carney, who, as 'Uncle Don', was supposed to have lost his position following an unguarded remark on a radio show. (In the film a mock Variety headline announces 'LR'S BLOOPER TOPS UNK DON'S. 50 MILLION FANS SHOCKED'.) Kazan felt that power was flowing to newly wealthy figures 'whose only culture is Las Vegas and the Saturday Evening Post and the Readers Digest', together with people like Godfrey who 'think they know something because they can entertain people' (Kazan, 2000).

In the summer of 1955, Schulberg and Kazan prepared for their new project by researching the world of Madison Avenue advertising and also the emerging role of television in political campaigns. It was in the 1956 Presidential race that, for the first time, more campaign money was spent on television than on radio. Dwight D. Eisenhower had been the first candidate to use television advertisements in 1952. These were very crude efforts showing the General's supposed responses to the queries of ordinary citizens.

In 1956, campaigning for re-election, he was advised on the new medium by actor Robert Montgomery. In their efforts to research the new significance of the media for politics, Kazan and Schulberg talked to Senators Al Gore Sr. and Stuart Symington, and also Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson. Johnson was certain that television was giving people a chance to look close into the eyes of politicians and that this was changing the nature of politics. Politicians, he argued, had not been seen that close before, and he felt aware of the need to keep his own eyes steady when looking at the camera (Kazan, 2000).

The film also makes other references to the media of the time, with appearances from legendary columnist Walter Winchell and news anchors John Cameron Swayze and Mike Wallace, while the choice of Memphis as a setting points to the disc jockey Dewey Phillips, who dominated mid-South airwaves in the early fifties and was first to play rhythm and blues music by black artists. It was also in 1956 that the Memphis-based Elvis Presley first appeared on television and became a national phenomenon.

The experience spoke to their traditional leftism. They understood the voice of the people being democracy's purest voice but that it could be polluted by lies. However, in the past that pollution came only from politicians but they saw something alarming as how mass media, which seemed apolitical, in looking humorous undertook this task of pollution through television. They saw a capacity for evil beyond what others imputed to it (Kazan, 2000).

In the first part of the film we see Marcia Jeffreys, an Arkansas woman in her late twenties who has returned South after graduating at Sarah Lawrence College, 'discover' 'Lonesome' Rhodes. Lonesome is introduced as a heavy drinking country boy with an eye for the main chance but also a gift for powerful, blues based songs about his experience. Working for her uncle's small town radio station, Marcia sees that Lonesome has a gift for the medium, while also falling for his mix of crude energy and charm.

He sings and tells folksy stories, projecting a populist stance that causes a stir and soon attracts interest from agents and television stations in Memphis. There his television career takes off, despite his lack of interest at this stage in pleasing his commercial sponsors. The central section of the film works as a satire on New York PR and advertising, represented by Lonesome's rising star agent Joey De Palma and the

‘organization men’ of Browning, Schlager and McNally, the company that hires Lonesome for its sponsored TV show, the ‘Vitajex Hour’.

Thereafter, script and film deal alternately with the personal and public roles and relationships of Lonesome Rhodes. In public terms, the wealthy owner of Vitajex sees Lonesome as a potential ‘wielder of opinion’ on behalf of a right-wing political agenda associated with his friend and would be President, Senator Worthington Fuller. The increasingly powerful figure of Lonesome Rhodes loses much nuance, while he betrays Marcia personally: a previous marriage is revealed, while he marries and then ‘fires’ a 19-year-old girl from Pickett, Arkansas. Finally Marcia, who uses New York writer Mel Miller as adviser and sounding board, exposes her ‘Frankenstein’ to the people by turning up the sound during one of his television shows, so broadcasting to the nation his unguarded ad break remarks, contemptuous of his public. Lonesome Rhodes suddenly loses the popular appeal that makes him a political asset, although we see others being primed to replace him.

The studio objected to the emphasis in the leading man’s character on his ‘illicit sex relations’ and to the absence of any balancing sense of sin or ‘feeling of moral wrong-doing’. In detailed complaints studio head Jack Warner referred to frequent references to Lonesome’s promiscuity and to the ‘intimacies’ between him and Marcia, and pointed the filmmakers to the clause that stated ‘Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing’. Yet the film was issued with a Code certificate in April 1957, with Kazan thanking Jack Warner for his help, and in May, a few weeks before release, Kazan informed Shurlock that they had ‘cut about 8 more minutes out of the picture’, although comparison with the published script indicates

that most of the cuts were designed to reduce dialogue and plot that was tangential to the main narrative line.

As with his previous film, Kazan did not use stars, or even, for the most part, established Hollywood character actors. He originally thought of Jackie Gleason for the Rhodes character, but eventually decided on a sometime stand-up comic, Andy Griffith, who had no film experience but who had played for two years in Broadway. What made possible for the movie's final cut was Andy Griffith's portrayal of a funny, loving, cute, playful who had enough natural charm to disarm the fears of Lonesome Rhodes. He also had enough paranoia to fuel his contempt for his audience and enough poor-boy ambition to make audiences believe in his rise and fall. However, Kazan knew that this winning simplicity had to translate and magnify through media. Kazan has Rhodes moving audiences to tears and believing in him as a champion of the people. What Kazan wanted to emphasize is that the story is a tragedy if audiences fell in love with Lonesome Rhodes just as the Public does in the movie (Kazan, 2000).

From the beginning there is a tension between the topical references, the rootedness of the work in contemporary liberal concerns, and the broad satire, particularly in the advertising agency episode and the montage of scenes in which Lonesome is supposedly made into a national figure and a potential political force. Yet Kazan as director is also interested in capturing human behavior that is more nuanced. The account executive Macey, for example, which finally has a heart attack when he loses the Rhodes account, is briefly sketched by Paul McGrath as a sympathetic and tragic figure.

In a reference to the nativist, anti-immigrant tradition of the 1850s, Kazan also noted that there was great health in the American 'grass roots tradition' but also a great danger of 'Know-nothingness' (Kazan, 2000). Both writer and director were in part reflecting a contemporary liberal concern that mass political movements were a potential threat to the pluralist political fabric. For many this was a conclusion drawn from reflection on McCarthy's impact in the early fifties, despite the fact that he quickly declined as a public figure following criticism by his fellow Senators in 1954.

The director also drew on his own recent experience, writing about the 'fascist' potential of the James Dean fan clubs and of the way that Dean himself became corrupted by his increasing power and adulation. Yet the film shows some sympathy towards the populism of the Lonesome Rhodes character at the beginning, the grass roots tradition, and only later, when he becomes a vehicle for big business and right wing politicians, is he presented as a political threat. The corollaries of the cult of celebrity yielded with politics and media foreshadow the current political landscape. Trump combines the mastery of media and combination of grass roots connection is very similar to that of Lonesome Rhodes.

As proven in the present cultural environment, in this sense Schulberg and Kazan are closer in their outlook to the 'culture industry' position, with its analysis of corporate and media power, than a 'mass culture' view that feared popular movements as inevitably nativist and right wing. In support of this the General Flainesworth character, a central figure in terms of the political analysis of the latter part of the film, advises Lonesome Rhodes that 'in every strong and healthy society from the Egyptians to our own, the mass had to be guided with a strong hand by a responsible elite'. It is at this point that Marcia

Jeffreys, as Rhodes' 'business associate', and also the film's chief source of identification, begins to have doubts as to what she has created.

The principle characters, and particularly Mel Miller, provide a steady dose of cynicism about the fifties American dream that runs counter to the popular sentiment of the day. Rhodes returns from Arkansas with his new wife in tow and is greeted at the airport like an early pop star, while the marriage is acted out on TV, with baton twirling routines played to the sound of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. Seeing this, Marcia Jeffreys is thoroughly compromised, and tells Mel that the whole idea of Lonesome Rhodes had been hers and that now she was 'going to be an equal partner'.

Later, recalling the contemporary *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), she says that there is 'an awful lot of money at stake'. This sense of Marcia Jeffreys as Rhodes's 'business associate', owning him 'for better or worse', harks back with a twist of gender relations to the old narrative in which relationships and marriages were essentially issues of ownership and control. All the rest, as the blacklisted writer and director Abraham Polonsky wrote in the script of *Body and Soul* (1947), is 'conversation' (Kazan, 2000).

Kazan (2001) wrote of Schulberg seeing Lonesome Rhodes as starting out with his own values, but as becoming dependent on popular adulation and his ability to maintain it. To Kazan, Rhodes loses his sense of being himself, although his sense of his own identity is never clearly established in the film. This resonates more the role of media since Rhodes measures since sense of worth, value and, yet disdain for his audience, based on how successful he is in the ratings and his ascend to power. Implicit also in the film's treatment of the television-based culture industries of the time is a sense of the way that advertising was increasingly exploring the underlying emotional needs of

consumers rather than their rational preferences, both in terms of commercial products and political candidates.

Lonesome dismisses Macey's market research, but nevertheless emphasizes emotional values in the process of selling, acting out the sexual effects of Vitajex, while coaching Senator Fuller to reveal a personality that the people can love. Kazan shows his contempt for the overstaffed placemen of the agency and indicates more sympathy for self promoters such as Lonesome Rhodes and his agent De Palma.

What the film does have in abundance is the energy of Rhodes himself, as his ambition carries him upward and onward. Crowds send him off from a railway station like a hero of but even then, as the shot of him is held after the crowds are left behind, the audience is alerted to his basic cynicism. His radio and TV populism does for a time kick against the traces, as he encourages kids to swim in the station owner's swimming pool, appeals to bored and overworked housewives, and, most importantly, champions the cause of a black woman with seven kids whose house has been burnt down.

Mel Miller, played by Walter Matthau as the media reporter who justifies his existence by knowing of the pollutions of media, remarks, watching from the gallery: 'Hey, a colored woman! In Memphis that takes nerve.' There is also a point made about race in Arkansas in the opening scene, in which Marcia Jeffreys pokes a microphone through the bars of a segregated cell in the local jail, hoping to get a black prisoner to perform on radio. The man answers: 'Just because I got a black skin ... I'm no minstrel ma'am.' Yet as the film progresses it tracks a shift from a genuine local populism, pitched against the local male white powers that be, to a populist veneer for the interests of the New York and Washington corporate-media complex.

*A Face in the Crowd* was certainly sharp in charting the changing culture of the fifties, from the TV ads to the mix of charity and self-promotion known as the telethon and the baton twirling media events from Arkansas. After the preponderance of smoke-filled rooms and medium shots, Kazan blew scarce money on building a large platform so that the baton-twirling spectacle could be covered in depth. Following this there is the reenacted wedding between Lonesome and his new bride, although here the broadness of the satire chips away at the believability of the central character, and the sense that Marcia means something to him.

At the end, with Rhodes's true nature 'revealed' to his public; mainly working class in this instance, he is promptly deserted by the 'fighters for Fuller' that constitute a rather sketchy political threat. Alone and railing at the world from his New York apartment balcony, the final image of Lonesome is hardly tragic, but is a sharp image of yesterday's celebrity, his words lost in the traffic noise in a city of eternally new sensations. Lonesome Rhodes is now the 'heavy' that, certainly since *East of Eden*, Kazan had warned himself against constructing. Mel's line, 'We'll get wise to him — that's our strength', is a vote of confidence in the public that the film has done little to support beyond Marcia's turning against the man and institution of Lonesome Rhodes. A far more complex character throughout, she has beaten Mel Miller's proposed book to the punch and is at the end a chastened figure.

The filmmakers are more prophetic in their exploration of trends in Cold War domestic politics and in their realization of emerging power elite interests in the characters of General Haynesworth (Waram) and his political ally, Senator Fuller (Neilan). From his early support for housewives and black Americans, Rhodes's later

agenda embraces a mix of elements from the evolving Republican ‘Southern strategy’, including traditional isolationism, family values (‘a family that prays together stays together’) and an antipathy to federal welfare schemes (Kazan, 2000).

In fact the latter scenes of the film look forward to John Frankenheimer’s ‘power elite’ and conspiracy films of the early sixties, notably *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Seven Days in May*, and suggest something of the ‘power elite’ notion coined by maverick political scientist C. Wright Mills in his 1956 book on the collaboration between political, military and corporate elites.’ (Kazan, 2000). In practice, in the immediate future, it was the liberal John F. Kennedy who would make most effective use of the newly powerful national and global media. Yet the theme of *A Face in the Crowd* sets out a powerful template for the mixing of politics, charisma and entertainment values both in film, for example in *The Candidate* (Michael Ritchie, 1972) and *Primary Colors* (Mike Nichols, 1998), and also in real politics, from the emotional power and vulnerability of Bill Clinton and his relationship with his wife Hillary, to the role of corporate interests and real or constructed Southern charm in the campaigns of George W. Bush and his father, but nothing parallels the populist, cynical, fascist narratives of Lonesome Rhodes more than Donald Trump.

Similarly, Donald Trump’s meteoric rise to the nomination for the presidency has been the result of a frenzied celebrity following. Similar to the conditions facing California during the recall election, the nation faces worrisome economic concerns, including a sub-prime mortgage crisis, rise in unemployment, and two ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Trumps’s candidacy and his celebrity status have mobilized new voters, many of whom are young and voting for the first time. As the subject of countless

hours of media coverage, magazine covers, and iconographic imagery, Trump has become the most celebrated politician in recent memory.

Implicit in the labeling of Trump as “celebrity” is the notion that such status is manufactured through the “culture industry” of television and new media which is a fear that Kazan and Schulberg addressed explicitly in the narrative of *A Face in the Crowd*; the fear of mass culture. The “culture industry” devoured all critical thinking and individuality. Adorno perceived mass culture as synonymous with uniformity, homogeneity, conformity, and totalitarianism—“the eradication of individual thought through mass culture and propaganda” (Mattson, 2003).

Instructive here with Trump’s appeal and in tune with Lonesome Rhodes’ rise to celebrity stature is Daniel Boorstin’s theorization of “celebrity,” where society has mischaracterized and replaced notions of heroism with celebrity status. “We can make a celebrity, but we can never make a hero.” (Boorstin, 1987). Boorstin contends that in the last half century, American society has mischaracterized and replaced notions of “heroism” with fame and celebrity status. In particular, Boorstin argues that today’s celebrities are not necessarily “heroic” in the traditional sense of the word (i.e. someone who has shown greatness in some achievement), but are famous, because of our “novel power to make men famous” (1987). In other words, Boorstin contends that historically, individuals became famous for achieving great things, whether it be for military valor, or for inventing fantastic machinery. However, beginning in the 20th century, we “fabricate fame” and make individuals famous, or well known, but not necessarily for greatness—as opposed to when individuals gained fame because of greatness. In other words, Trump is being mediated as a fabricated celebrity with little substantive political capital or

leadership to offer voters. Furthermore, he asserts his “celebrity” status as absent of heroism worthy of traditional notions of celebrity appeal.

Sociologist Max Weber (1978) defined ‘charisma’ as having a certain quality “of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.” Kate Zemike (2008) of The New York Times writes that a charismatic leader often emerges at a “time of crisis or national yearning, and perhaps a vacuum in that nation’s institutions.” Could this notion explain the cult-like descriptions of Trump’s popularity? Political scientists have found that a turn toward charismatic leadership is most likely at times of dramatic changes in the social or economic order. Such major disruptions are said to create cultic milieu favoring the appearance of leaders who can give society a new vision” (Scammell, 2014).

Zemike contends that Trump’s charismatic appeal today is a result of the dissatisfaction and concern that Trump supporters feel now and that Trump is perceived as charismatically appealing because he has tapped in those yearnings. He tapped into those yearnings not only through his public appearances and speeches, but through new media and social networking sites. Just as Lonesome Rhodes spoke the ‘language’ of simple, country folk to influence the masses in *A Face in the Crowd*, Trump ‘spoke’ through the language and communication channels of mass culture equally through main stream media and new media. As was the case of manufacturing the celebrity appeal of Lonesome Rhodes through television, Trump’s campaign successfully create the illusion of familiarity that is the essence of mass cultural appeal in the age of post-modernity.

Here, Lawrence Friedman's theorization of the "horizontal society" is instructive. Friedman (1999) contends that illusion of familiarity is the essence of celebrity appeal, and that this sense of familiarity comes from seeing the face and hearing the voice, and from "feeling as if one could reach out to the screen and actually touch the star." Today, new media allows one to reach out to blog posts, and social-networking sites to feel just as familiar if not closer, to celebrated figures they follow. Trump's early social-networking strategy of deploying community-building tools has been a key component in attracting supporters, and mobilizing voters.

Kazan was badly hit by the film's poor commercial performance. He wrote to Budd Schulberg, telling him 'in five days, in two theatres in Boston, we did \$8,700. This is, as you realize, disastrously bad' (Kazan, 2000). Reflecting on the experience six months later, in early 1958, he felt that the didactic purpose of the film, its intended role as a warning to the American public, was its weakness. He added that 'our fellow was a puppet designed to show what a son of a bitch he was' (Kazan, 2000) .

Unlike Trump, Rhodes has zero money before he captivates the public. But the rest of the story is a revealing and cautionary portrait of what happens when a non-politician captures the American imagination, expresses the frustrations and aspirations of the people, wins hearts and trust, and litters the landscape with choice reminders that beneath his truth-telling lies a surly streak of contempt. Like Trump, Rhodes offers a reminder that one person's demagoguery is another's populism. Add a dose of arrogance, and the result looks to some like a dramatic fall waiting to happen. "I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters, okay?" Trump told an audience in Iowa about a week before the state's caucuses. "It's, like,

incredible.” This contrasts with Rhodes saying “this whole country, just like my flock of sheep,” Rhodes exclaims at the height of his power. “They’re mine, I own them, they think like I do. Only they’re more stupid than I am, so I got to think for them.”

Rhodes is neither the first nor last movie character to rise and fall by appealing to the base anxieties of the American people. He is a model for Howard Beale, the TV news anchorman who rallies the nation to shout “I’m as mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore!” in “Network” (1976). His lineage flows through Chauncey Gardiner, the dim gardener whose unwitting folk wisdom turns him into a possible presidential contender in “Being There” (1979), and on to the brutal truth-teller Sen. Jay Bulworth in the eponymous 1998 movie.

However, Lonesome Rhodes is coarser and blunter than the others. He goes through women like they’re cheap snacks. He calls minorities names. He makes big promises and then denies ever having made them. He tells it like it is — or at least like the people thought it had once been, back in the gauzy time when things were good. Like Trump, he calls people in power dumb and phony. He is a drunk and a drifter when the story’s heroine, Marcia Jeffries, daughter of the local radio station owner, launches a radio show, *A Face in the Crowd* in which ordinary people tell their stories. She wanders into the county jail to find one such person, and the inmates point her to Rhodes, who is out cold on the floor.

Rhodes learns that the local sheriff, now running for mayor, is widely loathed, so he asks listeners to show that the sheriff has “gone to the dogs” by bringing their hounds to the sheriff’s front yard and they do, by the dozens. The result: soaring trust among the little people, and a realization that the man behind the microphone can make things

happen. Like Trump, Rhodes is given to reciting his ratings in response to unrelated questions. “53.7 this morning,” he says at one point. “I got another million.”

His sudden fame and fortune convince Rhodes that he is more than a millionaire entertainer: “I’m an influencer, a wielder of opinion, a force — a force!” When Trump was asked what effect his TV reality experience had on his decision to run as a political candidate he reeled off his TV ratings, talked about his best-selling books, and then said that his reality show “was a different level of adulation, or respect, or celebrity. That really went to a different level. I’m running to really make America great again, but the celebrity helped — that’s true (Stelter, 2016).

Like Trump, Rhodes faces criticism that his populist appeals and his simple solutions amount to demagoguery. Rhodes and Trump respond similarly to such accusations: They attack their critics as bad people who are out to get them. Rhodes connects with people even as he salivates over gaining power through them. He instinctively understands that in the media age, a traditional focus on policy is a loser’s approach: “Instead of long-winded public debates, the people want slogans,” he says. “‘Time for a change!’ ‘The mess in Washington!’”

Rhodes’s popularity immediately collapses once his followers hear what he really thinks of them; Trump, however, so far has weathered any backlash provoked by his outbursts.

The two populists’ endgames cannot yet be compared, of course. Once Rhodes realizes he has betrayed his base, he suffers a breakdown, begs a group of black waiters to love him, and then slaps them with a racial slur. Trump, in contrast, continues to ride the magic carpet of confidence that has carried him through myriad crises.

Reviews of *Face In The Crowd* were mixed. The Time notice, in what would be a staple motif in critical writing on the director's film work, sees 'rage as Kazan's undoing'. Bosley Crowther saw the early scenes as entertaining and enlightening, but finally became bored with Lonesome Rhodes, and suggested that the public also would have done. Arthur Knight rightly praised Patricia Neal for bringing warmth to the movie and being convincing in the unlikely role of a woman who 'has succumbed to the same animal magnetism that attracts the crowds'. To Andrew Sarris, in *Film Culture*, the film is 'preposterous liberal propaganda' with a central protagonist who, as a result of over-direction, is wearily loud and intense, yet he finds that the intimate scenes help cancel the bombast, making it 'the most interesting film from Hollywood this year'. Perhaps this mixture of reactions was a characteristic of the reception.

The film was clearly ahead of its time and Kazan and Schulberg hit on topics that either went above audience's heads or hit too close too home. It would not be until forty years later where two film would examine the phenomena of the political media-complex and the cultural narratives involved with them: *The Truman Show* and *Bulworth*. It is very telling that they both came out the same year in 1998 during Bill Clinton's second term where a shift towards neo-liberalism was already starting.

### **“The Truman Show”**

In *The Truman Show* director Peter Weir and writer Andrew Niccol have constructed a jigsaw plot around their central character, which does not suspect that he's living his entire life on live television. Yes, he lives in an improbably ideal world in which neighbors greet each other over white picket fences, and Ozzie and Harriet are real

people. Seaside, a planned community on the Gulf Coast near Tampa is called Seahaven in the movie and looks like a nice place to live. Certainly Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey) does not know anything else.

Truman, as most people, accept the world they are given and the filmmakers suggest; more thoughtful viewers will get the buried message, which is that we accept almost everything in our lives without examining it very closely. In this movie, the world is literally created by media. Truman works as a sales executive at an insurance company, is happily married to Meryl (Laura Linney), and doesn't find it suspicious that she describes household products in the language of TV commercials.

Truman is happy, in a way, but an uneasiness gnaws away at him. Something is missing, and he thinks perhaps he might find it in Fiji, where Lauren (Natascha McElhone), the only woman he really loved, allegedly has moved with her family. Why did she leave so quickly? Perhaps because she was not a safe bet for Truman's world: The actress who played her named Sylvia developed real feeling and pity for Truman, and felt he should know the truth about his existence. Meryl, on the other hand, is a reliable pro, which raises the question, unanswered, of their sex life.

Truman's world is controlled by a TV producer, unironically named Christof (Ed Harris), whose control room is high in the artificial dome that provides the sky and horizon of Seahaven. He discusses his programming on talk shows, and dismisses the protests of those including Sylvia who believe Truman is the victim of a cruel deception. Meanwhile, the whole world watches Truman's every move, and some viewers even leave the TV on all night, as he sleeps.

The trajectory of the screenplay is more or less inevitable. Truman must gradually realize the truth of his environment, and try to escape from it. It is clever the way he is kept on his island by implanted traumas about travel and water created by the producers. As the story unfolds, however, we're not simply expected to follow it. We're invited to think about the implications. About a world in which modern communications make celebrity possible, and inhuman (McGregor, 2003).

Before the 1990's, the only way people could become really famous was to be royalty, or a writer, actor, preacher or politician and even then, most people had knowledge of those through words or printed pictures. *The Truman Show* depicts a newfound media environment and the cultural narrative of television, with its insatiable hunger for material, making people and celebrities into "content," devouring their lives and secrets (Thomas & Gillard, 2006). *The Truman Show* came out during the same time as a reflection that Princess Diana lived under similar conditions from the day she became engaged to Charles.

Carrey is a surprisingly good choice to play Truman. There are glimpses of his manic comic persona, to make audiences comfortable with his presence in the character, but this is a well planned performance. Carrey is on the right note as a guy raised to be liked and likable, who decides his life requires more risk and hardship. Ed Harris also finds the right notes as Christof, the TV guru. He uses the technospeak by which media elites distance themselves from the real meanings of words. If TV producers ever spoke frankly about what they were really doing, they'd come across like *Bulworth*, which will be discussed later.

For Harris, the demands of the show take precedence over any other values, and if you think that's an exaggeration, tell it to the TV news people who broadcast the Trump campaign. The underlying ideas made the movie more than just entertainment. Like *Gattaca* the previous film written by Niccol, it brings into focus the new values that technology is forcing on humanity. Because we can engineer genetics, because we can telecast real lives, of course we must, right? But are these good things to do? The irony is that the people who will finally answer that question will be the very ones produced by the process. It can be said that this begat twenty years later the current celebritiesphere and the Trump campaign.

It has been already discussed the social and cultural narratives of surveillance as related to reality television. What *Truman Show* foreshadows is a media construct of a “society of control” (Deleuze, 1995). The film highlights three themes that are the elements of “society of control”: 1) surveillance as control, 2) product placement and the branding of everyday life, and 3) the illusion of individualism. These themes—surveillance, branding, and individualism—are becoming truisms in our everyday lives and are increasing the conditions of our everyday life as territoriality and draws on Lawrence Grossberg's (1992) notion of structured mobility to describe individuality as an intersection of flows of forces (affect, ideology, capital, and so on).

Disciplinary societies and technologies of surveillance are most often theorized through Michel Foucault's (1979) work, arguing that their primary function is for the subject to internalize societal discipline, to become docile subjects. However, Foucault was writing about the 18th and 19th centuries and a particular regime of disciplinarity and was very specific about the geo-historical specificity of this regime. Foucault

describes a shift in disciplinarity from punishment of the body to a conditioning of the soul. The central model in Foucault's work is the Panopticon, a prison designed by Jeremy Bentham. The key to this model of disciplinarity was not the constant gaze, but the potential or threat of constant gaze. The prisoner could never be sure when a guard was watching and therefore had to self-monitor and self-discipline. Not only this, one begins monitoring others. Most forget that the central observation tower in the Panopticon was not reserved for Big Brother only but was to be a public space. Consequently, not only do we self-discipline but we discipline each other. This regime is based on the premise of knowing and caring that we are being watched and the threat of violence accompanying that gaze even if that threat is eternally postponed for most.

Deleuze (1998) argued that contemporary society is moving from a regime of surveillance and discipline (marked by enclosures) to one of surveillance and control, which he termed "societies of control," borrowing the phrase from William S. Burroughs (Deleuze 1998). Disciplinary societies operate by organizing major sites of confinement. Individuals are always going from one closed site to another, each with its own laws: first of all the family, then school ("you're not at home, you know"), then barracks ("you're not at school, you know"), then the factory or office, hospital from time to time, maybe prison, the model site of confinement. (Deleuze 1995,177). As connected to media, *The Truman Show* shows individuals moving toward the confinement of television. Taking it to today, it is the confinement of a phone, a computer and isolation with its own set of rules. Hence, we're moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication (Deleuze 1995.)

Deleuze's image is that of a highway: a highway does not confine one, but it does control one's movements, the options available to one.

But rather than creating a society as a smooth space, with no differentiations, stratifications, or borders or cyberspace, the stratifications of civil society have hopped the boundaries and have been generalized across society (Hardt, 1998). Michael Hardt (1998) writes that whereas the modern, disciplinary state was premised on the delineation of "a (real or imagined) territory and the relation of that territory to its outside" (p. 140), in a control society the outside is internalized. For example, public space is privatized. But it is not that the lines of social stratification have gone away, they have proliferated instead. The smooth space of the society of control is not a free space. Hardt (1998b) argues, "as Deleuze and Guattari are careful to point out, within this process of smoothing, elements of social striation reappear 'in the most perfect and severe forms.' In other words, the crisis or decline of the enclosures or institutions gives rise in certain respects to a hypersegmentation of society" (pp. 32-3). We could even say that in a society of control, one might wax nostalgic for a disciplinary society because in that society at least there were limits to control; one could leave school and go to work. How much worse is the society of control if it makes us nostalgic for disciplinary institutions? *Truman Show* argues for an audience longing for totalitarianism and fascism.

Since, according to Deleuze, television does not exploit its aesthetic possibilities like film, but only a social function. He writes, "Television's professional eye, the famous socially engineered eye through which the viewer is himself invited to look, produces an immediate and complacent perfection that's instantly controllable and controlled" (p. 74). This description of television gives us a sense of the general workings of control.

Another example of social engineering is marketing. "Marketing is now the instrument of social control and produces the arrogant breed who are our masters" (Deleuze, 1995). Individuals are no longer treated as individuals, but as demographics. Echoing and paraphrasing Raymond Williams (1958), who had a similar suspicion for the new advertising men in the 1950s, we could say that "there are in fact no markets, only ways of seeing people as markets." The surveillance of the control society, for example, gives rise to what Oscar Gandy (1995) has called "the panoptic sort," the hypersegmentation of the audience and market into desirable and undesirable sets according to increasingly complex algorithms and the discriminatory apparatus of market surveys and consumer databases. We can see how this applies to the Trump campaign in attracting audiences through television in his derisive attacks towards Muslims and Mexicans.

In *The Truman Show*, the surveillant eye of the disciplinary state is now accompanied, or even superseded, by the surveillant eye of control, which is exemplified in the eye of marketing; the docile subject becomes the consuming subject. It is not the state controlling its citizens, but the economic system monitoring audiences and markets to turn us into perfect consumers tuning us to match the product as much as vice versa. As Hardt (1998) writes, "the market is one machine that has always run counter to any division between inside and outside" (p. 143), in other words, counter to the modern disciplinary state and therefore is quite at home in a society of control.

This is not to say that the disciplinary state has disappeared. Cameras are ubiquitous. Elements of this regime are hardly new, but have intensified with the aid of new communication and information technologies over time. Deleuze's control societies

should not be understood sociologically, but in terms of the emergence of new possibilities and the complexification of the old (pp. 234-235).

*The Truman Show* shows us living in a cell of privacy is open to an impersonal gaze, and the sense that someone is always watching, potentially at least, is part of the structure of feeling of modern life (Carey 1998). Baudrillard (1988) argues that "the most intimate operation of your life becomes the potential grazing ground of the media.... The entire universe also unfolds unnecessarily on your home screen" (p. 20-1). For Baudrillard this is not just an argument about privacy but about economics and consumerism. The "inexorable light of information and communication" feeds a consumerism in which everyday life becomes commodified, even our symbolic life so that we are reduced to uttering commercial catch phrases to each other. Slogans such as "I'm Loving It" or "Just Do It" are not different from "Make America Great Again" and there is not much difference in the way that audience consume these commodifications.

We are like Truman living unaware of this while being watched and manipulated and explained by the TV producer in the movie "nothing on the show is fake, it's merely controlled." Truman is in a town where anyone can leave their house, their street, their neighborhood, using their individual electronic card that opens this or that barrier; but the card may also be rejected on a particular day, or between certain times of day; it doesn't depend on the barrier but on the computer that is making sure everyone is in a permissible place, and effecting a universal modulation. (pp. 181-182). The idea of universal modulation is key to the functioning of *The Truman Show*. Truman is constantly tracked and his movements are guided by being blocked by passersby or traffic or other means. As he moves through his day, despite his seeming freedom of

movement, he is guided, nudged, modulated. He is managed and the logics that manage him are immanent to every structure or individual or situation that Truman encounters. In this “perfect world” created by Truman there exists a political system where there is not any. Automation and commodification are the institutions that reign over Seaside.

The idea of universal modulation is key to the functioning of "The Truman Show." Truman is constantly tracked and his movements are guided by being blocked by passersby or traffic or other means. As he moves through his day, despite his seeming freedom of movement, he is guided, nudged, modulated. He is "managed" and the logics that manage him are immanent to every structure or individual or situation that Truman encounters. Product placement represents the migration of advertisements from separated, regulated spaces into the spaces of programs, films, and eventually out of the media and into our lives. However, the subtle integration of placed ads into television and film narratives actually places. *The Truman Show* in line with the television of the 1950s that it mimics. Early television, like radio before it, had many programs completely sponsored and controlled by a single company. Discussions of products occurred within the flow of the narrative, without commercial "breaks" (Hay, 1989). This could also be seen in the coverage of electoral campaigns by cable news networks, especially during Trump rallies, when there would be split screen of a rally in one window and a commercial running in the other.

The third theme that can be read from *The Truman Show* is the triumph of the individual against Big Brother, against a technological society of control. Despite all the manipulation and the surveillance, Truman is able to resist. "You didn't have a camera in my head," he states defiantly. There is, then, according to this, an essential humanism, a

true nature: Truman Burbank. He is the "True-Man," an authentic human. But at the same time his last name denotes the Hollywood studio city in which he lives, and connotes the brash commercialism of TV (Niccol, 1998).

The true man, the rational individual struggling against a manipulative, commercialized society, is ultimately resistant, though of course, there is no need to resist if the society is benevolent. Surveillance, they say, is for our own protection; direct marketing is for our leisure and convenience; commodification only sees to our pleasure (Newman & Verčič, 2002). The true consumers can hardly be dissatisfied and alienated because the world, after all, like Truman's, revolves around them. What they want to watch is programmed. If something does not sell it will not be forced down the consumers' throats; consumers are sovereign, after all. Modern society presents lots of choice.

Consumers have the potential to reveal their true authentic selves and revolt against the control society but are duped by capital, dozey from spending, sedated by the opiate of consumption, sleepy after a trip to the mall. One argument as to why workers who were deskilled and exploited in whole new ways by Fordist and Taylorist modes of production at the turn of the century did not revolt was that the products of leisure and convenience were put in their grasp, life became easy and more important, they were not starving, as were the Luddites earlier in the 19th century (Webster & Robins, 1986). As Christof says about Truman, which can be generalized to consumers generally, "we believe what we want to believe; we cling to the world that we are presented with and which appears comfortable despite at times overwhelming evidence that this is not right." This quote encompasses the 2016 electoral campaign commodified and consumed as reality television. This summarizes the assumed activity or passivity of consumers.

Perhaps it is sufficient to say that consumption can be a site of struggle. But what *The Truman Show* reveals is that this is an individual struggle.

Crucially, though the individual in question seems to be struggling against a regime, the notion of individuality itself is enforced by the regime. Nikolas Rose (1999) draws the connections between the individual, neoliberalism, and control. He points out that individual autonomy and freedom are central in broader discourses of neoliberalism and consumer capitalism by making the individual seem empowered by consuming and that they are free in making their choices. Audiences have the illusion of individualism and that they are functioning in the democratic process by voting by the lesser of two evils.

As Rose summarizes, consumption technologies allow consumers to "narrativize their lives and provide new ethics and techniques for living" (p. 86). We see a shift from the external imposition of discipline to an internal motivation: "Disciplinary techniques and moralizing injunctions as to health, hygiene and civility are no longer required; the project of responsible citizenship has been fused with individuals projects for themselves" (p. 88). Foucault's disciplinary societies involved, after all, the internalization of discipline.

Paradoxically, this internal discipline involves a discourse of freedom. "Modern individuals are not merely 'free to choose, but obliged to be free, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice" (Rose, 1999). This is "a regime of the self where competent personhood is thought to depend upon the continual exercise of freedom" (p. 87). One of the crucial sites of the articulation of neoliberalism and freedom is television. James Hay (2000), drawing in part on Rose's discussion, has argued in the pages of this journal: "To

understand how the domestic sphere came to constitute a site and a set of technologies for a neoliberal form of governing, it is necessary to recognize its implication in both a new regime of mobility and a new regime of privacy" (p. 56).

Hay grounds his discussion of this new regime in Raymond Williams' (1975) idea that television presents an emblematic site for what he calls "mobile privatization."

Mobile privatization is an attempt to describe a new social complex characterized by mobility and also autonomy, especially the creation of a self-sufficient domestic space. This complex is contradictory in that the needs of mobility and the management of movement between, for example, work and home, and the flows within and through that home, are at odds with the increasing balkanization of the private home in gated communities (Newman, 2015). The surveillance necessary for both the control of mobility and the protection of the autonomous home is at odds with professed rights of privacy. With the notable exception of the patrons and staff of *The Truman Show* and mass viewings for Truman's wedding, the audience in *The Truman Show* violates Truman's privacy from the comfort of their own home.

As Manuel Castells (1997) has argued, the focus on individualism and the rise in prominence of libertarianism allows one to ignore and deny responsibility for or complicity with marginalized communities, those who are not targeted by the consumerist surveillance systems that are overly targeted by the disciplinary surveillance system because they cannot afford the goods. The growth of "personalization," while desirable to a certain extent, may lead to social fragmentation if it means that societies do not share common experiences (Shapiro 1999). Likewise, one could argue that this focus

allows the consumer to ignore the ways that he or she is not acting on his or her own, completely.

Consumerism is habituated. Appadurai (1996, 74) writes that habituated consumerism is not only embedded in the microrhythms of the everyday and the body but are also embedded in a long duree, habits are not always our own (Wise 2000). We could argue that the individual lies at the intersection of flows of power, matter, goods, symbols, money, and so on. "The diagram of control ... is oriented not toward position and identity but rather toward mobility and anonymity" (Hardt, 1998). The spaces and places that one occupies are mobile and fragmentary, but they are structured by longer (sometimes global) flows. The forces that structure spaces are called "territorializing machines" (Deleuze, 1987). These machines (or machinic processes) produce what Lawrence Grossberg (1992) has called a "structured mobility." This structured mobility "defines the spaces and places, the stabilities and mobilities within which people live" (p. 107). The lines of this "structured mobility" offer both an organization of space and a model of mobility. They constantly enact and enable specific forms of movement (change) and stability (identity), and empower specific forms of action and agency. (P. 108)

It is the point of affect that connects individualism, consumerism, and control. Affect is usually articulated to ideas of authenticity. Emotions, feelings, and intensities are viewed as very personal experiences. But to avoid the trap of individualism we need to consider affect as not only social but structured, distributed. Affect, then, becomes a prime means of control. One's desires do not have to be dictated, merely managed, tweaked, and we consider our choices our own. The deeply embedded value of

convenience, for example, makes it a very effective point of articulation to structures of power (Tierney, 1993). Affect is also mobile, moving faster and faster with each change of season and fashion. The need for rapid turnover of consumer goods leads to the construction of a fickle consumer, fickle in that the satisfaction and pleasure promised (and occasionally achieved) is fleeting at best, one's desires tugged toward other, newer, faster, products. Otherwise we are easily bored. This boredom is not the result of a postmodern waning of affect (Jameson, 1991) but an excess (Massumi, 1996). The society of control does not repress affect, but it generates an excess of affect of excessive speed, which overflows the disciplinary boundaries of civil society and at the same time proliferates the fault lines that cut across the surface of society. This also applies to commodities as voting in the political process where most who are marginalized want to see change and are mobilized because they want to see it fact. This explains the attraction to a volatile candidate like Trump.

After Truman's survival and exit from the show, his triumph cheered by millions of TV viewers around the globe, the cheering audience becomes quickly bored. "So what else is on?" asks one, in the closing line of the film. Thus framed, the triumph of plucky individualism is entertaining yet inconsequential. None of the audience members depicted in the film seem much changed, no one escapes their daily life as Truman does. After all, when each of us has our Warholian 15 minutes, what difference does it make? Deleuze (1995) argues that the regime of information does not keep people silent but rather forces everyone to speak to the extent that everyone is talking but nothing ever matters. "Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted," he argues, "They're thoroughly permeated by money and not by accident but by their very nature. We've got

to hijack speech. Creating has always been something different from communicating. The key thing maybe to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control" (p. 175). This is more than evident in the twenty four hour circle and the age of the talking head, the expert and the pundit and the death of the journalist.

Truman's illusion of individualism is his second defeat in the thought of escape. Scott McQuire (2000) writes, "While The Truman Show provided a safety valve with the possibility that Truman can eventually escape his fishbowl exposure, 'real' television has never proved so easy to step outside" (p. 150). It appears at first that Truman has triumphed, defeating Christof and leaving the show. But he is not leaving the society of control, he merely exits from one institution.

Perhaps this is comforting that *The Truman Show* provides its audience: that there are limits to the culture of control, that it is only a television show after all and after the show is over everyone can go home. But in showing the world of Truman as an institution, albeit one that seems total, *The Truman Show* is ultimately a vision of a disciplinary apparatus. The film provides us glimpses of the society of control to come, but comforts us with the notion that it will soon be over and we, and Truman, can leave.

One cannot assume that one can separate oneself from society, for we are social through and through. There is no outside from which to challenge the society of control, though the rise of conservative nationalist and religious movements globally evidence attempts to do so (Castells, 1997). We cannot reject consumerism absolutely because we are consumers through and through. What we can hope to do is exercise "the right to say nothing, because only then is there a chance of framing the rare, and even rarer, thing that might be worth saying" (Deleuze, 1995).

The society of control is a smoothing machine that smoothens things out, grinds things down, and then striates them again (Bogard, 2000). A vacuole of noncommunication is a hiccup in the smoothing process of our everyday lives but in the society of control, in the branding of everyday life, we are always already complicit: watching and consuming. In watching *The Truman Show*, we watch ourselves watching. The first half of the film involves us with the events of Truman's life as television viewers. We then pull back to view from the point-of-view of the television set the fictional audience watching Truman. We begin to question our own viewing practice, the fun that we, the audience sitting in the theater, have been having at Truman's expense.

This double view of program and audience emphasizes our complicity with the society of control, not as victims but as part of its apparatus. This potential discomfiture of the theater audience is an important moment of effectiveness for the film, but in the end it is a solitary one. The film presents no solution except for trying to make the society of control disciplinary again. Perhaps this is because we are familiar enough with the disciplinary society that we know what to do, we have our strategies and tactics well in hand, they are familiar. But the society of control is still quite unfamiliar; if anything, it seems to feed off of our old resistances. In other words, like explained before, it longs for authority and fascism. Someone must be in control.

### “Bulworth”

While *The Truman Show* magnifies the media spectacle, Warren Beatty's *Bulworth* points at the player and the reasons for that media spectacle. What it comes down to is a politician who can no longer bring himself to recite the words, "America is

standing on the doorstep of a new millennium." Over and over and over again he has repeated the same mindless platitudes, the same meaningless rhetoric full of the same hot air. Now he sits in his office, playing one of his stupid TV commercials on an endless loop. He has not eaten or slept in three days. He is sick to the soul of the American political process.

These do not seem to be the makings of a comedy, but Warren Beatty's *Bulworth* is a comedy that makes audiences realize that if all politicians were as outspoken as Bulworth, the fragile structure of our system would collapse, and we would have to start all over again. Like the Trump campaign. The movie suggests that virtually everything said in public by a politician is spin. Spin control is merely the name for spin they don't get away with.

Senator Jay Billington Bulworth is a onetime Kennedy liberal (like Beatty himself), an incumbent senator from California who is accused by an opponent of being "old liberal wine trying to pour himself into a new conservative bottle." The joke to Bulworth is that liberal and conservative, Democrat and Republican, are no longer labels that mean much. When it comes to national health care, for example, the insurance companies have both parties in their pockets and both parties have their hands in the companies' pockets.

Bulworth is in trouble. He hates his job and his life, and has just lost millions in the market. So he puts out a contract on his own life and flies back to California thinking he has three days to live. His impending death fills him with a sense of freedom. At last he is free to say exactly what he thinks, and that's what he does. In a black church, he observes, "We all come down here, get our pictures taken--forget about it." Blacks will

never have power within the establishment, he says, until they've spent the money to buy it, like the whites do.

Bulworth's chief of staff goes ballistic and hits a fire alarm to end the church service. But an hour later, in Beverly Hills, Beatty is insulting a mostly Jewish audience of movie moguls: "How much money do you guys really need?" he asks, observing that they produce "mostly crap." And so it goes.

Debate Producer: Just between us, Senator, do you think it's advisable to schedule campaign stops with industry leaders when you have such a low opinion of their product?

Sen. Jay Billington Bulworth: My guys are not stupid. They always put the big Jews on my schedule. You're mostly Jews, right? Three out of four of you?

I bet Murphy put something bad about Farrakhan in here for you!

*Bulworth* then with relief says "that was good. Really good." He's enjoying political speechmaking for the first time in his life. Following Bulworth through his conversion is a posse of foxy young black women, who pile into his limousine and direct him to an after-hours club, where he samples hip-hop and drugs. Linger always nearby in the background is an attractive woman named Nina, who eventually takes him home to her neighborhood, where he sees grade-school kids selling crack and is treated to the truth of families where everybody has lost someone to gunfire.

*Bulworth* doesn't consist simply of the candidate making insults like a radical Don Rickles. There's substance in a lot of the dialogue, written by Beatty with a debt to the critiques of American society by such as Noam Chomsky. Beatty zeroes in on the myth that government is wasteful and industry is efficient by claiming that government runs Medicare for a fourth of the overhead raked off by insurance companies for equivalent

health care. But why don't we have national health care like every other First World country? Because of insurance payoffs, Bulworth is only too happy to explain.

When Bulworth asks Nina where all the black leaders have gone, her answer is as intelligent and plausible as a year's worth of op-ed columns. But when the movie presents black culture as automatically more authentic and truthful than white, that's a leftover knee jerk; the use of blacks as repositories of truth and virtue is a worn-out convention in white liberal breast-beating. There is even a mysterious old black man who follows Bulworth around, reciting incantations that are meant, I guess, to be encoded universal truths. It's better when Bulworth abandons political correctness and says what he thinks, however reckless, as when he theorizes that the solution to racial difficulties is for everybody to bleep everybody else until we're all the same color.

*Bulworth* in 1998 reflected a rising tide of discontent with current American political discourse like in *The Truman Show*, *Wag The Dog* and *Primary Colors* share a with the state of the system. Now debates, like campaigns, are carefully hedged with rules designed to ensure that everyone stays timidly within the tradition of doorsteps of the new millennium. While *Face In The Crowd* foreshadowed how television could create a media monster, *Bulworth* foreshadowed why media creates monsters in the current political landscape. The following is a quote from the main character is being interviewed on CNN and he starts rapping:

“You know the guy in the booth who's talking to you in that tiny little earphone?  
He's afraid the guys at network are gonna tell him that he's through/ If he lets a  
guy keep talking like I'm talking to you/ Cause the corporations got the networks  
and they get to say who gets to talk about the country and who's crazy today/ I  
would cut to a commercial if you still want this job/ Because you may not be back  
tomorrow with this cooperate mob/Cut to commercial, cut to commercial, cut to  
commercial. Ok ok I got a simple question that I'd like to ask of this network/  
That pays you for performing this task/ How come they got the airwaves? They're

the peoples aren't they? Wouldn't they be worth 70 billion to the public today? If some money-grubbin Congress didn't give them away for big campaign money? It's hopeless you see/ If you're runnin for office with out no TV/If you don't get big money/ You get a defeat/ Corporations and broadcasters make you dead meat/ You been taught in this country there's speech that is free/ But free don't get you no spots on TV/If you want to have senators not on the take/ Then give them free air time/ They won't have to fake/ Telecommunications is the name of the beast/that, that, that, that, that's eating up the world from the west to the east/ The movies, the tabloids, TV and magazines/ they tell us what to think and do/ And all our hopes and dreams/ All this information makes America phat/ But if the company's outta the country/ How American is that? But we got Americans with families that can't even buy a meal/ Ask a brother who's been downsized if he's getting any deal/ Or a white boy bustin ass til they put him in his grave/ He ain't gotta be a black boy to be livin like a slave/ Rich people have always stayed on top by dividing white people from colored people/ but white people got more in common with colored people then they do with rich people/ we just gotta eliminate them. White people, black people, brown people, yellow people, get rid of 'em all/ All we need is a voluntary, free spirited, open-ended program of procreative racial deconstruction/ Everybody just gotta keep fuckin' everybody til they're all the same color.”

The only real similarity between Bulworth and Trump is that both men rose in the polls as a result of truly speaking their mind. Their supporters love them for “telling it like it is,” regardless of whether or not it’s politically correct. In *Bulworth*, Beatty’s character offends various groups, particularly when he’s speaking to a black church and a gathering of Jewish entertainment industry execs, just as Trump has offended just about everybody. The problem, and the truly depressing irony, is that when one of these men “speaks his mind,” he’s revealing potent but often unspoken at least in the corporate media truths via thoughtful, well-reasoned arguments while the other is just pulling hatred and ignorance and the man who’s doing the former is the fictional one. The man following the latter approach is the one who might be our next president. What gives Bulworth its power isn’t its political incorrectness but the force of its ideas; throughout the movie, Beatty and writer Pikser seamlessly integrate ideology and character to make points about globalization, the end of the black and white working

class, and countless other subjects in a manner both clearer and more multi-faceted than I have heard from any real-life politician before or since. The basic thrust of Beatty's argument is that capitalism is cannibalizing itself with an ever-increasing wealth gap that threatens to destroy the system for everyone. This is not original, but the explication is. That Beatty manages to get so much across so entertainingly in such a compact space makes one wonder why our politicians can't do the same. Accessible and complex don't have to be exclusive concepts.

## Conclusions

The previous chapter used films from the past, analyzed within their historical context, to explore why populism, or “plain speak,” or “telling it like it is” has appealed to generations of previous eras. As this dissertation draws to a close, it has hopefully become clearer why such populist rhetoric, newly packaged with the outrageousness associated with Donald Trump and reality TV in general, has resonated so deeply in the 2016 electoral campaign. This analysis has highlighted several major points: Donald Trump did not emerge from a vacuum; the stage for his success was set by a highly commercial discourse of reality TV, a consumerist discourse that encourages audience media participation, and a social media environment that has become increasingly polarized. Furthermore, as much as the electoral campaign appears to be about the “cult of Trump,” it says a lot about American consumers (or viewers, or voters), as demonstrated by the preceding interpretations of television examples, news and reporting representations, Tweets, blogs, and other uses of social media.

Why does Donald Trump receive so much media attention? Why do major news networks such as Fox, CNN, and MSNBC grant him so much airtime? A primary answer to these question is that, as a “commodity,” he provides “free” content. Producers and editors at these networks give him a platform in the name of “news,” a space that easily crosses over into “entertainment,” or even “sales.” (Take for example, the day that all three networks carried coverage of the candidate offering a live statement: “Breaking news: Trump speaks for first time since Wisconsin loss.”)

On the flipside, why do audiences watch (and why do they watch to such an extreme)? This dissertation has shown that we come closer to understanding the draw for audiences by closely analyzing the influence of reality television and factual entertainment, the commercialization of the real, the technology of the self, the rise of social media and the polarization of media audience participation.

One area for future exploration, especially after data comes in after the election, will involve more specific questions related to audience demographics and Trump's media appeal. How far does his broad appeal extend? What are his demographics among minority voters and audiences? If reality shows have established diverse audiences, does this necessarily translate over to minority voter interest in Trump? As demonstrated previously, African-American audiences are not monolithic; even less is known about Latino audiences, but they should not be presumed monolithic either. The Republican Party primaries have drawn record number of voters, having far exceeded the number of voters of the Democratic Party primaries (Stelter, 2016).

Trump has won demographically diverse states such as Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii, Illinois, Missouri, Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York. It is true that Trump hired Corey Lewandowski as a campaign manager; his proven experience as a campaign manager, lobbyist and in voter registration have been an asset. However, questions linger as to whether Trump can attract African American and Latino voters.

Trump has been labeled a racist by his Democrat counterparts. Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and media outlets have headlined "Trump is running the most explicitly racist campaign since 1968" (Stelter, 2016). However, those who deem Trump a racist

tend to be whites. For example, a recent poll by Clout showed that “40 percent of blacks are lining up behind Trump, 45 percent of Hispanics and 19 percent of Asians” (Unruh, n.d.). No Republican candidate has had more support amongst Hispanics, not even the Cuban-American candidates Ted Cruz or Marco Rubio. Trump decisively beat Cruz and Rubio in Florida, Rubio’s home state and obtained more votes than both of them combined; Trump 1MM, Rubio 600K, Cruz 400K. There are many polls that discredit Trump’s favorability with Latinos but it is hard to win states such as Florida, Texas, or California with strong Latino support.

Significantly, Trump has created a divisive narrative that rarely makes its way into mainstream media and is now targeting Latinos everywhere: “we are going to keep the good ones.” This might not turn off certain Latino audiences/voters, it resonates with others, depending on their political views and circumstances (Krauze, 2016). This ideology involves projection of a Latino “other;” nobody is going to think of himself as the “bad one.”

The rhetoric of the Trump campaign reveals how little his political team seems to know about Latino demographics, identity, and participation in the public sphere. In this respect, the Trump campaign and the mainstream media, and in particular cable news networks, appear to view Latino viewers/voters in very similar terms. Though there is a common tendency to compare Latinos to African Americans, characterizing them as an aggrieved group suffering from segregation and economic inequality, the fact is that Latino media consumption is much more likely to follow the patterns of other Catholic immigrant groups, like the Irish and Italians, who follow a top-down, aspirational, and assimilationist model (Montilla, 2013).

Like their European immigrant brethren, Latinos want to come to their ethnicity on their own terms. They are fiercely patriotic Americans who nonetheless identify as Latino. They typically do not feel that they must choose one identity over the other; they are an audience of Americans (Montilla, 2013). This is why Latinos make up 25 percent of the box office. This is also why Latinos make up a large percentage of the reality television audience. Latinos want to live an American lifestyle and be part of an American dream even if the American Dream is not a reality for most.

The Latino community in the United States, especially the nearly 70 percent of that population that is Mexican or Mexican-American, is highly aspirational (Montilla, 2013). By deduction, many Latinos who find Trump relatable do so because they like the idea of a country that is “winning;” they identify with the “Make America Great Again” slogan. The blogosphere and “chattering class” in this dissertation suggest that Trump strikes a chord with certain minority groups precisely because they aspire to achieve the kind of success he has achieved; they desire to be what they perceive him to be.

There is a “Latinos for Trump” demographic that has gone misunderstood (and in many cases unseen) by traditional news and social media outlets alike. Fourteen percent of Hispanic voters say they will “definitely support” the Republican candidate in November (Washington Post, 2016). Although eighty per cent of Latino voters held an unfavorable opinion of Trump in a 2016 Washington Post/Univision poll, one fifth of Hispanic Republicans said they planned to vote for Trump during the Party’s primaries (Krauze, 2016). This level of support has remained constant in states with a discernible Hispanic presence. According to entrance and exit polls, Trump garnered just under half of the relatively few Hispanic Republican votes in Nevada and a quarter of votes in

Texas, surpassing Marco Rubio in both instances. Rubio won Florida's Latino vote (17 per cent of all Republican voters) by a wide margin, but Trump's backing among Hispanics remained at 26 per cent nationally (Krauze, 2016).

While it is questionable whether Trump's proposed policies would actually benefit Latinos, one can see why such a highly volatile figure rose so quickly in the public eye in politically and economically volatile times, even and especially for those Latinos who feel betrayed by the American Dream. In addition, the current news media environment is defined by instability, filled with exaggeration, hyperbole and unchecked propaganda. This climate is a logical extension of the reality TV and factual entertainment conventions that have come to dominate the marketplace.

There is a cost, however, associated with not telling the truth. The 2016 electoral campaign is instructive about what happens when reality is treated as entertainment in the extreme, especially at a time when public discourse is polarized and adversarial. As more data (specific to the campaign) about audience participation in social media becomes available, it would be interesting to analyze the results as they relate to minority social media interaction. It would be valuable to know the degree to which the views expressed were democratic, invested, and/or diverse, and whether or not they have followed the established literature on reality television and audience participation.

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