

Reality of Reality Television

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The so called "Reality television" is one of the recent innovations in programming genres. "Reality TV shows", steamed up the new TV spectators by giving variety of novel ideas that attracted audience. Reality television in a way is also the result of TRP war.

Reality Television

Reality television is a genre of television programming that presents purportedly unscripted dramatic or humorous situations, documents actual events, and usually features real life people, ordinary at times known or lesser known celebrities, instead of professional actors, sometimes in a contest or other situation where a prize is awarded (Hill, 2005)⁷. Programs in the reality television genre are commonly called "reality shows" and often are produced in series. Traditional TV Documentaries and nonfictional programming such as news and sports shows are usually not classified as reality shows.

Reality Television: Some Definitions

Jagodozinki (2003) defines reality television as the careful video construction displaying "the 'lives' of ordinary people engaged in sometimes extraordinary events".

Ouellette and Murray (2004) explain the reality television as "an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real",

Pecora (2002)^{1°} explains reality programming as "largely unscripted, though heavily edited, programs" filled with nonprofessional actors, which focus on some element of group dynamics.

Reality television programs are said to "film real people as they live out events (contrived or otherwise) in their lives, as these events occur" (Nabi, Biely, Morgan & Stitt, 2003)".

There are five important elements, characterized by this definition:

- That most important aspect of reality shows is that people must be portraying themselves. Any program involving an actor playing a role is excluded.
- The show must be shot in the people's living or working environment, instead of a set. Some might argue that reality programs do utilize sets, but the differences between these sets and previous television show sets are that the items are functional in some reality show sets.
- Thirdly, there is no script utilized. Individuals are not required to memorize and recite lines, as in traditional television programming.
- The events are placed in a narrative context. This would exclude shows like America's Funniest Home Videos because there is no narrative thread throughout the show.
- Lastly, these shows are produced for the purpose of 'pure' viewer entertainment.

Reality television is a means by which television programmers attempt to portray a constructed reality, one in which the reality will gratify the needs of the audience, a similar goal of much, if not all, of the programming found on television.

Sub-genres of reality television

The genre of reality television consists of various sub-genres. This research has identified some major sub-genres of reality programming after watching various reality shows and going through literature available on the subject. Most of the information has been collected from pbworks.com (n.d.)¹², Murray, S. & Ouellette, L. (Eds.). (2008)¹³ and Hill, A. (2007)."

Documentary-style

In many reality TV programs, camera shooting and footage editing give the viewer the impression that they are passive observers following people going about their daily personal and professional activities; this style of filming is often referred to as fly on the wall or factual television. Story "plots" are often constructed via editing or planned situations, with results resembling soap-operas, hence the terms docusoap and docudrama. In other shows, a cinema verite style is adopted, where the filmmaker is more than a passive observer their presence and influence is greatly manifest in each shot and sequence. Documentary- style reality television has several sub-categories or variants:

Special Living Environment

Some documentary-style programs place cast members, who in most cases previously did not know each other, in artificial living environments. The Real World, telecast in 1992 on MTV, is the originator of this style. In almost every other such show, cast members are given a specific challenge or obstacle to overcome. Road Rules, which started in 1995 as a spin-off of The Real World, started this pattern: the cast traveled across the country guided by clues and performing tasks.

Big Brother is probably the best-known program of this type in the world with different versions produced in many countries around the globe. In India the examples of this type of reality shows are Bigg Boss (Colors), Fear Factor, MTV Roadies, Mas Exchange etc.

Celebrities: Another subset of fly-on-the-wall-style shows, involves celebrities. Often these show portray celebrities going about their everyday life: notable examples include The Anna Nicole Show, The Osbournes, Newlyweds: Nick and Jessica and Hogan Knows Best. In other shows, celebrities are put on location and given a specific task or tasks; these include Celebrity Big Brother, The Simple Life, Tommy Lee Goes to College, The Surreal Life, and I'm a Celebrity... Get Me out of Here! VH 1 has created an entire block of shows dedicated to celebrity reality, known as "Celebreality".

Professional Activities

Some documentary-style shows portray professionals either going about day-to-day business or performing an entire project over the course of a series. No outside experts are brought in (at least, none appear on screen) to either provide help or to judge results. The earliest example (and the longest running reality show of any genre) is COPS which has been airing since 1989, proceeding by many years the current reality show phenomenon.

Other examples of this type of reality show include the American shows Miami Ink, The First 48, Dog the Bounty Hunter, Dog Whisperer, American Chopper and Deadliest Catch; the British shows Airport, Police Stop! and Traffic Cops; the Australian shows Border Security and Bondi Rescue, and the New Zealand show Motorway Patrol. The US cable networks TLC and A&E in particular show a number of this type of reality show.

VH 1's 2001 show Bands on the Run was a notable early hybrid, in that the show featured four unsigned bands touring and making music as a professional activity, but also pitted the bands against one another in game show fashion to see which band could make the most money.

"Coke studio" (MTV) is an example of such type of reality show in India and Pakistan.

Competition/Game Shows

Another sub-genre of reality TV is "reality competition" or so-called "reality game shows," which follow the format of non-tournament elimination contests. Typically, the participants are filmed competing to win a prize, often while living together in a confined environment. In many cases, participants are removed until only one person or team remains, who/which is then declared the winner. Usually this is done by eliminating participants, mostly one at a time, in balloon debate style, through either disapproval voting or by voting for the most popular choice to win. Voting is done by the viewing audience, the show's own participants, a panel of judges, or some combination of the three.

A well-known example of a reality-competition show is the globally syndicated Big Brother, in which cast members live together in the same house, with participants removed at regular intervals by either the viewing audience or, in the case of the American version, by the participants themselves.

There remains some disagreement over whether talent-search shows such as the Idol series, America's Got Talent, Dancing with the Stars, and Celebrity Duets are truly reality television, or just newer incarnations of shows such as Star Search. Although the shows involve a traditional talent search, the shows follow the reality-competition conventions of removing one or more contestants per episode and allowing the public to vote on who is removed; the Idol series also require the contestants to live together during the run of the show (though their daily life is never shown onscreen). Additionally, there is a good deal of interaction shown between contestants and judges. As a result, such shows are often considered reality television, and the American Primetime Emmy Awards have nominated both American Idol and Dancing with the Stars for the Outstanding Reality-Competition Program Emmy. Modern game shows like Weakest Link, Greed, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?, American Gladiators, Dog Eat Dog and Deal or No Deal also lie in a gray area: like traditional game shows (e.g., The Price Is Right, Jeopardy!), the action takes place in an enclosed TV studio over a short period of time; however, they have higher production values, more dramatic background music, and higher stakes than traditional shows (done either through putting contestants into physical danger or offering large cash prizes). In addition, there is more interaction between contestants and hosts, and in some cases they feature reality-style contestant competition and/or elimination as well. These factors, as well as these shows' rise in global popularity at the same time as the arrival of the reality craze, lead many people to group them under the reality TV umbrella as well as the traditional game show one (MSNBC, 2007).

There are various hybrid reality-competition shows, like the worldwide- syndicated Star Academy, which combines the Big Brother and Idol formats, The Biggest Loser and The Pick-up Artist which combine competition with the self-improvement format, and American Inventor, which uses the Idol format for products instead of people. Some shows, such as Making the Band and Project Green light, devote the first part of the season to selecting a winner, and the second part to showing that person or group of people working on a project.

Dating-based competition

Dating-based competition shows follow a contestant choosing one out of a group of suitors. Over the course of either a single episode or an entire season, suitors are eliminated until only the contestant and the final suitor remains. For a time, in 2001-2003, this type of reality show dominated the other genres on the major US networks. Shows that aired included The Bachelor, its spin- off The Bachelorette, as well as For Love or Money, Paradise Hotel, Temptation Island, Average Joe and Farmer Wants a Wife, among others. More recent such shows include Flavor of Love and its spin-offs I Love New York, Rock of Love, and The Cougar. This is one of the older variants of the format; shows such as The Dating Game that date to the 1960s had similar premises (though each episode was self- contained, and not the serial format of more modern shows). In India Ralchi lea swayamwar, Rahul duhaniya le jayega and Ratan ka rishta fall under dating-based competition

Job search

In this category, the competition revolves around a skill that contestants were pre-screened for. Competitors perform a variety of tasks based on that skill, are judged, and are then kept or removed by a single expert or a panel of experts. The show is usually presented as a job search of some kind, in which the prize for the winner includes a contract to perform that kind of work. Pop stars, which debuted in 1999, may have been the first such show. The first job-search show which showed dramatic, unscripted situations may have been America's Next Top Model, which premiered in May 2003. Other examples include The Apprentice (which judges business skills), Hell's Kitchen and Top Chef (for chefs), Shear Genius (for hair styling), Project Runway (for clothing design), Top Design (for interior design), Stylista (for fashion editors), Last Comic Standing (for comedians), The Starlet and Scream Queens (for actresses), I Know My Kid's a Star (for child performers), On the Lot (for filmmakers), The Shot (for photographers), So You Think You Can Dance (for dancers), Much Music VJ Search (for television hosts), Dream Job (for sportscasters), Face Off (for make-up artists), and The Tester (for game testers). Some shows use the same format with celebrities: in this case, there is no expectation that the winner will continue this line of work, and prize winnings often go to charity.

Sports

Most of these programs create a sporting competition among athletes attempting to establish their name in that sport. The Club, in 2002, was one of the first shows to immerse sport with reality TV, based on a fabricated club competing against real clubs in the sport of Australian rules football; the audience helped select which players played each week by voting for their favorites. Break is a reality show in which aspiring golfers compete against one another and are eliminated. The Contender, a boxing show, unfortunately became the first American reality show in which a contestant committed suicide after being eliminated from the show; the show's winner was

promised a shot at a boxing world championship. Sergio foras, who won, indeed got his title shot and became a world champion boxer. In The Ultimate Fighter participants have voluntarily withdrawn or expressed the desire to withdraw from the show due to competitive pressure. In sports shows, sometimes just appearing on the show, not necessarily winning, can get a contestant the job. The owner of COC declared that the final match of the first season of The Ultimate Fighter was so good, both contestants were offered a contract, and in addition, many non-winning contestants have prospered in the UFC.

Self-improvement/makeover

Some reality television shows cover a person or group of people improving their lives. Sometimes the same group of people are covered over an entire season, but usually here is a new target for improvement in each episode. Despite differences in the content, the format is usually the same: first the show introduces the subjects in their current, less-than-ideal environment. Then the subjects meet with a group of experts, who give the subjects instructions on how to improve things; they offer aid and encouragement along the way. Finally, the subjects are placed back in their environment and they, along with their friends and family and the experts, appraise the changes that have occurred. Other self-improvement or makeover shows include "How Do I Look?" (fashion makeover), The Biggest loser (which covers weight loss), Extreme Makeover (entire physical appearance), Supernanny (child-rearing), Made (attaining difficult goals), Trinny Tool Academy (relationship building) and Conform School (self-improvement and manners).

Renovation

Some shows make over part or all of a person's living space, workspace, or vehicle. The American show This Old house was the first such show, debuting in 1979. The British show Changing looms, beginning in 1996 (later remade in the US as Trading Spaces) was the first such renovation show that added a game show feel with different weekly contestants. Other shows in this category include Extreme Makeover home Edition, Debbie Travis' facelift and Holmes on Homes. Pimp My Ride show vehicles being rebuilt. Some shows, such as Hell's Kitchen and Ramsay's kitchen Nightmares, show both the decor and the menu of a failing restaurant being remade. The issue of "making over" was taken to its social extreme with the British show Life Laundry, in which people who had become hoarders, even living in squalor, were given professional assistance. As with game shows, a gray area exists between such reality shows and more conventional formats. Some argue the key difference is the emphasis of the human story and conflicts of reality shows, versus the emphasis on process and information in more traditional format shows. The show This Old house, which began in 1979, the start to finish renovation of different houses through a season; media critic Jeff Jarvis has speculated that it is "the original reality show." Jarvis, 2003)

Social experiment

Another type of reality program is the social experiment that produces drama, conflict and sometimes transformation. Wife Swap which began in 2003 on Channel 4 and has aired for four seasons on ABC is a notable example. People with different values agreed to live by each other's social rules for a brief period of time and sometimes learn from the experience. Other shows in this category include Its holiday, Oxygen's The Bad Girls Club (lifestyles and actions), and Channel 4's Secret Millionaire. Faking It was a series where people had to learn a new skill and pass

themselves off as experts in that skill. Shattered was a controversial 2004 UK series where contestants competed for how long they could go without sleep.

Dating shows

Unlike the aforementioned dating competition shows, some shows feature all new contestants each episode. This format was first used in the 1960s show *The Dating Game*. Modern examples include *Blind Date*, *Matchmaker*, *Room Raiders*, *Eliminate*, *Next*, and *Parental Control*.

Talk shows

Though the traditional format of a talk show is that of a host interviewing a featured guest or discussing a chosen topic with a guest or panel of guests, the advent of trash TV shows has often made people group the entire category in with reality television. Programs like *Ricki Lake*, *The Jerry Springer Show*, *Dr. Phil*, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* and many others have generally recruited guests by advertising a potential topic for a future program. Topics are frequently outrageous and are chosen in the interest of creating on- screen drama, tension or outrageous behaviour. Though not explicitly reality television by traditional standards, this sort of depiction of someone's life, even if only in a brief interview format, is frequently considered akin to broader-scale reality TV programming.

Hidden cameras

Another type of reality programming features hidden cameras rolling when random passers- by encounter a staged situation. *Candid Camera*, which first aired on television in 1908, pioneered the format. Modern variants of this type of production include *Punk'd*, *Trigger Happy TV*, *The Jamie Kennedy Experiment* and *Just For Laughs Gags*. The series *Scare Tactics* and *Room 401* are hidden-camera programs in which the goal is to frighten contestants rather than just befuddle or amuse them. Not all hidden camera shows use strictly staged situations. for example, the syndicated show *Cheaters*, purports to use hidden cameras to record suspected cheating partners, although the authenticity of the show has been questioned (Nowell, 2002)". Once the evidence has been gathered, the accuser confronts the cheating partner with the assistance of the host.