

## *Reality TV: Its Contents and Discontents*

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Abstract: This article offers an overview of major trends in contemporary reality television scholarship, mapped against changes in the content, formats, performance modes and viewer appeal of reality TV itself. It follows the influential scholars of reality television by locating the interest of the genre in its relationship to larger social and political formations, including questions of governmentality and the self, nationhood and globalism, gender and sexuality, class and race, and performance and affect. An argument is made in support of claims that reality TV does not merely represent but also constitutes social categories through their enactment by participants on screen in a way that draws audiences' affective engagement. Although the hypervisible manifestations of gender, sexuality and race paraded on contemporary reality TV may be questionable, particularly as assessed by recent scholarship on portrayals of black womanhood, it is precisely in the interrogations of its discontents that reality TV proves to be most productive.

In January 2004 a little-remembered reality show called *Shattered* aired on Channel 4 in the UK. Its premise was simple: ten contestants competed to stay awake for a week, with the eventual winner, a 19-year-old police cadet named Clare Southern, scooping a cash prize of £100,000 for lasting 178 hours – nearly seven and a half days – without sleep.<sup>1</sup> Although the format was never repeated or franchised (which is hardly surprising given the extremes to which the participants were pushed), *Shattered* serves as an outlier in reality TV history that nonetheless recalls important trends from the first half of the 2000's. Like Endemol's breakthrough reality format *Big Brother* (1999-present), *Shattered* was presented not as televised torture but rather as a social experiment that melded documentary (involving real people) with entertainment (involving competition) to relay public information – in this case about the effects of sleep deprivation. Two other aspects of this minor show are worth noting: first, akin to *Big Brother*, the show involved ordinary people confined together and monitored live by cameras 24/7, and second, as with all social observation shows, *Shattered* raised some serious ethical concerns about surveillance for the sake of entertainment, in particular with its premise of putting real people into the risky situation of extreme sleep deprivation. Making people stay awake for a week on camera is likely the point at which social experiment TV

found its limit in the UK, but what Mark Andrejevic calls ‘the lab rat quality of reality television’ never quite disappeared.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the notion that ‘certain forms of artifice are necessary to get to something authentic and true’<sup>3</sup> continued in the mid-2000s to be the unspoken premise behind extreme-challenge formats (e.g., *Fear Factor* and *I’m a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here*), makeover shows (e.g., *What Not to Wear*) and the seemingly unstoppable surge of talent programmes, from *Pop Idol* and *American Idol* to *X-Factor* and beyond. What would happen in the next decade, closely followed by scholars, can be described as a slow shift from experiment to enactment, as reality shows moved toward ever greater intervention while participants were given license to ‘act up’ for the sake of audiences enacting their own affective participation. Reality television, in other words, was about to become complicated.

Looking back now, it seems that 2004 was the year when reality TV began to explode across television broadcast schedules in ever-expanding subgenres and, not coincidentally, the year in which television scholars like myself gave up trying to watch ‘everything’. In terms of scholarship, 2004 also marks the first wave of mature academic exploration of this newest TV genre. The first two anthologies on reality TV appeared in that year – *Understanding Reality Television*, edited by Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn and *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, edited by Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette<sup>4</sup> – as did Mark Andrejevic’s seminal book, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, which presciently argued that reality shows such as *The Real World* (MTV, 1992-present) offered a ‘particular form of subjectivity consonant with the emerging online economy: one that equates submission to surveillance with self-expression and self-knowledge’.<sup>5</sup> In the same year, a special Commentary and Criticism section of *Feminist Media Studies*, entitled ‘Reality Television: Fairy Tale or Feminist Nightmare?’, made an early foray into addressing questions of gender and sexuality on reality TV.<sup>6</sup> Soon thereafter, in 2005, Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn published their classic study of reality TV in the changing context of documentary film practice, addressing ‘key issues around ethics, politics, truth-telling and realist representation’, while Jonathan Bignell interrogated the themes and aesthetics of reality TV in relation to the success of *Big Brother*, and Annette Hill presented the first book-length study of reality TV audiences.<sup>7</sup> What is notable about this early scholarship is that the authors take reality television seriously as a site for interrogating questions of mediation, representation, realism, performativity and viewer appeal, rather than assuming, as had earlier commentators, that such ‘trash TV’ means desperate participants, manipulative producers and duped audiences.<sup>8</sup>

Fast-forward a decade, and scholarship about reality television is booming, not least because the spread of reality TV across schedules, platforms and formats shows no signs of abating. The Writers Guild of America reported that the market share of reality TV in US prime time had doubled from 20% in 2001 to 40% in 2013, while the news site *Vox* estimated that 750 reality TV shows aired on cable in the US in 2015, of which 350 were new shows.<sup>9</sup> Of course, this does not mean that all reality shows are ephemeral; a number of ‘grand-daddy’ shows still in production in the US and/or globally have been airing for decades, such as *Cops* (from 1989), *The Real World* (from 1992), *Big Brother* (from 1999), *Survivor* (from 2000), *The Amazing Race* (from 2001) and *American Idol* (from 2002), as well as *The Bachelor* (from 2002) and *The Bachelorette* (from 2003). This continuity of blockbuster formats, however, masks the key ways in which reality TV has changed over the years. No longer concerned with its roots in documentary or social observation, reality TV has now become synonymous with camera-ready people (over)performing themselves in situations brimming with emotive drama, itself guaranteed by semi-scripted formats, on-set contrivances, and post-production editing. At the same time, the ‘powers of transformation’ that Jack Bratich has argued are ‘capture[d], modifie[d] reorganize[d] and distribute[d]’ by the ‘performative phenomenon’ of reality TV<sup>10</sup> remain evident in the outright attempts of shows to make interventions in people’s lives, espiecially in formats related to ideologies of well-being, such as the makeover, dating, and rehab shows. In turn, reality TV participants, who once used to be aggressively framed as ‘ordinary people’, now orbit somewhere within the reach of celebrity, drawn to this stratosphere in part because the ‘attention capital’ accrued through dramatic appearances on reality TV ‘can eventually be exchanged for other forms of capital’.<sup>11</sup> The overarching popularity in recent years of American docusoaps, especially of *The Real Housewives* ilk, speaks to this lurch of reality TV toward hypervisibility, coalescing over-the-top emotions with behavioural transgressions that promise the thrill of unpredictability within the security of televisual contrivance. It is in this vein that the UK summer hit *Love Island* (ITV2, 2015- ) showcases fit bodies but compellingly serves up broken hearts, due as much to the rules of the format as to participants’ loose dating ethics, while the ongoing popularity of the much more staid *Great British Bake Off* (BBC, 2010-2016; Channel 4, 2017- ) suggests the degree to which reality TV depends on a delimited, competitive setting to reach the dramatic heights of the unpredictable, even if attained through choux pastry.

Scholarship about reality TV has likewise turned its attention from the documentary to the dramatic, while expanding the frame to think about audiences, texts and production

contexts in relation to governmentality and the self; nationhood and globalism; gender and sexuality; class and race; and, more recently, performance and affect. Notably, while the majority of the work continues to be driven by media scholars engaging with the lessons of social, cultural and political theory, there are abundant signs that reality television scholarship has been growing beyond the discipline of media studies. Researchers from disciplines like marketing or public relations, drawn to reality TV's diegetic as well as extra-diegetic links with business, entrepreneurship and advertising, are being joined by scholars from fields like medicine and tourism, who are assessing the influence of reality shows on public perceptions related to health, beauty and travel. While often taking the measure of reality television's negative effects, such as concerns about the impact of *Survivor* on real estate in the South Pacific or the unfortunate publicity for Mediterranean tourism generated by reality TV participants behaving badly in sunny locations,<sup>12</sup> there are also positive appraisals from some surprising quarters. The show *Botched* (E!, 2014- ), for instance, which follows in a long line of fairly sensationalist cosmetic-surgery transformation programmes, meets with approval in the pages of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, where Steven Dayan argues that 'revision plastic surgery' shows like *Botched* are 'working against a flood of medical misinformation'.<sup>13</sup> More commonly, however, the shift in reality TV toward (hyper)visibility has led media psychology and mass communication researchers to use cultivation theory – which holds that people are proportionally 'cultivated' by the amount of television they watch to believe that social reality aligns with televisual reality – as evidence for the direct negative effect of reality shows on behaviours related to body image, perceptions of race and ethnicity, and gendered aggression, to name a few.<sup>14</sup>

While positivist concerns about the negative impact of reality television have been as hard to shake as they have been difficult to prove, the more theoretical scholarship based in social and political traditions has been no less interested in the effects of reality television's conjunction with social life. In fact, one of the most influential shifts in recent thinking is what we might refer to as 'the neoliberal turn' in reality TV scholarship. Consolidated by Laurie Ouellette and James Hay's influential book *Better Living through Reality TV* (2008), this approach argues that the transformational promise of reality TV is based in the neoliberal values of personal responsibility, entrepreneurialism and self-empowerment through self-management, values which are mobilised by experts on 'life intervention' shows to transform "needy" individuals into functioning citizens'.<sup>15</sup> Drawing on a Foucauldian power/knowledge framework that aligns subjectification with 'indirect technologies' of government, the scholars of the neoliberal turn argue that reality television functions as a

cultural technology of governmentality, teaching participants as well as viewers the knowledges and techniques required for empowerment through self-governance.<sup>16</sup> In her most recent book, Ouellette has applied this argument to lifestyle TV, a loose category of hybrid reality formats which, broadly speaking, take up ‘the self as project’.<sup>17</sup> In this study, Ouellette argues that ‘the self as project has increasingly intersected with a self-enterprising logic’, which on the one hand requires lifestyle TV experts to deliver the curriculum of appropriate self-management, but on the other hand allows everyone on screen – expert and participant alike – to function as ‘living brands’.<sup>18</sup>

The intersection of self-governance and brand-consumerism in Ouellette’s understanding of lifestyle TV echoes the groundbreaking work of Alison Hearn and Sarah Banet-Weiser on ‘self-branding’, that is, the iterable and consumable performance of the self within a mediated framework of capitalist production and consumption.<sup>19</sup> What Mark Andrejevic had noted about ‘the equation of self-disclosure and self-expression’<sup>20</sup> in earlier reality TV has now been conjoined with the demand that neoliberal subjects fashion themselves into branded products in order to achieve social recognition through views, ‘likes’ and accrued attention capital, especially for those caught in the cross-hairs of economic precarity and gendered consumption patterns. Both Hearn, with an emphasis on capital, and Banet-Weiser, with an emphasis on gender, reflect on users’ participation in the mediascape of self-branding as a form of extracted labour, which in turn connects with the numerous ways in which neoliberal subjects engage in an ‘immaterial labour’ that is masked as choice and even passion, despite the fact that this is due to the increasingly insecure nature of work.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the connection between extracted labour and precarity has been specifically studied in relation to reality shows that appeared in the post-2008 age of austerity, such as Diane Negra’s work on ‘gender vocabularies’ activated in the recession economy by the programmes *Extreme Couponing* (TLC, 2010-2012) and *Gold Rush Alaska* (Discovery Channel, 2010- ),<sup>22</sup> or Hannah Hamad’s argument about the show *The Fairy Jobmother* (Channel 4, 2010) that, ‘despite economic and social developments seemingly at odds with the continued viability of neoliberal postfeminist discourse, its hegemony is entrenched in cultural consciousness’.<sup>23</sup>

This extensive socio-economic focus on reality television as both the means and the playbook for the ‘self as project’ has in some sense replaced earlier investigations of class and reality TV, traditionally carried out through audience studies. This is not to say, however, that audiences have become less central to the study of reality television – indeed, the runaway success of Channel 4’s *Gogglebox* (2013- ), a show that watches viewers watch TV,

suggests that viewers are of at least as much interest as participants, and that viewers, too, can enact a hypervisibility through the televisual apparatus. Interestingly, since Annette Hill's 2005 book *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television*, which countered claims of duped or bovine viewers by revealing that reality TV audiences fully understand the media construction they are watching, audience researchers have continued to chip away at oft-repeated assumptions about the manipulability of viewers. Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood, in their influential book *Reacting to Reality Television*, challenge the 'neoliberal turn' in order to pursue the importance of tracing affect amongst viewers.<sup>24</sup> Interrogating the assumption that 'governmentality works',<sup>25</sup> Skeggs and Wood conclude instead that it does not work: their multi-levelled methodology reveals that audiences themselves 'see how utterly incoherent, contradictory and unstable the production of subjectivity and normativity is', which in turn reveals 'the impossibility of the governmentality project, at least in having any straightforward determined "effect"'.<sup>26</sup> Against this, in order to gain a more granulated approach to understanding audience engagement with reality TV, Skeggs and Wood developed a method they call the Affective Textual Encounter, which enabled them to map how, where and why 'affect made [their] respondents do things', often against the more dominant 'pedagogic instructions in governmentality'.<sup>27</sup> In a similar concern with affective economies, Katherine Sender's study *The Makeover: Reality Television and Reflexive Audiences* adopts the term 'reflexivity' to articulate both her respondents' awareness of the constructedness of makeover shows as well as their willingness to find an emotional realism in these shows that allows the viewers to 'make sense of their [own] life trajectories'.<sup>28</sup> In particular, Sender upsets assumptions about humiliation and *schadenfreude* in reality TV, noting that audiences in her study made a distinction between the shame experienced by makeover participants, which the viewers considered productive, and humiliation, which was seen as exploitative. Tracing a similar affective alignment between viewers and participants to that uncovered by Skeggs and Wood, Sender found very little evidence of *schadenfreude*, or viewers taking pleasure in makeover subjects' humiliation; rather, viewers were more likely in such situations to express sympathy for the participants.<sup>29</sup> Sender's research thus bears out what Brenda Weber, in her book on *Makeover TV*, calls the 'redemptive story of shame to salvation', which depends on the circulation of negative as well as positive emotions for the production of transformed selves.<sup>30</sup>

More recently, the attention of television scholars interested in audiences and their uptake of reality TV has turned to issues of global politics and nationhood, especially relating to countries beyond the dominant transatlantic production axis. Inspired by Marwan Kraidy's

book *Reality Television and Arab Politics*,<sup>31</sup> scholars have begun to research not just the spread of particular formats across the globe, as comprehensively exemplified, for instance, by the 2004 publication *Big Brother International*,<sup>32</sup> but also the social and political uses of a range of reality shows in non-English-language regions. In his 2010 book, Kraidy casts a critical eye on the geopolitical entanglements of shows like *Big Brother* in Bahrain, *Star Academy* in Saudi Arabia and *Superstar* in Lebanon, grappling with questions about the relation of social reality, reality TV and representational authority in Arab public life. In the follow-up anthology *The Politics of Reality Television: Global Perspectives*, edited by Kraidy, Katherine Sender and Barbie Zelizer, the contributors pursue a global outlook by presenting studies about the processes and practices of reality television in Western European countries like France and Norway, but also in regions that had not previously drawn the attention of scholars, like the Balkans, South Africa, India and Singapore.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall it turns out that reality television in the Balkans had developed into a vehicle of ‘commercialised nationalism’ that blended attachments to nation with free-market ideologies, as noted by Zala Volčič and Mark Andrejević<sup>34</sup>; the argument is confirmed and expanded in the broader context of *TV Socialism* by Anikó Imre, who only somewhat tongue-in-cheek refers to the Eastern European programming of nationalist exceptionalism as ‘post-socialist ethno-racial reality TV’.<sup>35</sup>

Other routes for exploring the relation between viewers, national(ist) programming and global format trends have been opened up by the conjunction of reality TV, non-Western geopolitics and viewer investments. For instance, Tania Lewis’s foray into makeover TV in Singapore<sup>36</sup> paved the way for a boundary-breaking book entitled *Telemodernities*, authored by Lewis, Fran Martin and Wanning Sun, about lifestyle television across Asia.<sup>37</sup> Concentrating mainly on India and China, the authors combine industry and audience research methodologies to explore the nationally variegated experiences of modernity that are being supported by global formats and their localised offshoots. This study is part of a growing wave of English-language scholarship on contemporary television and politics in China, with a particular focus on the mainland’s adaptation of global reality formats from the mid-2000s onward, including talent formats like the mega-hit *Super Girl* (Hunan Satellite Television, 2004-2011) and dating shows like *If You Are the One* (JSBC, 2010- ), both of which caused social controversy as well as government consternation due to their popularity.<sup>38</sup> Similar questions of cultural adaptation and direct or indirect regulation have been taken up in a volume on the international reaches of the *Idol* format, edited by Koos Zwaan and Joost de Bruin, which extends earlier investigations of global reality TV format

transfer, while in a contemporary vein it traces the *Idol* format as a vessel for the spread of a national and regional politics of identity across regions previously unexamined by TV scholarship, such as post-socialist Europe, the Middle East and Asia.<sup>39</sup>

The return of the phrase ‘politics of identity’ – if, indeed, it ever left – begs questions about representation and the role of reality TV. Skeggs and Wood caution that representation pales in the face of reality television’s capacity for intervention.<sup>40</sup> As Anne Graefer summarises in her work on femininity in German reality television, ‘rather than merely representing identity markers such as gender, race, class and nation, reality television is fundamentally constitutive of these’.<sup>41</sup> Reality television scholars have broadly accepted this notion, and many would agree with Skeggs and Wood’s claim that the constitutive driver of reality television is its affectivity, which weights social identities with the power of their visible and sensible enactment. The audience thus confirms the experience of the participants by sharing in the affective flows that mark them – both participants and viewers alike – as more or less successful enactments of regulated identities.

Amongst these, the socio-political marker of gender is constantly on display, reframed and reconstituted by a succession of reality shows and formats. Yet, despite the fact that gender has been interwoven into discussions about reality TV since at least the mid-2000s, including a significant study by Rachel Dubrofsky of women participants on *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*,<sup>42</sup> it took another decade for a collection to appear that focused specifically on gender through the lens of reality TV. The aptly named *Reality Gendervision*, edited by Brenda Weber, draws together contributions from a range of gender and sexuality scholars who investigate issues of celebrity, performativity, self-making and -branding, citizenship, ethnicity and domesticity, along with analyses of ‘freak shows’ relating to pregnancy, hoarding, obesity, ghost-hunting and the requisite toddler pageant.<sup>43</sup> The decision to acknowledge reality TV as emblematic of television freakery was purposeful, as Weber notes in her introduction, since using gender as an analytic for ‘trash’ programming highlights the fact that question marks about authenticity and performance are just as critical to reality TV as to the field of gender studies.<sup>44</sup> The appearance of *Reality Gendervision* has thus gone hand-in-hand with an expansion of thinking about how reality television (re)frames gender and sexuality, and vice versa. This stretches from interrogating postfeminist discourse on reality shows, such as Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra’s edited volume on *Gendering the Recession*<sup>45</sup>; to situating reality television within the broader field of feminised popular culture, such as the engagingly titled *Cupcakes, Pinterest and Ladyporn*<sup>46</sup>; to interrogating the production of masculinity across a range of reality TV formats.<sup>47</sup> Particularly welcome,

too, has been the recent embrace of LGBTQ identities within the genre, marked for instance by the much-vaunted return of *Queer Eye* (Netflix, 2018- ), now rebooted on Netflix and without the ‘for the Straight Guy’ addendum that accompanied its initial appearance on Bravo/NBC in 2003. Although *Queer Eye*’s release has been too recent for academics to have assessed its kinder, more caring and more overtly politicised take on social attitudes to gay sexuality, scholarship related to LGBTQ reality TV is burgeoning in relation to the cult series *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (Logo/VH1, 2009- ). Hosted by the established drag artist RuPaul Charles and representing a seismic shift in queer male visibility through the hypervisibility of televised drag performance, *RuPaul’s Drag Race* ‘has served to propel drag culture from the obscurity of the gay bar/club scene to the mainstream of reality television’.<sup>48</sup> Since the mid-2010s, the show has also propelled television scholarship, with articles devoted to representation, language use and the ‘realness’ of drag within the ‘reality’ framework of the show.<sup>49</sup> Recently, the first collected volume on *RuPaul’s Drag Race* has taken up similar concerns in the light of the international reach of the series, with contributors writing about drag identity, drag community, and globalisation through social media channels, while a forthcoming issue of *Celebrity Studies* on ‘*RuPaul’s Drag Race* and the cultural politics of fame’<sup>50</sup> suggests that scholars are continuing to find new entry points to this multi-faceted show.

While the pun in the title of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* falls first and foremost on the word ‘drag’, it is also notable that ‘race’ refers not only to the show’s competitive format but also to the way that it grapples with discourses of race through its post-tokenist casting. The debate continues as to whether the representations, performances and discussions of racial identity on the show reproduce or dismantle stereotypes,<sup>51</sup> but in the centrality of race to its format *RuPaul’s Drag Race* is in line with contemporary programme trends as well as the most recent swell of reality TV scholarship. As Weber noted in the introduction to *Reality Gendervision*, gender and sexuality must be interrogated through the prism of ‘nationalized ideologies of class and race’,<sup>52</sup> which is precisely the call being met by scholars who are amassing hitherto absent work on the portrayals of black women in reality TV. With a race- and gender-critical eye cast on the raft of US docusoaps which feature ‘predominantly African American [women] leading bombastic lives that could be imploded at any moment’,<sup>53</sup> these writers constitute a welcome shift in the scholarship toward an intersectional approach that addresses the tension between visibility and exploitation of black women on reality TV. Many of these studies interrogate similar tropes, in keeping with the limited range of portrayals available to black women even when they are the focus of the

camera: namely, the mother, the 'angry black woman' and the sexualised spouse or girlfriend, which Donnetrice Allison connects with the culturally ingrained stereotypes of the 'Mammy', the 'Sapphire' and the 'Jezebel', respectively.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, however, precisely because it situates real women at the intersection of self-performance and cultural scripts, reality television also revises and reconstitutes these stereotypes, generating what Kristen Warner has called 'interstitial spaces between positive and negative representations of black womanhood on reality television'.<sup>55</sup> These interstitial spaces, between what Warner positions as a 'ratchet' femininity that is as tastelessly excessive as it is reflexive and a more staid 'politics of respectability', are explored in turn by Adria Goldman and Damion Waymer in *Block Women in Reality Television Docusoaps*, by Jervette Ward's edited collection *Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability and Black Women in Reality TV*, and by Donnetrice Allison's edited volume *Black Women's Portrayals on Reality Television*.<sup>56</sup> Although the repeated concern in a number of these studies is with the negative representations of black womanhood, especially the seemingly ubiquitous angry black woman as reality TV staple, Terrion Williamson suggests taking a different approach to the anger performed by this figure: 'what might it mean to refuse positivity, to refuse to back away from or *alter* anger, to consider anger neither as righteous nor as detriment but as *critical posture*?'<sup>57</sup> It is here, too, that Warner finds the nuanced spaces that reality TV, and even its black female viewers, can create; mobilising Lauren Berlant's notion of affective communities, Warner argues that 'black female audiences negotiate the characters that are available to them in a kind of liminal space where they can patch together facets of identity from which they derive pleasure or that resonate with their own experiences'.<sup>58</sup>

The notion of viewer pleasure derived from facets of identity patched together by televisual mechanisms recalls Skeggs and Wood's argument about the constitutive affectivity of reality TV. But it should also remind us of the arc traced by reality television's move away from an earlier social experimentation toward modes of hypervisibility, transgressive enactments and performative interventions. Hosts of reality TV participants behaving badly on myriads of shows is by no means positive, as many critics have attested, but if it leads audiences and scholars to re-experience and revisit the shifting constitutions of nation, class, gender, sexuality and race, then this is no bad thing. Much can be made, from this critical posture, of reality television's discontents.

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- <sup>1</sup> Sirin Kale, 'Shattered: Legacy of a Reality TV Experiment in Extreme Sleep Deprivation', *Guardian*, 4 September 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> Mark Andrejevic, 'When Everyone Has Their Own Reality Show', in *A Companion to Reality Television*, ed. Laurie Ouellette (Chichester, West Sussex and Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2014), 40-56 (p. 45).
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn, eds., *Understanding Reality Television* (London: Routledge, 2004); Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, eds., *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2004; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2009).
- <sup>5</sup> Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 97.
- <sup>6</sup> Sujata Moorti and Karen Ross, eds., 'Reality Television: Fairy Tale or Feminist Nightmare?', *Feminist Media Studies*, 4:2 (2004), 203-231.
- <sup>7</sup> Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005); Jonathan Bignell, *Big Brother: Reality TV in the Twenty-first Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).
- <sup>8</sup> For an early critical assessment of the 'trash TV' position, see Jon Dovey, *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 83-88.
- <sup>9</sup> Writers Guild of America, East, 'The Real Cost of Reality TV', 2013 WGA Report on Nonfiction Television, [https://www.wgaeast.org/wp-content/uploads/typo3/user\\_upload/temp/WHITE\\_PAPER\\_-\\_Real\\_Cost\\_of\\_Reality\\_TV.pdf](https://www.wgaeast.org/wp-content/uploads/typo3/user_upload/temp/WHITE_PAPER_-_Real_Cost_of_Reality_TV.pdf); Todd VanDerWerff, '750 Reality TV Shows Aired on Cable in 2015. Yes, 750', *Vox*, 7 January 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/1/7/10728206/reality-shows-how-many-peak-tv>.
- <sup>10</sup> Jack Bratich, "'Nothing Is Left Alone For Too Long": Reality Programming and Control Society Subjects', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 30:1 (2006), 65-83.
- <sup>11</sup> Andrejevic, 'When Everyone Has Their Own Reality Show', 49.
- <sup>12</sup> See Siobhan McDonnell, 'Selling "Sites of Desire": Paradise in Reality Television, Tourism, and Real Estate Promotion in Vanuatu', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 30:2 (2018), 413-435; Nicola Williams-Burnett, Heather Skinner and Julia Fallon, 'Reality Television Portrayals of Kavos, Greece: Tourists Behaving Badly', *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 35:3 (2018), 336-347.
- <sup>13</sup> Steven Dayan, M.D., 'Revision Plastic Surgery Reality Television: What's Good about *Botched*?', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 319:21 (2018), 2156-2157.
- <sup>14</sup> See Jolien Trekels et al., 'Beauty Ideals from Reality Television and Young Women's Tanning Behavior', *Communication Quarterly*, 66:3 (2018), 325-343; Kelly P. Dillon and Elizabeth B. Jones, 'How "Real" Is Reality Television? Marginalized Group Representativeness in Competitive Reality Television Programming', *Psychology of Popular Media Culture* (2018), online first publication, 2 July; Erica Scharrer and Greg Blackburn, 'Is Reality TV a *Bad Girls Club*? Television Use, Docusoap Reality Television Viewing, and the Cultivation of the Approval of Aggression', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95:1 (2018), 235-357.
- <sup>15</sup> Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living through Reality TV* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 6.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>17</sup> Laurie Ouellette, *Lifestyle TV* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 49-72.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.
- <sup>19</sup> Alison Hearn, 'Meant, Mask Burden: Probing the Contours of the Branded "Self"', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8:2 (2008), 197-217; Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 51-90.
- <sup>20</sup> Andrejevic, 'When Everyone Has Their Own Reality Show', 49.
- <sup>21</sup> Ouellette, *Lifestyle TV*, 117.
- <sup>22</sup> Diane Negra, 'Gender Bifurcation in the Recession Economy: *Extreme Couponing* and *Gold Rush Alaska*', *Cinema Journal*, 53:1 (2013), 123-129.

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- <sup>23</sup> Hannah Hamad, 'Fairy Jobmother to the Rescue: Postfeminism and the Recessionary Cultures of Reality TV', in *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity*, eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 223-245 (p. 224).
- <sup>24</sup> Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood, *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience and Value* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 223, 149.
- <sup>28</sup> Katherine Sender, *The Makeover: Reality Television and Reflexive Audiences* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012), 15.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.
- <sup>30</sup> Brenda R Weber, *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 136.
- <sup>31</sup> Marwan M. Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
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- <sup>41</sup> Anne Graefer, "'No Place Like Home": Patriotism and Femininity in German Reality Television', *Critical Studies in Television*, 13:1 (2018): 27.
- <sup>42</sup> Rachel E Dubrofsky, *The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television: Watching The Bachelor and The Bachelorette* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).
- <sup>43</sup> Brenda R Weber, ed., *Reality Gendervision: Sexuality and Gender on Transatlantic Reality Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
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- <sup>45</sup> Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, eds., *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
- <sup>46</sup> Elana Levine, ed., *Cupcakes, Pinterest and Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015).
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<sup>48</sup> Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas, 'Drag Culture, Global Participation and *RuPaul's Drag Race*', in *RuPaul's Drag Race and the Shifting Visibility of Gay Culture: The Boundaries of Reality TV*, eds. Brennan and Gudelunas (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1-11 (p. 3).

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Lauren Levitt, 'Reality Realness: *Paris is Burning* and *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Interventions* 3:1 (2013), n.p.; Nathaniel Simmons, 'Speaking Like a Queen in *RuPaul's Drag Race*: Towards a Speech Code of American Drag Queens', *Sexuality and Culture*, 18:3 (2014): 630-648; Matthew Goldmark, 'National Drag: The Language of Inclusion in *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21:4 (2015), 501-520.

<sup>50</sup> Call for Papers, Special Edition of *Celebrity Studies*, ed. John Mercer, posted to MeCCSA mailing list, 12 June 2018.

<sup>51</sup> See Sabina Strings and Long T. Bui, '"She Is Not Acting, She Is": The Conflict between Gender and Racial Realness on *RuPaul's Drag Race*', *Feminist Media Studies* 14:5 (2014), 822-836.

<sup>52</sup> Brenda R Weber, 'Introduction: Trash Talk', 7.

<sup>53</sup> Kristen Warner, 'They Gon' Think You Loud Regardless: Ratchetness, Reality Television and Black Womanhood', *Camera Obscura* 88, 30:1 (2015): 133. The programmes that this descriptor refers to are too numerous to list here, but include Bravo's *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, VH1's *Basketball Wives*, VH1's *Love & Hip Hop*, Oxygen's *Bad Girls' Club*, and Bravo's *Kandi's Wedding*, among others.

<sup>54</sup> Donnetrice C Allison, 'Introduction: A Historical Overview', in *Black Women's Portrayals on Reality Television: The New Sapphire*, ed. Donnetrice C Allison (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), ix-xxix; for more on these tropes, see Monique Moultrie, 'Black Female Sexual Agency and Racialised Holy Sex in Black Christian Reality TV Shows', in *Religion and Reality TV: Faith in Late Capitalism*, eds. Mara Einstein, Katherine Madden and Diane Winston (London: Routledge, 2018), 31-45.

<sup>55</sup> Warner, 'They Gon' Think You Loud Regardless', 129.

<sup>56</sup> Adria Y Goldman and Damion Waymer, *Black Women in Reality Television Docusoaps: A New Form of Representation or Depictions as Usual?* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015); Jervette R Ward, ed., *Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability and Black Women in Reality TV* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Donnetrice C Allison, ed., *Black Women's Portrayals on Reality Television: The New Sapphire* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016).

<sup>57</sup> Terrion L Williamson, *Scandalize My Name: Black Feminist Practice and the Making of Black Social Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 27 [orig. Emphasis].

<sup>58</sup> Warner, 'They Gon' Think You Loud Regardless', 139.