

**COM 321, Documentary Form in Film & Television
Spring 2014**

Viewing Assignment #2—Specifics

Due May 1, 2014

Using the Proposed Typology of Reality TV Programming (attached), do the following:

1. Sign up for one reality TV show from one of the six categories.
2. Watch two episodes of that show.
3. Produce a two-page written analysis (again, your second Viewing Assignment for this class, worth 10% of the course total) that answers the following questions:
 1. Provide a definition for the category, based on your knowledge of the examples shown and other shows you've seen. How does the series you have viewed for this assignment fit the category? How does it *not* fit?
 2. What Barnouw documentary category(ies) does it seem to align with most closely?
 3. Using the Brief Scholarly Review of Reality Television (attached): What techniques, from Baruh (2009) and from COM 321 Techniques, are used most distinctively in the series? With what results, do you think?
 4. Using the Brief Scholarly Review of Reality Television (attached): What uses and gratifications/functions are served by this show for its audience? Consider voyeurism and exhibitionism as well as the uses and gratifications identified by Jeffres et al. (2004).

Proposed Typology of Reality TV Programming

- 1. Fly on the Wall (from Direct Cinema + Soap operas)**
e.g., An American Family (1973); 16 & Pregnant; Pawn Stars; Jon and Kate + 8; American Pickers; Selling New York; Swamp People; Little People Big World; Storm Chasers; American Loggers; Cops; The Osbournes; Million Dollar Listing; Here Comes Honey Boo-boo, Duck Dynasty
- 2. Reportage (News-like)**
 - 2A. First-person narrative (interviewee-focused)**
e.g., Celebrity Ghost Stories; I Survived
 - 2B. Third-person narrative (including investigative) (News magazine-like)**
e.g., Escape to Chimp Eden; Biography; Myth Busters; Cold Case Files; Unsolved Mysteries
- 3. Expert Intervention**
 - 3A. Individual**
e.g., Millionaire Matchmaker; Intervention; Hoarders; Clean House; I Used to Be Fat; Made; Sell This House; Queer Eye for the Straight Guy; Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution; This Old House; Kitchen Nightmares; Tabatha Takes Over; Tool Academy; Property Brothers
 - 3B. Group**
e.g., You're Cut Off!
- 4. Setup (from Soap Operas, in part/Catalyst Documentaries)—most are Goal-less, but some may have a Goal**
 - 5A. Individual**
e.g., Candid Camera, Punk'd, Cheaters
 - 5B. Group**
e.g., Jersey Shore; Real World; Real Housewives; The Simple Life
- 5. Challenge (from Cinema Verite/Catalyst Documentaries)...A Social Experiment?**
 - 4A. Individual**
e.g., Wife Swap; House Hunters; World's Strictest Parents, Judge Judy
 - 4B. Group**
e.g., Celebrity Rehab
- 6. Contest (from Game Shows)**
 - 6A. Winner**
e.g., Art Race; The Voice (?)
 - B. Elimination/Winner**
e.g., Survivor; Top Chef; America's Next Top Model; The Apprentice; Iron Chef; Project Runway; Last Comic Standing; American Idol; Big Brother; Dancing with the Stars; The Bachelor; Rock of Love; Top Shot

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A Brief Scholarly Overview of Reality Television

Defining Reality TV

Recall that Barnouw concludes that documentarists “are dedicated to not inventing.” Reality television seems dedicated to invention within a natural setting, or with natural performers.

“Reality television is a genre of television programming which presents purportedly unscripted dramatic or humorous situations, documents actual events, and usually features ordinary people instead of professional actors. Although the genre has existed in some form or another since the early years of television, the term *reality television* is most commonly used to describe programs of this genre produced since 2000. Reality television covers a wide range of programming formats, from game or quiz shows which resemble the frantic, often demeaning shows produced in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s (such as *Gaki no tsukai*), to surveillance- or voyeurism-focused productions such as *Big Brother*. Such shows frequently portray a modified and highly influenced form of reality, with participants put in exotic locations or abnormal situations, sometimes coached to act in certain ways by off-screen handlers, and with events on screen sometimes manipulated through editing and other post-production techniques.” (Wikipedia.com)

So. . . similarities with documentary forms?

- “Unscripted” (with quote marks intentional)
- Actual events
- No professional actors
- Formal features similar to documentaries (e.g., direct address to camera; Hall, 2009)
- Functions: Surveillance & Voyeurism
- Exotic locations
- Abnormal situations
- Participants coached
- Manipulation through editing

Voyeurism and Exhibitionism

Hill (2005) has established that TV audiences perceive reality programs to be both:

- Voyeuristic—the [nonpathological] pleasure derived from learning about what is typically forbidden or private (Calvert, 2004)
- Exhibitionistic—the proclivity to freely disclose or display what is typically private

Groombridge (2002) notes the *reciprocity* of the voyeuristic needs of TV viewers and the exhibitionism of program participants. Koskela (2004) proposes that in an era of extensive surveillance, media such as webcams, blogs/vlogs, and reality television afford individuals an opportunity to engage in “empowering exhibitionism.” So, in this view of things, the voyeur and the exhibitionist need each other. Reality TV provides a legal and safe venue for this exchange.

Other Functions of Reality TV Viewing

In an application of the uses and gratifications approach to media exposure, Jeffres et al. (2004) found enjoyment of reality TV to be related *both* to affective functions (mood/escape/stimulation/socializing) and cognitive functions (facts/keep in touch/learning/challenge/think). This pattern is similar to that for talk shows, medical dramas, and game shows. (Enjoyment of most other formats related to only one set of functions— affective for sitcoms, crime dramas, sports, movies, sci-fi, soaps, and cartoons, and cognitive for local news, national news, and musicals.) Additionally, the specific U&G functions of parasocial viewing and presence viewing were also related to reality TV enjoyment.

In a survey, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) found that those who enjoy reality TV the most for its entertainment and relaxing value also tend to perceive the meticulously edited and frequently preplanned content of reality interaction as realistic. And, those with external locus of control, and with low mobility and low levels of interpersonal interaction are more likely to watch reality TV to fulfill voyeuristic and companionship needs.

The Variety of Reality TV Programs

Jeffres et al. (2004) found in a general population survey of the Cleveland area that people collectively described reality TV shows as having three key ingredients: Competition, unscripted but planned behavior, and the use of non-actors. However, differences among reality TV shows are many.

A multidimensional scaling approach to respondents' perceptions of 33 reality-based TV programs indicated two underlying dimensions along which audiences think about reality TV: romantic vs. not romantic, and competitive vs. not competitive (Nabi, 2007).

A study by Baruh (2009) used a content analysis of 15 reality shows to identify a number of characteristics that differentiate among reality TV programs:

- Private setting (vs. public)—ranging from 0% of scenes (*Big Brother* and *Dancing with the Stars*) to 68.0% (*Cops*)
- “Fly on the wall” shooting style—from 26.7% (*America's Most Wanted*) to 90.8% (*Amazing Race*)
- Disclosure of personal information such as substance use/abuse, financial status, and sexual behaviors—from .14 disclosures per scene (*Amazing Race*) to 1.18 per scene (*Cops*)
- Negative emotions (vs. positive)—from 7.0% of scenes (*Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*) to 42.1% (*Nanny 911*)
- Gossip—from 0% (*America's Most Wanted*, *Biggest Loser*, *Dancing with the Stars*, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*) to 31.6% (*Cops*)
- Intimate touching—from 0% (most programs) to 7.4% (*Beauty and the Geek*)
- Nudity—from 0% (six programs) to 15.8% of scenes (*Big Brother*)

Of these characteristics, some were found to be related to voyeuristic viewing:

- Private setting

- “Fly on the wall” shooting
- Gossip
- Nudity

And some were not:

- Disclosure of personal information
- Negative emotions
- Intimate touching

References

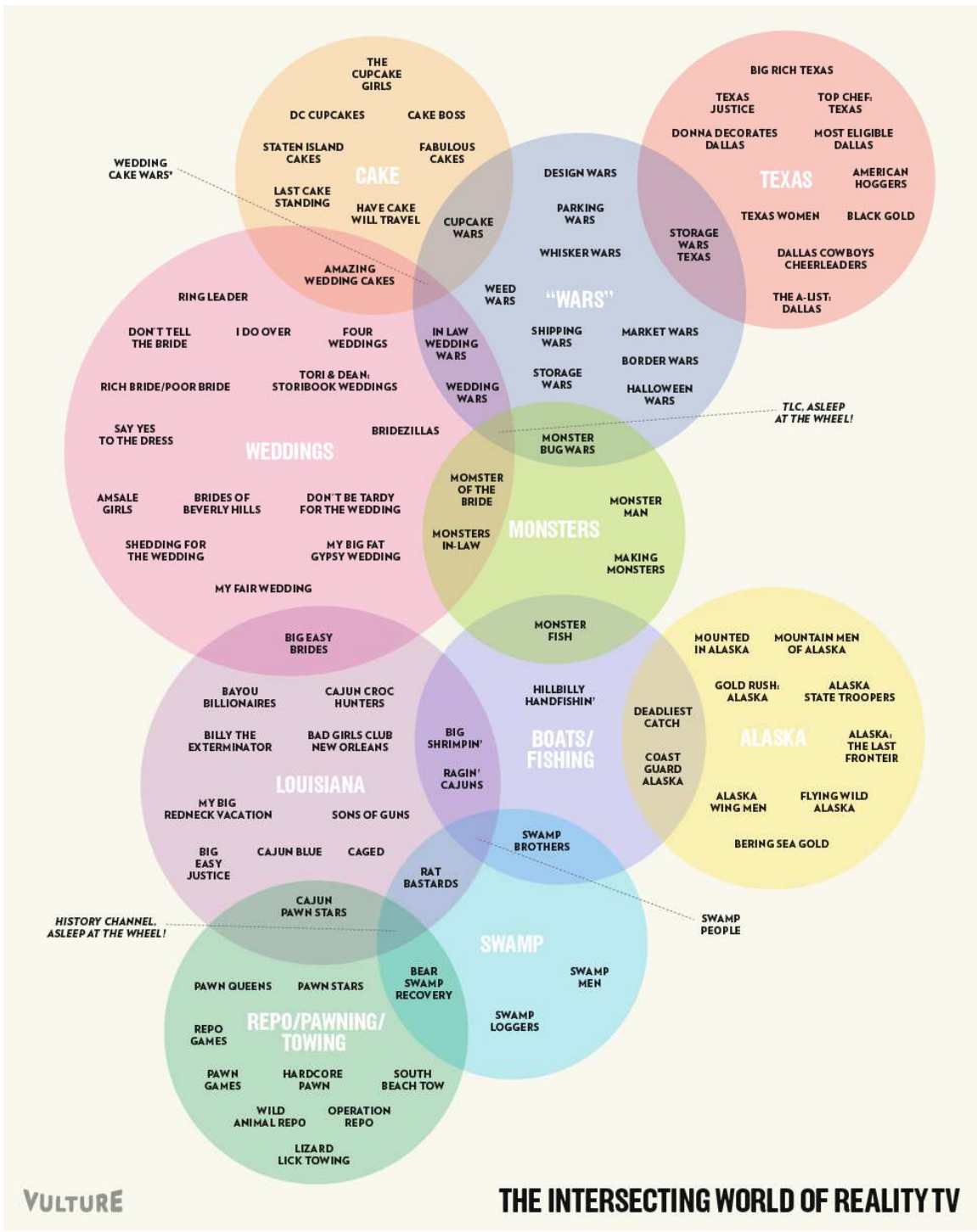
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From Lyons & Cotton (2012).