Surviving the Casting Economy: Reality Television and Cultural Citizenship, Consumer Labor, and Commodification

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Prologue:

As a kid, I watched all the typical networks. Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, and Cartoon Network among my favorites. Then in 2000, when I was in kindergarten, something revolutionary was thrust upon me, Survivor: Borneo. My dad was hooked the first episode, my mom shortly after, and then I was brought in. Somewhere between Richard Hatch’s first naked appearance, and the iconic merging of the tribes in season one, I was hooked. My family and I each had our own favorites. Some overlapped, like the underdog, retired Navy SEAL, Rudy, while others were completely different. Sometimes, we coalesced around the same villain (I will never forget Susan Hawk’s iconic “snakes and rats” speech as she cast her final vote in favor of the first Sole Survivor, Richard Hatch). Other times our house remained staunchly divided on a contestant. Regardless of the ultimate outcome, week after week we set aside an hour of our time to bond over our love for the show. This was a tradition that remained throughout my childhood, and still occurs occasionally via Skype when I’m away at school. Our tradition started branching out in 2002, with the introduction of American Idol, and has since expanded to include shows like MasterChef Junior, America’s Got Talent, Cupcake Wars, The Amazing Race, and the ever changing Real Housewives franchise.

When I left for college in 2012, I found myself feeling lonely and scared after moving eight hours away, without knowing a single soul in my new hometown. Thinking fondly on my family’s tradition, and feeling somber after missing my first Survivor night, I decided to do something crazy. Maybe it was the fury of emotions, maybe it was trying to procrastinate during midterm season, maybe it was sheer boredom after not finding much success with my new social life, whatever the case, I found the Survivor casting website. A new application cycle for
potential contestants had just begun and I felt compelled to let them know I was here and ready for my adventure of a lifetime.

I made an incredibly corny video, sitting in my dorm bed and just talking about what I deemed my “awkward life”. I talked about being a Midwesterner in a town chock-full of wealthy, skinny southern belles, getting attacked by an owl three weeks after I came to school, delivering a baby at seventeen years old (no, really. That happened.), giving a graduation speech to seven thousand people solely devoted to my love of chicken wings (my mother was so proud), and having my very core beliefs shaken after discovering I apparently was not pronouncing the word “Appalachian” right my entire life. The video was two minutes long and I submitted it online with a basic contact information form in mid-October 2012. I got the generic, “Thank you for your application!” email and forgot all about the entire thing. I didn’t even tell my parents I had applied.

Three weeks later, I got a phone call from a blocked number on my way home from class. I answered and thought it had to be a joke. The lady on the other end described herself as a casting director from Survivor, and said she wanted to see if I was still interested in being a potential candidate. After a few more basic questions, she requested to set up a phone interview with me about a week later, to which I happily obliged. The interview came and went in a flash, with questions about the stories in my video, my roommate, my summer job as a lifeguard, and my obsession with the show. The conversation ended positively, but with no guarantee I would ever hear back from her again.

Due to contractual obligations, I cannot discuss what happened post that conversation, however, I did hear back from her again. While I ultimately did not make it to air, the Survivor casting process was one I will never forget, and was a large inspiration for my continued
research on reality television. Although it was a whirlwind experience, I wouldn’t trade it for the world. Discovering the truth behind the casting process and experiencing first hand the unreal expectations potential contestants are expected to uphold, has sparked a new interest in myself that has yet to be matched in my academic path through Communications Studies. In this thesis, I aim to convey my passion and deep interest for this subject matter as both a fan and participant. I will also draw upon my own experiences in the casting process of reality television, to share why this genre and it’s many implications are so near and dear to me.
Introduction

The primary aim of the thesis I am creating is to explore the complex and often taken for granted role reality television has on contemporary American society. Discourses I will engage in to achieve this goal include neoliberalism, the concept of celebrity, consumer labor, and the irony bribe, among others. Neoliberalism, as defined by Teppo Eskelinen, is a political ideology that is marked by minimal government involvement in the lives of citizens. Free markets and individual responsibility outweigh the idea of a public good (Eskelinen 751). I will use this ideology to critique reality television’s impact on cultural citizenship. I will unpack the concept of celebrity, which, as defined by Matthew Guterl, “is a person in the public eye who, for better or worse, has earned fame or infamy, or found renown or scandal, as a consequence of some act or supposed quality, and is celebrated as a result” (80). I will use this definition to analyze the desire to participate in reality television, and assess cast members’ need to market themselves further than their fifteen minutes of fame.

I will also utilize the irony bribe, coined by Dana Cloud. The irony bribe essentially refers to the ability of RTV to be both real and fake at the same time, providing an ironic detachment from the program, while also inspiring a fervent love for it (Cloud 413). I will analyze this quality in reference to something I call the casting economy. Finally, I will utilize Mark Andrejevic’s concept of consumer labor to analyze reality television’s impact on the economy, as well as media and technology development both nationally and internationally. Under consumer labor, viewers have the ability to give valuable input on what they would like to experience, with their only compensation being participation in new, seemingly democratic television programming, for producers and editors to comb through and utilize in their

One term I have coined that will be used to tie many of these themes together is the “casting economy”. If reality television were truly “real” producers would be able to pull any random number of people off the street, place them in an enclosed setting, and see riveting drama soar. However, this is not the case, and a whole economy of its own, the casting economy, has risen behind this genre to ensure its success. The casting economy includes everything from the never-ending well of potential contestants seeking fame, selecting contestants to maintain a neoliberal agenda as well as the irony bribe, and the utilization of different locals both nationally and internationally to create sensational, yet addictive programming.

**Reality Television: The Beginning**

Reality television stirs many varying opinions in today’s society. It is deemed superficial, trashy or low-budget by many scholars, critics, and even fans, but underneath all of the seemingly meaningless challenges, tribal councils, and rose ceremonies lies race relations, class inequalities, gender politics, and even self-conception struggles, making it a fantastic site for cultural analysis. The situations we are exposed to and the interpersonal relationships and struggles we watch each week, help shape our culture, economy, and even political structures as a whole—just as events and trends in the contexts shape what we see on the screen. What we visually consume on reality television, and the hot-button topics and controversies of the moment, are mutually constitutive, and they both inform our opinions on societal issues at large.

Ideologically, reality television can be analyzed for its effect on identity formation, gender politics, class inequalities, and effects on society’s perception of beauty and body image.
However, economically, reality television does just as much, if not more. Reality television is a powerful economy-shaping force, specifically through its utilization of effective product placement, low-cost, yet innovative, production methods, connection to new technologies that allow for the rise of consumer labor, and the development of a never-been-seen before casting economy that continuously churns out successful reality stars for viewers to consume.

The origins of reality television (RTV) date as far back as the late 1940’s with Alan Funt’s, *Candid Camera*, and progressed further after the dramatic documentary following of the Loud Family on the 1973 documentary series, *An American Family* (Slocum). While light hearted entertainment like *Candid Camera* provided a family friendly outlet for viewer connection and participation, *An American Family* showed the inner workings of a family dealing with real, sensational issues like divorce, financial struggles and questions of sexual orientation. Following these dramatic turns within a previously considered documentary series, a new genre was born that viewers could be sucked into while finding connections to their own lives. Reality television is classified as utilizing non-actors (an assumption that later in this work will be proven to not always be true) in unscripted scenarios and watching how their “real” life pans out (Kowalczyk and Royne 249-250). While many question its “realness” and the genuineness of characters and situations they are thrust into, reality television provides a site for cultural and personal behavioral analysis as viewers (hopefully) identify themselves within a member of an RTV cast or relate to a specific scenario portrayed.

RTV also received a giant push in the late 2000’s after a shortage of writers in Hollywood left a need for low-budget airtime planning. The writer’s strike of 2007-2008 within the Writer’s Guild of America left many networks at a loss for new, affordable content and content creators (Slocum). The reality television genre swooped in to the rescue. By creating
programming with little to no script and/or low-budget “editors”, networks could help fill the void that classic sitcom and primetime scripted drama writers left, while slashing overhead and labor costs in the process.

Further Defining the Scope of This Work

Oftentimes disregarded as a mindless outlet of entertainment, the cultural, economic, and political importance of RTV often remains undetected. RTV is a site where the ideal American and neoliberal citizen is alluded to. This is achieved through a clever balancing act of praising those who possess desirable traits and shaming those who fall outside of cultural ideals and norms. This ideal citizen is not only created culturally, but economically and politically as well. By encouraging consumption, capitalistic tendencies, and the importance of one’s own class and labor, RTV can be a source for the creation of a self-reliant, successful member of society.

However, in order to achieve this level of influence, RTV needs to present itself in a way that commands our attention, hearts, and minds as viewers. By putting the right cast of characters on an RTV program, we can watch certain qualities thrive, while others falter. Creating this perfect balance has become an economic force in itself. Audition processes and rounds are often innumerable, even in the casting of just one season of one RTV program. Finding relatable, yet interesting cast members who will thrive—or sometimes just crumble to make for sensational TV—in front of viewer’s eyes is the heart behind the success of this genre.

This work will consist of three chapters detailing RTV’s wide impact on American society. The first of these chapters will be devoted to the cast and what I call the casting economy of RTV. There is an entire process to find and cast the perfect characters to complete the puzzle. The right balance of heroes, villains, underdogs, drama kings/queens, and downright
insane cast members is crucial to sending an influential message to viewers, as well as creating viewer loyalty week after week. I will draw on a lot of my own experiences here, especially in the way I was taught to alter my story or market myself to find success in the form of getting airtime. In this chapter I will look at representational logics of primetime television that I was asked to convey, and connect these to the creation and maintenance of Dana Cloud’s irony bribe.

The irony bribe works as serial drama in conjunction with its ties to surveillance and authenticity. To create and maintain the irony bribe, RTV needs a cast of constant affective or emotional laborers that are performing non-stop. This raises questions of who is being “real” or who is potentially presenting themselves in an inauthentic way. To elaborate how these themes operate in tandem, I will draw heavily on Mark Andrejevic’s work on surveillance, and I will contrast identity creation on shows like The Bachelor versus Flavor Of Love, as well as analyzing the complex sign system that is Kim Kardashian. Concepts such as celebritization and celebrification will be discussed as I analyze the ability of some RTV starlets to become full-on celebrities. I will also discuss the compensation, or lack thereof, for RTV performers, and the impact that the demand for affective labor has on the performers as well as the genre as a whole.

The second of the three chapters will analyze the audience watching RTV, specifically how RTV can be used to create the perfect neoliberal citizen at home. Creation of this individual will come on several levels, specifically ideologically. Several specific examples of RTV programming along with what they are suggesting about morality, herteronormativity, class and affluence, race, gender, hard work, and what the American Dream looks like today will be scrutinized. I will identify what RTV defines as the perfect subject, and how we see examples of a movement towards these ideals in the programming we mindlessly consume every day.
The final chapter will focus on RTV’s impact on labor and the economy on a broader scale. In this section, I will aim to discuss the overall shift from high budget scripted shows to low budget RTV and the implications of this. Notably, I will discuss how a low budget is continuously achieved through mechanisms such as product placement and its symbiotic relationship to corporate America, as well as analyzing who exactly are the laborers within an RTV program and when, where, and how much they work or are compensated (including local laborers for American RTV programs that film in other parts of the world).

Furthermore, I want to discuss the emergence of new global markets, jobs, and technologies as a result of RTV. These include the development and usage of new technology including body cameras, microphones, and set pieces that established practices of rapid creation and tear down. Furthermore, I will assess the development of social technologies such as texting, twitter, and phone or computer applications. I will use specific program examples to discuss RTV’s influence on citizen spending patterns. This will include the encouragement of consumption in general, as well as increasing demand and diversity in markets that already exist.

Also, I will assess the role of the viewer as a consumer laborer, whose connectivity and appropriately shared opinions can be harvested to produce immediate feedback for the creators of RTV programs. This input, gathered for free from the audience member, can then be used to shape programming in ways that will guarantee audience approval and success on both current and future seasons of a program. I would also like to look at and assess any environmental implications in the creation and production of both home-based and internationally-based RTV programs. Many of the goals of this chapter will be achieved through a quintessential case study of Survivor, and its relationship to the global economy, international laborers, and the environment of its shooting locations.
This work will take an expansive look at many facets of the RTV genre from a broad lens. I will utilize my own experience as a participant in RTV, specifically in chapters two and three, to demonstrate how many of the previously mentioned themes are connected and developed in this genre. Additionally, specific RTV programs are often used as examples or brief case studies, culminating in the final case study of *Survivor*, in order to illustrate larger trends within the genre as a whole. The hope is to appeal to a large audience of communications scholars as well as regular, at-home viewers alike, in order to draw attention to the complex meanings behind a product we mindlessly consume each day.
Chapter 1: The Cast

The Casting Economy and Bottomless Pit of Contestants

If reality television was completely true to form and represented real, human experience, producers and casting directors would be able to pluck ten strangers off of the street and plop them in a house, on an island, in a gym, or any other setting, and watch the drama we see on popular RTV programs soar. However, this is not the case. The casting of reality television is a critical balancing act, often with numerous levels, casting teams, and rings of fire that potential contestants have to jump through just to make it to an in-person interview, let alone in front of a camera. RTV depends on performances of spectacular ordinariness in order to be interpreted as both real and sensational to viewers, and demands this of its cast members (Turner, “The Mass Production of Celebrity” 154). In order to achieve this feat, RTV has its own unique process, a term I call its “casting economy”, in order to find promising participants, and create the entertainment RTV’s audiences have come to love.

As discussed in the first chapter, one of the many jobs of RTV producers is to not only cast “real” and relatable cast members, but also to put them together in a way that will lead to tension. By casting unique candidates and manipulating their environment, or forcing a small subset that will no doubt clash into close quarters, producers are almost guaranteeing a hit (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 104). The crucial step is finding the right puzzle pieces that will form the larger picture. In my experience with Survivor, this uncovering of the puzzle was a constant stress in all of my interviews. I was constantly asked what kinds of people I felt I would not get along with, what my political affiliations were, who I voted for in the last election, what my beliefs on sex and marriage were, and probed on several other hot-button topics. No doubt this
was to figure out who I would most likely butt heads with, and what scenarios would bring out the drama in me.

*Who Can Be Found on RTV, and How Did They Get There?*

Many walks of life need to be represented in reality TV, but we often see the same tropes, especially ones that play to the white, heterosexual male gaze. We also see creator identity in the consistent casting patterns of shows, in which creators cast based on their own preferences or how they see the world (Mittell 306). An excellent example of this is in *The Bachelor*, in which, according to the show’s IMDb page, all of the highest-ranking producers, directors, and writers are white males (“The Bachelor”). This pattern is also true for *The Bachelorette*, where only one or two females and minorities make their way into the top staffers (“The Bachelorette”). The casting process may be unique and more intensive at times than for other media outlets, but we see the same patterns that create predictable casts.

However, although predictable, the casting economy, in the current age of obsession with reality television, will never run dry, as there is always a never-ending well of fame or adventure-seeking individuals looking for their shot at stardom (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 11). In an age where it seems like everyone is increasingly connected via new technologies and media (to be discussed later), a common fervor has arisen in viewers in which they feel they have a shot to “cash in” on the big time—a statement that obviously has some validity, as I made it all the way to the end of the casting process from a two-minute homemade video on a webcam in my dorm room. The compensation for most contestants is in being granted participation, and there is no dwindling to the reserve of people willing to sell access to their lives (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 6). Whether it be for self promotion, business promotion, a chance to travel the world, or
even a thirty-nine-day vacation on a deserted island, participation in many RTV formats is often the ultimate goal. Besides my genuine love for the show Survivor and the RTV format, my next biggest reason for wanting a shot at the title of “Sole Survivor” was to put it on a medical school application. At eighteen years old, I had a hard time believing any institution would turn away the 2013 Sole Survivor!

Interestingly enough, many potential contestants I came in contact with during my time in the casting economy weren’t just average Joes and Janes off of the street. Many were previous contestants, fading (or faded) celebrities, and model-actors, “mactors” as they are known. These three types of contestants are increasingly taking over the realm of reality TV, and are present at some point in nearly every reality show today (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 3). Past contestants and demi-celebrities are obvious targets for guaranteed success in reality television, however, the “mactor” contestant, potentially the worst type of all in my opinion, has risen in the ranks and is often replacing real, genuine viewers in casts. Mactors are recruited through partnerships with agencies in their local casting area, or approaching other casting calls or runway shows. Mactors are often given life stories that are very different from their actual lives, and asked to take on this identity for the duration of the show. They are especially utilized when a casting team is missing a stereotype necessary to paint a specific fantasy or setting and they haven’t found a better “real” alternative who will provide drama, beauty, excitement, and the like. Mactors are often encouraged to lie, a value not typically hailed in reality television identity creation, and are told when, where, and how to do so (Prose 62). Even those who are real fans or genuine average Joes often have to relinquish the rights to their own life story in favor of something producers think may be better received, knowing that there are hundreds, if not thousands, waiting behind them who are aiming to please.
Labor and Compensation of the Cast

Whether or not someone is portraying their true self or a selfhood thrust upon them by those behind the scenes, producers are buying the labor of self-disclosure to that identity. This is done in exchange for, most likely, the equivalent of less than minimum wage, when all hours behind the camera are attributed (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 105). It is in this phenomenon that one’s self can become a commodity that now has monetary value to be bought and sold. Although participants are gaining exposure and extra compensation just by participating, they are often turned into commodities that the producers can exploit and peddle (Driessens 647; Holmes 111). What is unique to the labor process for the cast members, besides being bought, sold, and exposed based on identity, is the nature of their world. They are both the product and producer of constant affective labor throughout their entire time in an RTV program (Driessens 652).

Affective labor is often seen in service industries, and is defined by Michael Hardt as labor performed in order to create or change the emotions of another (Hardt 89). An example of this can be as simple as a flight attendant on a major airline acting as a motherly figure while caring for patrons, in order to make them feel safe and content. Affective labor in RTV relies on the contestant’s ability to constantly wear their heart on their sleeve, and give a spectacle of real emotion through confessional, arguments, falling in love, physical altercations, and family reunions—just to name a few (Holmes 113). To make it past the rounds of casting, one must know how to commodify themselves, and commit to consistent, authentic (to whatever identity they need to portray) affective labor to create the best version of themselves that can be manipulated by production staff. Once making it on the actual program, the casting economy can be summed up nicely by Francine Prose when she speaks about contestants vying for a
suits’ heart on *The Bachelor*. She notes, “A purchasing decision [has to be] made among twenty-five suitable, competing products who labored long and hard to commodify and sell themselves” (Prose 63). The never-ending surplus of fans, average Joes, mactors, fading celebrities, and previous contestants wanting a second shot, make the commodification of one’s self a crucial aspect of the casting process of reality television and the basis for the churning of this unique casting economy.

**Consistent Commodities: Surveillance, Authenticity, and Hybridity in RTV**

With so many waiting in the wings, a potential contestant must not only provide a commodified selfhood that carries drama and the ability to connect with viewers along with it, but also be perceived as real or authentic across many forms of surveillance. RTV is based on surveillance and authenticity, with a complex relationship being present between the two. Drawing on Mathieson, Mark Andrejevic discusses the two major forms of surveillance present in RTV, panopticism and synopticism (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 14). Synopticism is the obvious form of surveillance in RTV, where the many millions of viewers act as voyeurs of the few on television. However, panopticism is also present, in which few producers monitor the viewers to determine which contestants are the most consumed and thus, provide the algorithms to future success. Producers can use consumer labor information (to be discussed later) in order to tailor future casts, environments, challenges, and the like, specifically to consumers.

Surveillance also acts as an enticer for viewership in this genre in general, playing on the voyeuristic desires buried in many, if not all viewers.¹ Under surveillance, contestants must

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¹ This is especially true in the case of celebrity reality television shows such as *The Osbournes, Keeping Up with the Kardashians, Married to Jonas,* or any of *The Real Housewives* installments where viewers get a peek into the world of fame (Gillan 57).
perform constant and consistent affective labor and identity creation over multiple settings. This is the basis of authenticity in its relationship to RTV (Dubrofsky and Hardy 378). Surveillance is a means of verifying realness, whereas authenticity is when we, or someone we are watching on TV, consistently appears to be themselves, despite the panopticon. Authenticity is crucial to making reality television believable, and is most likely the reason why “quality” contestants are few and far between. In my experience, many of my rounds of questioning included the same questions over and over again, testing my answers across various days, times, hunger levels, energy levels, and any other confounding variables.

Authenticity is so crucial because RTV viewers connect most with moments that include genuine selfhood (Gillan 59). Whether or not this selfhood is directly relatable to their own experience, an honest performance (or very believable lie) is what draws the mass populous into RTV, as they perceive regular people are getting their shot at bigger opportunities. Many two-faced contestants are often revealed in RTV programming at some point, as any façade is hard to keep up 24 hours a day, seven days a week for as long as filming lasts (a feat of affective labor unheard of in any other field).

Viewers get an omnipotent gaze into the world of the show via personal confessionals, and access to all areas the cameras can reach at once. This gaze is often very hard to fool, especially if producers and editors want to reveal someone who is less than authentic. However, although it is crucial, authenticity brings along different success rates for different shows. For example, those who are more open with cameras and those around them tend to succeed more in shows where voting happens in real time whereas in shows where voting doesn’t occur or

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2 Other cast mates can also be used as vehicles to question a participant’s motives for being around. For example, one contestant accusing another on The Bachelor if they are there for the “right reasons”, pursuing love and not personal fame (Cloud 419).

3 For example, Big Brother, American Idol or America’s Got Talent.
winners are chosen based on wit and conniving abilities⁴, those who are duplicitous or two-faced have the same chance of success as every other contestant (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 125-129). Generally, audiences back those who are relatable and consistent when they get a role in choosing a winner, but often praise those who are conniving in shows, specifically gamedocs, where witty play allows one to advance further on their own.

The Balancing Act of Surveillance and Authenticity: A Raced Space

As described, two of the biggest things reality television capitalizes on are the balance of surveillance and authenticity, as well as the need for a cast who can successfully navigate this often-treacherous space (Gillan 58). One thing I would like to touch on however, is that this space is a raced entity, in which certain authenticities are privileged. To explain, in most RTV programming, whiteness seems to not need to be performed, shows comfort under surveillance, and aligns with common discourses of success today. Conversely, on shows where blackness is highlighted, it is typically associated with a discomfort under surveillance, a need to constantly claim the “Black Experience” as part of one’s identity, along with a connection to the ghetto, and a constant need to authenticate one’s identity (Dubrofsky and Hardy 373-374).

This is not unlike the way race is mediated in many contexts throughout everyday life. According to Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Antoine Hardy, even in shows where the black identity is allowed to flourish, it does so by re-centering whiteness as the ideal norm (376). Dubrofsky and Hardy analyze the performance of race in a traditionally white-centered reality television show, The Bachelor, which nearly always features a rich white suitor, plays on a major network and possesses an expansive budget to take contestants on high-class dates. Flavor of Love, in

⁴ The Amazing Race, Survivor and the like.
contrast, is centered around washed-out, black rapper Flavor Flav, airs on a lower-budget cable network, and awards participants with giant fake gold clocks to wear around their necks. *Flavor of Love* functions to re-center and re-affirm whiteness as the ideal by encouraging contestants to claim black or minority identities in a low-class, and often humorous way. In contrast to the princess-like characters on *The Bachelor* who conform to all white norms, the girls on *Flavor of Love* break these rules, flaunting their bodies in skimpy clothing, being overtly sexual, swearing, and excessively smoking and drinking.

Shows where the black or minority identity is allowed to be performed typically center this identity as a counterpoint to what’s expected, and can only be embraced in this setting. In a white-centered show, it is imperative to conform to white ideals. This means that minorities must act white, and constantly authenticate a white-like identity, in order to have a shot at sticking around. When they claim their true race, they are often cast aside as outsiders if not in the right race-centered show. Basically, if you’re white on a white show, you’re good to go, and if you’re black on a black show, you’re good, as long as you constantly authenticate your blackness. Conversely, whites can often traverse this space and be seen on black television and still find success. They may need to try to claim some elements of a black identity, if it is crucial to the show, like some white girls try to do on *Flavor of Love*. This performance may be scrutinized, but the contestants’ whiteness often places them above the rest to a degree where the authenticity of whatever identity they want to possess isn’t scrutinized as heavily.

On the other hand, if a minority contestant tried to claim their heritage on a white-centered show, and managed to make it past the first couple episodes, they would need to consistently continue to authenticate their identity as a minority and establish why even though they are different, they are purposeful to the show and its goals (Dubrofsky and Hardy 377).
This double standard of whites traversing and minority’s constant need for authentication, even in minority-centered shows, makes it incredibly difficult for non-white cast members to occupy RTV as successfully as whites, and negotiate the surveillance/authenticity teeter-totter. This places increased demands on minorities in order to take full advantage of the platform RTV is.

*Hybridity and the Case of Kim K*

Celebrities and reality television participants, which are increasingly becoming one in the same, can be read as cultural texts (Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies” 12). Icons who are “hybrids”, or who successfully occupy multiple raced, classed, or gendered spaces can often claim multiple authentic identities in order to connect with many audiences to find success.

There is no better example of this than Kim Kardashian. Kim, a reality starlet turned celebrity who is able to be “read” in various ways across race and wealth borders, can often connect and market her show, self, and all lines of products she endorses to a much larger and more diverse audience, which may be reason for her incredible success.

Kim Kardashian, specifically her body, is a complex sign system (Sastre 124). She can utilize different aspects of it to authenticate various identities, while managing to preserve others. Traditionally, the white female body is in constant progress, is connected to restriction, possesses a privatized sexuality, and is associated with a higher class. The black body, on the other hand, is less restrained, untamed, over-sexualized, and associated with a lower class (Sastre 123). Kim can tap into both these spheres in order to market herself appropriately for the task at hand.

Although it’s possible for her to switch back and forth, she needs constant authentication. This is where her reality television program, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, and the various spin-offs it has produced, has come in handy.
On every episode of *KUWTK*, Kim can be read as white or black, depending on her goals of the time. The entire series opens with a shot of Kim’s curvy backside, leading her away from whiteness (Sastre 126). Other shots like this, discussions of Kim’s sex tape with black rapper Ray J, or other mentions of overt sexuality, reinforce and authenticate this persona that she can enter in and out of. She even goes so far as to get an X-ray of her backside on an episode of the show to authenticate that she hasn’t had any plastic surgery. Conversely, other episodes of the show focus on her money and high-profile business meetings, where she is dressed conservatively and portrayed as a reserved, powerful, white-centered woman.

There are many examples of how she authenticates both identities, and a whole paper could be devoted to just this topic alone, but for now, it’s important to note that Kim especially uses her Armenian heritage to position herself as both white but also a minority, allowing her to traverse both spaces whilst under constant surveillance (Sastre 125). Although she does have to constantly justify herself and how she wants her audience to read her, she is able to do something that most stars can’t do. By tapping into different personas and commodifying herself in different ways, she can be white one day/episode to sell diet pills to white women trying to constantly police their figure, and then black or a minority the next, to sell curve-accentuating jeans to a population targeted for its supposed lack of restraint (Sastre 130). A lot of this mobility is granted due to her monetary and media status, however, it is interesting to note that this space can be traversed, so long as the participant can be read in a number of different contexts and authenticate those constantly.

*Extending The 15 Minutes of Fame: RTV Starlets to Actual Celebrities*
Recently, many scholars have begun talking about the demotic turn in society, where the ordinary person finds themselves represented in the media or has access to participate in the media (Driessens 646; Turner, “The Mass Production of Celebrity” 153). The American Dream is now slowly shifting from a Horatio Alger story of hard work and dedication, to a desire for fame and celebrity (Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies” 12). In reality television, the ordinary person now has a platform, so long as they pass the rigorous rounds of auditions and tests. Once on a show, depending on the nature of the program, RTV starlets often experience quick fame, followed by its rapid decline, as they integrate back into society post-appearance. Some shows bring back beloved participants, which allows them to re-enter the spotlight for perhaps another 15 minutes, but even then, they most likely will fade back into normalcy eventually. However, some reality television show participants have made significant names for themselves and have crossed over into celebrity territory. Elizabeth Hasselbeck, Kim Kardashian, Kelly Clarkson, and Gordon Ramsay are all examples of people who kick-started their rise to lasting fame via reality television. These types of people use the self-disclosure platform of RTV to promote themselves in ways that reach beyond their original show or potential (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 113).

Reality television has created participants who are accurately described by Su Holmes as, “the most famous non-famous people,” that can ride the paradox of extraordinary ordinariness well (117). RTV has connected at least part-time celebrity and fame with normal, everyday things like losing weight, building a house, getting married, or having many children, and is often seen as one of the lowest possible forms of recognition (Lawler 420). However, celebrity is not only a representational attribute, but is also discursive, has heavy ties to industry and

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5 Although many of these participants burn out quickly, either from lack of exposure, scandal, tax evasion on winnings, breakups, or many other possibilities.
consumption, and is culture-influencing (Turner, “Approaching Celebrity Studies” 13-14). Celebrity can be achieved by an individual, and it can also be studied in reference to its effects on our society as a whole.

On his work on the study of celebrity, Olivier Driessens discusses the processes of celebritification and celebritization. Celebritification is the means by which an ordinary person becomes a celebrity (Driessens 641). This can be easily achieved by an RTV participant commodifying one’s self whilst in the realm of RTV, and using this to spring themselves into other markets, or to just become a household name in general. Celebritization on the other hand, studies how the nature of celebrity is changing in our culture on many levels (Driessens 641). Celebrities and celebrity itself are both becoming more mobile, where fame can now be achieved in several markets at once (Driessens 643-647). This is much like Kim Kardashian being a reality TV starlet, while also being a highly successful fashion and makeup designer.

Celebrity is also becoming more migrant and diverse (Driessens 647-648). Celebrities are moving into completely different fields than where they started, such as someone in RTV moving to politics or business, but still using their previous fame to do so. Diversity also comes from the idea that we can turn anything into a spectacle using the ever-expanding media and economy (Abend). This rise of celebrity encroaching on everyday life has produced a wide variety of celebrities and topics for RTV programs that are based on day-to-day businesses, owning a bakery, or shopping for a wedding gown.6

However, just because an RTV star has managed to make a name for themselves, doesn’t mean they will stay for long. The pressure for newly formed celebrities to maintain their fame in

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6 The rise of the celebrity chef in RTV has stemmed from this idea of diversification, as people like Buddy Valastro from Cake Boss and Gordon Ramsay from Hell’s Kitchen, Kitchen Nightmares, MasterChef, MasterChef Junior (and several other programs), have been born and expanded their ordinariness to full-blown celebrity status.
an increasingly connected and democratic world has never been higher. The use of online networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Vine, Instagram, and the like are crucial in creating a parasocial self—one that allows the new celebrity to connect with as many people as possible, even though it is impossible to personally address everyone (Marshall 43). The role of an RTV cast member is not just to make it past all the hurdles of casting, proving authenticity, performing well under surveillance, being relatable, and completing a term on a popular program, but also to commodify themselves to gain permanence. The need to stay relevant and market oneself in order to make the jump from ordinary person with 15 minutes of fame, to an acclaimed celebrity, has never been greater or more demanding, now that RTV programs are often a dime a dozen.

**The Irony Bribe: Loving to Hate the Fake**

One last topic that ties together the cast of reality television’s role is the irony bribe. The irony bribe, a term coined by Dana Cloud, essentially refers to the ability of RTV to be both real and fake at the same time, providing an ironic detachment from the program, while also inspiring a fervent love for it (Cloud 413). Most viewers watching RTV know that at least some of the characters, plotlines, or issues are fabricated, pressured by producers, or formed in the editing room rather than during filming. However, RTV producers do an excellent job casting and framing individuals in a way that makes us connect with them or become emotionally invested in their journey. The temptations of a fantasy love world, an underdog success story, or a family reunion are so present in our minds that they draw us into these programs, however, many people experience an underlying ironic detachment to them, knowing deep down that its not all “real”.

As viewers, we can find “campy” moments in even some of the most believable and heartfelt stories or settings. This reinforces them as hegemonic ideals without feeling like we are
too gullible, even though, at the end of the day, we’re still blindly buying into a dominant ideology (Cloud 414-415). In my interpretation of this concept, I believe not all viewers experience the irony bribe, or even experience it equally. I think there are people who truly believe that when the latest Bachelor tells the stereotypically thin, white, blonde, rich, preschool teacher that he loves her with all his heart and proposes, he means it. I also think there are people who scoff at this moment and accurately predict the couple’s breakup in four months. There are also people in between, like myself. Believing in the fantasy world is enough to bring back viewers week after week, just as critiquing or laughing at some of the more sensational moments can do the same. While only viewing a program from one angle or another can promote loyal viewership, I think it is a combination of both that provides a strong following for a show. The irony bribe can also be used as a means of justifying our watching of RTV, if it arises in a setting where admitting you love Say Yes to the Dress may be frowned upon.

Because of the need for a strong irony bribe, it is up to casting and producers to find the right host of characters to air, which leads us back to the complex casting economy. Picking the right tropes of contestants in order to emotionally connect with the most people, as well as make viewers feel they are represented, even a little bit, is crucial to painting pictures of ideologies for audience members to consume (Gray 268-269). It is also on the cast to fit these roles and play to them in order to be beneficial to the show. In my case, I knew I fit the nerdy, underdog, quirky, young girl role (not a far stretch from my actual personality). Every interview, phone call, and meeting I had, I always played to that. In order to get placed on the show, I needed to be relatable and a role model for other young girls who wouldn’t identify with the professional models near their age, or any other character either. If I could be the nerd who challenged one of the popular girls and won in some shape or form, I would have served my role for the show.
(And vice versa, if I was squelched by the popular girl, I would enforce another ideology as well—whichever was the goal of the production staff.)

Concluding Thoughts on the Role of the Cast

The true cause of RTV’s massive success lies in the people or contestants it features. Interesting cast members create sensational media for viewers to latch onto that is unmatched by most scripted counterparts. This is such an important aspect of RTV, that it has garnered its own economy of sorts that constantly churns through a large portion of Americans seeking their path to stardom. Great cast members also create the irony bribe, which also functions to draw loyal viewership. While it may seem to be all fun and games for RTV starlets, it is important to note that the amount and type of labor expected from them is gruesome at times, and often inadequately rewarded. In order to find true success, an RTV participant must succeed through the treacherous space of surveillance and authenticity, and further commodify themselves as a diverse entity, to be consumed across other markets. Effective and interesting characters makes for programming that will not only promote specific neoliberal agendas, to be discussed next, but will also drive consumption, as well as the American and global economy.
Chapter 2: The Audience

Making Sense of Our World: Reality Television as an Accessible Meaning Maker

Everything we know about the world around us we construct in response to the experiences we have and the things we see. Gamson et al. suggests, “We assume that a wide variety of media messages can act as teachers of values, ideologies, and beliefs and that they can provide images for interpreting the world, whether or not the designers are conscious of this intent” (374). Visual representations seem to move towards the forefront in the battle for our attention and identity shaping outlets, and there is no better example of this than RTV.

RTV works much stronger than regular scripted television in shaping contemporary identity as it is presented to us as being “real”. Whether or not this is always the case is greatly up for debate, however, it provides a more accessible entry point to the world of entertainment, television, and visual imagery than anything previous. Jon Kraszewksi goes as far to say, “media that attempts to document reality actually shapes it, filtering through a variety of discourses and unequal fields of social power” (207). I agree with this statement, and feel reality television is one of the most influential meaning makers and contributors for the promotion of hegemonic ideologies. We can judge other “real” people within the reality television genre, and in doing so, we are judging ourselves. Whether or not this influence is used oppressively or as a liberating experience can vary, but generally, a trend towards favoring the same classes, races, work ethic, body images, and gender performances is observed.

Within RTV, we as viewers have a choice. We can identify with a particular character who looks like us, an underdog if we’re feeling downtrodden, or someone we aspire to be, which shapes the way we view ourselves and those around us to determine worth (Gray 268-269). This possibility is present in scripted shows, however, the “realness” of this genre is what gives it the
competitive edge as a meaning maker. Reality television’s naturalistic style as opposed to a traditional presentational style, allows us to accept ideals easily as we evaluate dominant characters and their opposing sub groups to determine where we belong (Mittell 162). We can either accept the norm and strive to be the perfect version of it, or we can find ourselves in a character who is in opposition to the status quo. If the latter occurs, we can either embrace our uniqueness and claim it as our own identity, or begin our journey towards advancing ourselves towards that which is coveted.

So what exactly is reality television presenting as the normal or “right” way to be? While there are hundreds of shows in this ever-expanding genre, we do see the same tropes constantly exalted. The rest of this chapter will focus on the reoccurring standards of beauty placed on both male and female viewers, as well as define and examine what race, class, sexuality and gender performance RTV suggests its viewers should attempt to gain and maintain. First and foremost, however, I will talk about reality television’s attempt to create the perfect neoliberal citizen. By condemning certain lifestyle choices and characters, reality television constantly pushes forward a neoliberal agenda onto all of its recipients.

Neoliberalism and Creating the Perfect Neoliberal Citizen: The Real Aim of RTV

Before jumping into how reality television consistently furthers a neoliberal agenda, I want to take a step back and discuss neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has five main pillars on which it stands on. These include: deregulation of the government, cutting public expenditure, an economy in which a free market rules, privatization of the government, and finally, eliminating the notion of public good for an approach based on individual responsibility (“What is Neoliberalism?”). Under neoliberalism, if you fail, it must be your own fault. There is no
government safety net or aid, and a move to individual commitment and demonstration of morality and other “good” ideals is valorized.

Between 1929 and 1961, incidences of an intact family unit were up 55% and the overall income up 60%. This led to a population that was 400% more likely to have discretionary income and sought to join the ideal middle class (Watts 306). Playing on citizens’ desires to succeed, early neoliberalism (just as it still does today) encouraged values in which individuals saw success if they pursued a heteronormative, middle class family, possessed self-responsibility, and obliged to good Christian values. As reality television arose around this era, it carried the neoliberal agenda with it. And in today’s society, RTV provides a “theater” that allows viewers to affirm and model neoliberalism (Couldry 3).

In this form of government, personal conduct is greater than collective decision making. An increase in individual responsibility is much more essential than the public good. This move places a burden on each person that implies if they fail, it is solely their fault. Self-fashioning lessons are present in RTV, that demonstrate how to be a better citizen and how to take care of oneself. A great example of this comes from the long withstanding show, Judge Judy. The show utilizes the “governmental nature of the courtroom” to demonstrate a “zero tolerance for nonsense” alongside neoliberalism movements in the 1990’s (Ouellette 223). Judy steps in as the governmental authority figure, perfect for the courtroom setting she’s in, and focuses more on the social situations of those she is presiding over rather than actually delivering justice. The individuals involved in the cases she and the show choose are labeled as self-made deviants and victims (Ouellette 234). Many of her cases involve petty things, however, she chooses to harp on the decisions made by those in front of her in order to end up where they did. The show seems to always feature those who are demonstrating non-neoliberal agendas, such as
cohabitation before marriage, extramarital affairs, those on welfare, and those who have children out of wedlock. Not to mention, many of these cases feature minorities as well, furthering stereotypes of certain minorities as deviant, dangerous, or unintelligent in comparison to the white, middle class, moral neoliberal citizen.

The naturalistic nature of RTV allows us to consume it as truth more easily, but furthermore, situates the audience outside of the issue at hand and in juxtaposition to the “bad” citizens (Ouellette 237). This is a key part of the genre. We as citizens are “good”, so long as we don’t make the same mistakes and poor judgment calls the people condemned on RTV do. It is no accident, however, that the “good” agenda lines up precisely with neoliberal ideals. This adds another role to cast members, performing as complex contestant-citizens.

In the same vein of Judge Judy, a new genre of primetime drama, the family makeover show, developed in response to worries of conservatives that the family unit was beginning to break apart—specifically due to the rise in acceptance or tolerance of homosexuality— in order to save the heteronormative, nuclear family (Becker 175-176). An example of this programming, Supernanny, presents viewers with two wealthy, heterosexual parents, performing to their typical gender roles, who just can’t manage to gain control of their children. Supernanny never suggests that this had anything to do with their lifestyle, living in a dysfunctional marriage or not sharing the labor of the household equally, but rather attributes it to their lack of good decision making (Becker 184). The job of the Supernanny is to come in and demonstrate the wrong choices parents were making when it comes to disciplining children, create well-planned schedules, and teach them how to properly train their toddlers (who of course will now also follow the neoliberal agenda and take responsibility for their actions as well).  

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7 Examples of other deviant-shaming shows, among others, are Sex Sent Me to the ER and My Strange Addiction.
Other shows further the neoliberal agenda not by shaming those who don’t follow it, but by praising those who do. This is especially true in shows centering around constructing a solidified family unit, and conforming to appropriate gender roles.\(^8\) Additionally, game documentary, popularly known as gamedoc, shows like Survivor, although about community, feature aspects of individual responsibility in the sense that only one can ‘Outwit, Outlast and Outplay’ the others to win (Ouellette 13; Prose 60). Moreover, makeover television shows focus on a before and after body that only the individual can control by seeking out the right forms of help—to be discussed more in subsequent sections (Weber 39).

Also, in the neoliberal realm of RTV, a rise in hard work and a talent-based economy has also been praised.\(^9\) In order to become talented, one must have perfected their craft through individual training. Programs that feature normal people showing their hard work to get a chance at receiving fame, fortune, and social mobility, represents the new American Dream. Everyone wants to be known, talented, and make an income that is disposable, and we see this is achievable by people just like us within the RTV genre. We just need to follow their lead and be hard-working and neoliberal citizens.

The Basic Citizen is Created, But What Else is Missing?

I have identified the neoliberal citizen as a trope of reality television, and an ideal it strives to produce. This individual is moral, hardworking, heteronormative, and takes

\(^{8}\) The Learning Channel, TLC, features several shows like A Wedding Story and A Baby Story that function to quell anxieties about things like motherhood and marriage. By portraying these as wonderful events that involve a lot of consumption and happiness, these shows are functioning to encourage the young female viewer to embrace the concept of the family unit and desire her own. All of these shows have a fairytale ending, however, they also feature hints at gender roles traditional to the 1960’s family unit, where the female is subordinate to the male (Stephens 195).

\(^{9}\) This is evident in shows like Project Runway or America’s Next Top Model, where skill determines worth, much like in a neoliberal society (Hendershot 246-247; Wells 34). This meritocracy is also present in shows like American Idol, America’s Got Talent and MasterChef.
responsibility for their own actions in order to succeed in a governmentally deregulated society. This definition is expansive, but there are things that are missing or could be developed further that RTV covets. Graeme Turner defines reality television as a space where ordinary people can gain access to media representation, and these spaces (shows) can be used to help individuals, while conditioning viewers on appropriate behaviors (153). These behaviors are indicative of specific class, race, beauty and gender standards, and are constantly reproduced through this philanthropic as well as normalizing genre.

Climbing the Ladder: Class Matters

Upward class mobility is constantly portrayed as desirable in RTV. Mike Meloy argues that RTV shows us a social system that allows us to believe we too can be mobile, and gives us access to a consumption based reality, as opposed to most of our labor-filled existences (“From Kid Nation to Caste Nation”). This is why it is so addictive and makes us feel like the lavish life is the best life. Access to celebrity “reality” can feel achieved as viewers are invited into a “social club that includes everyone, but also excludes everyone…providing the illusion that all can be a part of the select, privileged few” (“From Kid Nation to Caste Nation”). However, when we hear the stories of “real” families who have worked hard to gain access to this new lifestyle, we feel like we too can make it, as long as we take responsibility for ourselves. This ties into the neoliberal agenda as well, but makes the extent to which the upper class is deemed desirable clear. These types of shows also suggest that consumer power, not necessarily production or labor only, marks class status (“From Kid Nation to Caste Nation”). Basically, if
we can afford the Gucci bag Kim K is holding, we too are high class by association, even if that association is small and short-lived.\textsuperscript{10}  

This trend in consumption patterns that traces to connection with RTV and its participants—usually to gain access to their private, fame-coded world—can be referred to as affective economics, and relies on emotions in consumer decisions, which can be a consumption-driving force (Jenkins 61-62). Whole economies can be created or diversified in direct correspondence with viewers trying to access this illusory club.\textsuperscript{11}  

RTV also tells us certain professions are deemed worthier than others. These are almost always the white collar, elite positions. An interesting example that demonstrates this wonderfully, is the case of \textit{Survivor: Worlds Apart}. Aptly titled, the show focused on three different worlds participants live in based on their professions. Split into tribes based on white collar, blue collar and no collar—and dressed to match each respective class their profession codes to—the white collar team was the most aesthetically pleasing, spoke the most intelligently, and was the most desirable as a whole. The show made a further statement when the no collar tribe was almost immediately flushed out by their higher class counterparts ("Survivor: Worlds Apart"). By coding the middle and upper class as winners, and the lower class as losers, viewers can’t help but make the association that upward mobility, if possible, is the way to go.

\textit{Beauty Fades, But Plastic Surgery Won’t}

\textsuperscript{10} We also often get the most invested in shows in which an underdog from a lower class has the opportunity to move up the social ladder in front of our eyes, as in most cases on \textit{American Idol} or \textit{America’s Got Talent} where nobodies become somebodies on the spot, giving us hope.  
\textsuperscript{11} A few examples I have seen just in my lifelong viewership include things like new and popular lines of cookware used by the chefs on \textit{MasterChef}, further diversifying the kitchen cookware industry, as well as the selling out of new lines of at home waist trainers used by the wealthy, elite Kardashian sisters to maintain their physique.
Reality television also functions to teach viewers what beauty is and who can access it. It does this through many ways, two of which I will focus on: the aiding of unfortunate “ugly” souls on makeover reality television, and the praising or lauding of individuals on dating reality shows. For makeover television, we are entering a state Brenda Weber calls a “makeover nation,” in which one can attain their true identity and feel a sense of belonging and pride by overhauling their body or an inanimate representation of themselves, such as a car or a home (38). An “after” body, car, or house is always better than the original, and although every experience is on an individual level, the final products all code to the same standards of beauty that America as a whole has accepted are right.

A crucial thing these shows function to do is portray a sense of beauty, that also ties into the aspiration to be higher class. Makeover television shows normalize plastic surgery and break beauty into an attainable goal, so long as you have the high class resources to fulfill the necessary steps (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer 255). These steps include things like tummy tucks, breast augmentation, rhinoplasties, Botox, access to personal trainers, dieticians, personal stylists and therapists. All of these “tools” are used to make the perfect figure, the coveted hourglass with petite facial features, and places beauty into a high class realm that is often young and white. This gives a whole new meaning to the idea of the American Dream as well, in which the desire to excel in class to be able to access the expectations of beauty reigns supreme. This turn is slightly neoliberal in nature as well, with emphasis on the individual, and suggests that anyone can become successful, as long as they have the proper resources. This success, however, is coded more in the physical body than the nature of the decisions the body makes.

12 A prime example of this being Fox’s, *The Swan.*
Dating shows also present an ideal beauty, however, this beauty is not only in physical presence, but also in performances of gender and sexuality. Dating shows give women in particular the space to perform their gender roles for all of America to see while also giving them a space to challenge them as well (Gray 266-269). However, in order to be seen as beautiful, a contestant must perform the appropriate feminine identity: docile, complacent and submissive. Women who see success on dating shows that code for the true fairytale love ideology, are the ones who perform the hegemonic ideological version of femininity and are always coded as white, high class, thin, heteronormative and seeking traditional values. The last part is crucial here, because it implies that a person’s beauty can be stripped if they are immoral. This is why acquiring and maintaining the whole package of docile femininity is important. Because we see these girls constantly winning the heartthrob’s heart and finding love, we too believe this is what beauty in America looks like.

Conversely, these beauty ideals do not just apply to women. Men are occasionally featured on makeover shows. It is important to note that these appearances are generally few and far between, and are usually present to save a man from his dwindling masculinity—the male form of ideal beauty in the way of large muscles, a toned physique, well-groomed facial hair, a full head of hair and aggression or dominance (Weber 172-175). Average-looking men can get marginalized too, and it is their appearance on these shows that allows them to “reclaim” their masculinity while teaching viewers at home what coveted masculinity is.

_The Whiter You Are, The Longer You’ll Stay_

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13 Examples include, *Extreme Makeover* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.
14 It’s not hard to tell that this is the ideal for men today, especially as seen in shows like *Average Joe*, in which, upon being presented with average to below-average looking men, the female suitor chose a handsome hunk as her final love, who didn’t even arrive until over halfway through the season as a twist in the game (Prose 63).
As mentioned above, whiteness is valued for both class and beauty construction, so where does this leave those who don’t fit into this category? On shows where class and beauty are valued, minorities take a back seat or are missing entirely. It took The Bachelor franchise twenty-two seasons to finally cast a non-white bachelor, Juan Pablo Galavis (“The First Latino ‘Bachelor’ Makes His Debut”). And even this wasn’t that huge of a step, since he is an incredibly light skinned Latino with a more European “swagger” than most. If a true minority does appear on the show as a contestant however, their chances of staying are generally better the more “white” they act. Rebecca Pardo suggests that there is a clear, white, beautiful ideology of women (as discussed in the previous section), and if you are black, and you act black, you are not white or beautiful and therefore, not a lady (72-73). These types of individuals can no longer access the upper class “fantasy” portrayed in the show and are often eliminated very early on. Sometimes claiming a black identity or portraying one’s self in a ghetto-like manner can be novel to predominantly white, beauty seeking viewers, and may be beneficial for ratings. This type of contestant can stick around for awhile, but ultimately they will not succeed.¹⁵

What’s interesting is that a black contestant truly becomes more welcomed, liked, and critical to a show, the more mainstream—white—they act, or, as Pardo puts it, if they can be deemed “eloquent”, they’re okay (77). One example of this is James Clement, a grave digger from Survivor: China, who went on to replay the game multiple times. He was physically fit, played football (a traditionally white American pastime), was well spoken and educated, and worked several decent jobs to support himself (“James Clement”). Fans flocked to him due to his complex portrayal of masculinity in a space that finally could be occupied by a man of color. However, others similar to him have failed on the show, and have received nowhere near the

¹⁵ For a closer look at race in RTV, refer back to the analysis of The Bachelor versus Flavor of Love on page 20.
same amount of praise James has, notably because his attitude was one of the most coveted (and white).

As previously mentioned, a crucial role of the casting economy in RTV is to cast characters who will naturally lead to conflict. One of the easiest methods of doing this, as suggested by Kraszewski, is to always cast a high-strung, typically angry in temperament, urban black alongside a conservative, rural, naïve white (210). This allows for conflict to happen, but places it in the hands of a select few whites that most of the population won’t identify with. This is a common trope amongst many RTV shows, and proves to be a site for negotiating racism (with a little help from the editing process). This actually situates non-racist liberals as above their conservative, rural counterparts. However, this is a system in which praising one group still reinforces the underlying issue of racism (Kraszewski 210-212). Black stereotypes still run rampant in this genre, and although they are sometimes challenged, they are often used as props to situate whiteness and its connection to beauty, class, and citizenship above other races.

**Concluding Thoughts on Viewership**

Overall, RTV consistently promotes a neoliberal agenda, and also functions to serve as a marker for what makes a beautiful, successful, or “right” person. RTV consistently perpetuates dominant ideologies of whiteness, affluence, heteronormativity, and Christian morality, among others, all while infiltrating the unsuspecting American population sitting at home on their couch. In order to constantly perpetuate these ideals and remain unchallenged, RTV needs to continue to be mass consumed and relatable for viewers. This mass consumption has ties to both national and international economics, as well as media and technology development, to be discussed next.
Chapter 3: The National and Global Economy

Reality Television: A Global Economic Force to be Reckoned With

As P. David Marshall writes, “Celebrity taught generations how to engage and use consumer culture to ‘make’ oneself” (Marshall 36). Essentially, we are all taught how to consume, what to consume, and why to consume throughout our lives. There may be nothing as powerful as celebrity and the media in facilitating this process. From creating goods, new markets, jobs, and consumption patterns, RTV has made a large impact on labor and innovation around us. Overall, reality television is a powerful economy-shaping force through its utilization of effective product placement, low-cost, yet innovative production methods, and connection to new technologies that allow for the rise of consumer labor.

One of the most impressive things about RTV, is its ability to generate massive revenues and expand new markets, all while remaining low-cost in production. Compared to scripted shows which can reach costs of nearly a million or more dollars per episode, the budget for an RTV episode can range as low as $100,000 or even less (Jerpi). Low-paid cast and crew members, lower quality sets and filming technologies, as well as product placement all contribute to this decrease in cost. Similar to cast compensation and expectation, RTV has the cunning ability to employ “editors” to comb through film and create storylines rather than “writers” such as the ones on scripted shows. Simple title changes like this allow RTV creators to pay its content creators less, as well as expect longer and less-traditional hours.16

16 The only exception to the low-budget mentality of RTV is in a few programs where there is an implementation of celebrity judges or mentors who draw in similar salaries to scripted counterparts. For example, celebrity judges on the X Factor, like Britney Spears, reportedly made an estimated $15 million per season during the show’s run. On American Idol, Jennifer Lopez was reportedly taking home similar numbers as well (Strommen).
Corporate Sponsorship: Product Placement and The Insatiable Need to Consume

Product placement and corporate sponsorships have been around since nearly the beginning of the film and television industry. However, with the rise of seemingly infinite cable television channels and DVR technologies, more viewers are skipping the revenue-generating commercials altogether, creating a need for advertisers to think outside the box (Kowalczyk and Royne 249). The format of reality television creates a product-pushing friendly environment that can affect consumption patterns and brand perceptions within its viewers to a large degree. A great theory that links television viewing to consumption patterns, as described by Damien Arthur and Claire Sherman, is called cultivation theory (526). This essentially refers to the idea that an increased exposure to television and its content can create a new world perception on societal norms, structure, brand identities, and the creation or expansion of consumption values. Since reality television utilizes characters that are supposedly just like us, they possess a power that scripted programming does not.

Arthur and Sherman suggest that since viewers can identify with and model their own behavior after a “real” character, there may be a tendency to exchange viewership for perceived experience with a particular brand (526-527). What this means is that in creating effective parasocial bonds with cast members, a viewer can feel connected to their experience, or trust their perception of a good or brand. For example, if a viewer identifies with the soccer mom team on The Amazing Race and watches them praise Travelocity.com (a very prominent corporate sponsor whose services are often placed at the forefront in this series), he/she at home may feel that they too would like Travelocity.com if they used it to book their next vacation.

RTV can use a completely different, but just as powerful, version of word of mouth. Just as your trusted neighbor next door of ten years can tell you how much they love the new flavor
of Coca-Cola, Kelly Clarkson can do the same thing, and her opinion may be valued even more than someone a viewer has an actual relationship with, but doesn’t necessarily see himself or herself in.

Parasocial bonds and perceived trust in RTV characters can help sell products, but there is still much strategic planning behind effective product placement and corporate bonds. A great feature of RTV is that its low-budget, generally non-actor cast will have no problem shamelessly pushing a brand or product, as opposed to their art valuing, highly regulated, scripted counterparts (Elliott). However, disorganized, frequent brand interjections, no matter how loved the character, have proven to fall flat. There is a meticulous science behind making a product placement or brand identity really take off.

One main target audience of brands is viewers who have no previous experience in the field at all. Makeover shows in which viewers identify with the average American being transformed, or shows in which completely new skills or personas are created within unfamiliar fields, are prime sources for this (Arthur and Sherman 527). Viewers who don’t know much about the home-cooking industry or the fashion industry can watch shows centered around them, and use characters they identify with to develop a completely new sense of brand consciousness, leading them to buy into a fresh field. This doesn’t mean, however, that viewers who are familiar with a field aren’t swayed by RTV product placement or brand pushing, it just means that RTV and its corporate partnerships have the power to issue in and completely shape the consumption patterns of an entirely new market category.

Further, RTV has the ability to use its parasocial connections and perceived realness to reach those who already participate in a particular market, and convince them to buy in excess. By both partnering with corporate sponsors and/or creating their own line of products, RTV
allows for diversification in many previously utilized consumer markets by attaching a new face or brand to previously represented goods. As RTV has grown, so has dozens of lines of cookware, fitness equipment, instruments, clothing items, and virtually any other consumer good imaginable, representing a different RTV program or fan favorite contestant. This drives new market fervor into previously stagnating, or even profiting markets in a way that is hard to match by any other innovation or advertising.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{How and Why Product Placement Works in RTV}

Product placement needs to be realistic in order to be effective. It is better received when the brands or products are related to the content of the show and the show is highly regarded. A smooth integration of products, along with viewer desire, relevance, and potential brand familiarity, all play a large roll in well-received marketing. RTV has the unique ability to feature products both visually and verbally in a fluid manner, which its scripted counterparts have not been able to master (Kowalczyk and Royne 250). Additionally, producers of RTV and advertisers alike recognize that many consumer decisions, even some of the simplest, can have emotional foundations (Jenkins 61-62). Advertisers can tap into the “real” emotions of pregnancy, weight loss, marriage, virtually anything seen on RTV, and consumption can be encouraged to an extent that other forms of advertising may not be as successful at (Stephens 200-201).

\textsuperscript{17} As an example, \textit{MasterChef} takes home cookware that is already sold in nearly every department store or online outlet imaginable, and reinvigorates it in order to influence further consumption. Many home chefs slaving away each day may have their own extensive set of cookware and cookbooks, however, as they become fans of \textit{MasterChef}, they may suddenly find themselves buying their favorite contestants frying pan line, crockpot or anything else that they may already have had lying around in their kitchen at home.
A great example of prime product placement that utilizes all of the necessary marketing components is Survivor’s partnership with Sprint Mobile (Lafayette). As not only a potential participant, but also a loyal viewer of the show, it is very clear that at times, Survivor can be an hour-long ad for Sprint. However, due to the nature of its integration, it works. By watching a character I see myself in get to call home or have a video chat with their loved ones they sorely miss, I become even more engrossed in their story line, and as a by-product, the Sprint brand. Sprint already has a positive brand familiarity in my mind as one of the nation’s leading mobile phone companies, but now I can associate it with someone I align with connecting with missed family members in a way that doesn’t break the flow of the show and actually adds something to my experience as a viewer, and the contestant’s experience within the game. This is so incredibly unique, and something only seen in RTV, which contributes to its huge success with product placement and corporate sponsorships.

Because of this amazing ability of RTV to connect to viewers and subtly sell products like never before, the ability to place a product within an RTV program is not cheap to come by. A short, seconds-long placement can cost upwards of two million dollars and can contribute to funding much (if not all) of reality television’s already low production costs (Kowalczyk and Royne 252). However, it’s not just corporate America seeking to advertise in RTV programming. RTV programs themselves have also developed the savvy business tactic of seeking out brands in order to draw in more viewers, not just market to the ones they already have (Elliott).18

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18 A great example of this is The Voice’s partnership with both Starbucks Coffee and KIA Motors (Baysinger). By promoting the show itself within this partnership via signs or promotions at local KIA outlets or Starbucks’ locations, The Voice can also get added advertising and potentially draw in a new audience who displays a previous loyalty to KIA or Starbucks’.
Finally, one last thing to note in the vast realm of product placement and reality television, is viewer reception to product placement and the perception of “realness” of the RTV program in question. Many are skeptical that not all reality television is completely unscripted. While this may be true for some programming, it is not a complete definition across the board. As discussed in previous chapters, many producers of RTV admit that while they don’t script their shows, they do push contestants towards certain tense situations, like reducing their spending allowance or food rations, leading to inevitable conflict (Andrejevic, “The Kindler, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother” 262). However, many viewers are still incredulous of how much of what they see on RTV is unaltered. This skepticism has lead to a weakening of the parasocial bonds between reality television characters and their viewers, leading them to resemble bonds between scripted show actors and viewers rather than the traditional RTV character-viewer relationship (Russo ii-iii).

According to a study done by Zelyne Russo, this doesn’t eliminate RTV’s advantage over others in the product placement realm, but it could cause a weakening of the effect a specific brand or advertisement within an RTV program can have on viewers (ii). Overall, many factors contribute to effective product placement and corporate sponsorships within reality television. Brand desire, effective parasocial relationships between contestant and viewer, relevancy, smooth integration, and previous lack of knowledge within a field or lack of previous brand identity, can all be unique to RTV, and allow it to be a major advertising force unmatched in the media industry. Entire new markets can arise and expand on a national and global scale, leading to labor, environment and production changes throughout the world.

The RTV Inspired Technological Boom
RTV has been a major source of media convergence in the current technological age. Shows like *Survivor*, among countless others, have combined the Internet, texting, social media and surveillance technology, contributing to their successful rise, as well as thrusting them into the forefront of our global economy. By normalizing surveillance and increasingly relying on viewer participation through new media outlets, RTV can keep its production costs low, while sending new markets and technologies to skyrocketing profits.

With the rise of a new format that desires to truly capture the human experience, comes a rise in new technologies to capture these self-documentation and surveillance moments. RTV has changed the equipment rental process, as well as led to a rise in cost-efficient digital production technologies, and a need for professionals who know how to use them (Goldman 23). Rental houses that used to be utilized only by low-budget, no-name films, or the independent arts industry, are now becoming a true hot spot for the one of the nation’s fastest growing genres. Where there is a demand for more and more rental houses, comes a demand for laborers to work them and be familiar with the equipment sold in order to aid in set-up, tear-down and usage during filming. While this may seem to be a small-scale growing market, the impact it has on the number and types of laborers can be great as RTV continues to grow.

Furthermore, many RTV programs rely on close up footage of human expression, or clandestine alliance making. This has led to an increase in the global production of equipment such as the helmet cam, cigar cam, various spy cams, mini DV cams, vest cams, clamshell backpack cams, and other technology, as well as the need to create mobile control rooms on shows where crews need to be hidden. In their infancy, RTV shows that used this type of footage needed to be able to utilize cheap but effective technologies that could be replaced easily when damaged under harsh shooting conditions, and could be customized to fit their specific
needs. This led to a rise in need for workers who could travel or be on location with film crews, as well as be able to replace or teach about new types of recording equipment (Goldman 25-27).

This was a huge change in the global economy of film and television production, a shift in what Toby Miller et al., would deem as an example of the changing NICL, or the New International Division of Cultural Labor (3). The need for rental houses and skilled technicians across the globe to feed the increasing RTV appetite has increased dramatically and has helped change the way media everywhere is created. Now, many scripted movies and television shows are beginning to learn from RTV, and their ability to shoot innovative camera angles and in harsh conditions previously very hard to film in, and are changing their global production needs as well (Goldman 30). Clearly, many production technologies have needed to arise and meet the demand for these low-cost, sensational programs, however, just as many technologies have also arisen for viewers to get in on the RTV action and either emulate what they see on air, or connect with contestants who represent them.

As mentioned previously, many reality television programs rely on the idea of surveillance to give “realness” to their programming. Many shows rely on confessional-style narration, in which the contestants can share their experiences and inner monologue. This vulnerability is what viewers latch on to and connect with the most. Mark Andrejevic argues that this type of format trains viewers for their role in the new digital economy of our generation (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 98; Andrejevic, “The Kindler, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother” 251). We want to express the things we desire and have goods and services tailored to us, however, many of us feel threatened by the “big brother” aspect of this type of economy.

What surveillance shows do, is train viewers to be more accustomed to this vulnerability. RTV has essentially normalized and popularized the idea of surveillance, leading the rise in
technologies allowing for viewers to be surveyed themselves (Andrejevic, “Visceral Literacy” 322). By connecting with a character who enjoys being monitored, or seeing benefits from declaring their every opinion and allowing it to shape the world presented to them, we as viewers are becoming desensitized to this type of control our digital society is moving towards. As we are accepting this new economic model, we are investing in new technologies and platforms to express ourselves. Andrejevic states, that, for example, post the initial boom of *Big Brother* and *The Real World*, webcam technology sales skyrocketed (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 74-75; Andrejevic, “The Kindler, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother” 261). People began to emulate their favorite characters and tried to get in on the action of personalized mass confession.

This also allowed for a new format in casting, in which viewers could do the work for casting producers and send in their own personal tapes in an easy, regulated manner. No longer were the days of physical head hunting. Now eager, ready to be watched viewers could make their way directly to a casting agents’ doorstep without either party really moving a muscle. This phenomenon, falls under the category of consumer labor within the casting economy and is a major reason RTV is so successful, despite being low-budget.

**Social Media and Texting: Technologies of Consumer Labor Driven in by RTV**¹⁹

This surveillance idea of reality television also changed the way viewers presented themselves online, and changed the format of social media platforms. The idea of constantly being watched and having the ability to update an invisible audience on one’s life 24/7, led to the shift from social media being told only through images, to the concept of status updates and the ability to “like” brands and media outlets to tell one’s own story (Stefanone et al. 512-513).

While viewers may wrongly think they have a large invisible audience of fans waiting to hear their every thought, they are correct in thinking they have an audience in general. By posting their opinions on social media, liking brands, or utilizing other apps to connect with shows and send in questions or votes for fan favorites, producers can get a sense of what viewers want to see or who they want to see. Mark Andrejevic writes extensively about the concept of consumer labor in the digital economy, however, he draws many connections to reality television and free audience labor. Essentially, in reality television, viewers (consumers) have the ability to give valuable input on what they would like to experience, with their only compensation being participation in new, seemingly democratic television programming, for producers and editors to comb through and utilize in their programming, ensuring its success (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 17-18; Andrejevic, “The Kindler, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother” 256-257; Andrejevic, “The Work of Being Watched” 230). This is a brilliant strategy implemented by producers and advertisers, in which consumers hand over value-enhancing labor, with the only payout being a sense of indirect involvement.

Many social media outlets like Twitter, Vine, or even the massive YouTube, have roots in the RTV movement, and the desire to be heard and seen, but are mainly used now as widely extensive market research. Consumer monitoring is placed in the hands of the consumers themselves thanks to interactive technologies that enable significant participation (Andrejevic, “Reality TV” 15). For example, when a new Survivor app comes out for the iPhone and allows you to cast your vote for the “fan favorite”, a massive viewer opinion poll is created that helps producers effectively cast their next all-star season. Additionally, when American Idol enlists viewers’ help to tweet in their questions for contestants during a result show, they are effectively getting no-cost content for a ten to fifteen-minute portion of an hour-long show. This is effective
consumer labor, something uniquely utilized by RTV, and is linked to growing interactive media outlets. The use of the Internet as a massive communications device that can be surveyed widely has also led to a rise in effective consumer labor. Large proportions of dedicated fans flock to show websites, play games, or post on fan message boards expressing who and what they love—or hate—which can all be combed through to create content that will appeal to the most audience members possible.

Further, *American Idol* had a massive impact on our society by aiding the introduction of both texting and text-to-donate outlets. American Idol, as outlined by Henry Jenkins, utilized media convergence, in its use of a new media format, texting, to gain extensive market research on which contestants viewers wanted to see stick around for another week (59). A large proportion of the show’s audience reported that they learned how to text just to vote on the show, which is a great example of media convergence leading to the rise of a new technological outlet (Kessler). Specifically, in its second season alone, *American Idol* received more then 20 million votes in the form of calls or text messages each week—indicating a larger potential viewership than most news outlets of the time—with one-third of those who sent in text votes reporting that they had never sent a text message before (“AT&T Wireless Text Messaging Takes Center Stage With Unprecedented Performance on FOX’s American Idol”; Graham; Prose 59). *American Idol* alone was a huge factor for ushering in texting, a current cultural phenomenon that bleeds into all aspects of our daily lives in 2016, while still being utilized to harvest consumer input.

This combining of two or more previously distinct media outlets has proven to be so crucial for RTV, and the success of technologies, like texting or social media outlets, associated with it. Furthermore, *American Idol* also helped usher in a completely new idea within media convergence, by introducing texting that aided society in a new way. Text-to-donate fundraising,
developed in 2005 by AT&T’s Marian Croak, wasn’t necessarily the first of its kind, but was the most successful in its campaign for Hurricane Katrina relief in partnership with *American Idol* (Kessler). On the whole, RTV has created a new global economy and a demand for low-cost, extreme environment withstanding production equipment, as well as fostered a rise in new technologies for viewer engagement with RTV programming, that allows consumers to both connect with characters, as well as provide no-cost labor to producers.

**RTV and the Rest of the Earth: Local Laborers, the Environment, and Tourism**

Although there have been several mentions of RTV’s potential impact on global economics, ideologies and cultural labor, this work has primarily focused on RTV’s impact on American society. While this is a large and important discussion, this work would be lacking if I didn’t at least briefly discuss further global implications of RTV and its production and consumption. An entire body of work as long as this one could focus on RTV throughout the world, and its ties to politics, global community making, technological advances, and the like, however, I would like to conclude with a case study near to my heart on how RTV, specifically American RTV shooting on location internationally, can bring positive effects to other populations. While there are exceptions to the general patterns I will outline from *Survivor*, this is the common trend for most ethically responsible American RTV brands, and is heuristically valuable as an example for RTV’s global impact.

*Case Study: Survivor, An Ethically Responsible RTV Brand Connecting the Globe*

Many critics question how *Survivor* could be anything but detrimental to the environments it inhabits during production. In setting up three separate base camps (one for
production staff, one for the first 8-10 castaways post-elimination and one for the remaining castaways eliminated after the midway point of filming), constructing an elaborate set for its Tribal Council, taking over multiple beaches for castaway base camps, and building elaborate challenges on pristine land, it’s hard to believe that the environment isn’t demolished post-filming. However, the show’s creator, Mark Burnett, has established a franchise that recognizes the need to return the often previously untouched land to its former glory. Crews are instructed to take pictures both before and after production, and are known for their immaculate cleanup—leaving not even a single unwanted scrap behind (Henderson). *Survivor* also takes great care to educate its crew and contestants on the local wildlife and vegetation in order to prevent any accidental human harm to the setting. I can attest to the hours of training on what plant life could and could not be harvested, what animals could and could not be hunted, and what areas of the beaches and islands could not be built upon. *Survivor* goes as far as to include this in the contestant contracts, outlining punishments and even disqualification clauses if any environmental protection rule is broken.

In addition to protecting a flourishing environment, *Survivor* also instills growth in the local economy of its shooting location. During its production, each installment of *Survivor* created many jobs both directly related to filming, and also as a side product of the crew and cast’s needs. For example, in *Survivor: Cook Islands*, there were reportedly 184 locals employed in tasks that could not be done pre-production or by on-site crewmembers. These employees collectively made over $500,000 U.S. dollars and did everything from driving boats, transporting contestants, painting, constructing sets and teaching on local culture or practices (“*Survivor Micronesia, Episode 16*”). Additionally, local landowners made over $100,000 renting out land to the *Survivor* production team (Zurowski). This is a prime example of the New International
Division of Cultural Labor, the NICL, which the changing and expanding global Hollywood is utilizing. As mentioned before, the NICL is essentially a globalization process in the form of outsourcing and new dividing of labor, especially in the American film and television industries (Miller et al. 3). No longer are the days where a television show is filmed, produced and constructed in Hollywood alone, and *Survivor* is a fantastic example of this.

Many additional jobs were created to support the needs of the cast and crew. Local grocers, shop owners, and food service outlets needed to respond to the increased demand for their products from the *Survivor* base camp, and the overall economic boom that was only just the beginning for their previously unknown islands. Each installment effectively became a weekly hour-long tourism commercial for the filming location. Both the beautiful, artistic shots of each filming location, as well as the appeal of being a *Survivor* island, shed light on these new areas, bringing increased tourism to a now booming economy. As an example, places like the island of Palau saw a tourism explosion that was unheard of, and caused the nation to completely redesign visitor accommodations (West). This increase in economic growth also brought an increase in cultural growth and awareness.20

Furthering the cultural branch of *Survivor*’s positive impacts on its filming locations, is its ability to highlight and bring aid to cultures and causes that needed it. The show has featured dozens of reward challenges across nearly all of its seasons, in which the winners get the opportunity to visit underprivileged communities within the filming location. Contestants have done things like bring school supplies and toys to local schools that lack them, or bring food to communities that are struggling. Not only does this allow the franchise to directly give back, but

20 Benefits like this bring a whole new aspect of the casting economy into light—the casting not only of potential participants, but also the casting of locations and local populations. A separate casting economy within the larger one can be fueled by the desire of global populations to be featured on popular American programming, as well as producers’ needs to find perfect shooting locales to complete the puzzle.
it also provides a means in which the influence of the show can inspire others to aid as well. By highlighting previously unheard of areas that need assistance, *Survivor* can provide a platform for those without a worldwide voice to earn the help they need.

*Survivor* has sparked several charities and missionary groups to look at some of their filming locations, as well as partnered with several notable causes to provide more aid than ever before. For example, during the production of *Survivor: Africa*, creator Mark Burnett had an eye-opening encounter with the horrific HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa, that is often forgot about in other parts of the world. To bring awareness and help to this issue, a reward challenge and episode was dedicated to the challenge winner bringing HIV testing kits and medical supplies to an underprivileged village that needed them, as well as beginning of the long-term partnership with the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric Aids Foundation (“‘Survivor: Africa’ Joins the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatrics Aids Foundation to Highlight the Global HIV/AIDS Pandemic”). Not only did viewers get to see a relatively forgotten about side of the world and its struggles, but they could also support the Elizabeth Glaser foundation through an annual online *Survivor* auction, in which all kinds of memorabilia could be purchased. Loyal fans could buy pieces of the set, castaway headbands (called “buffs”), immunity idols and many more highly coveted items that would directly benefit a global charity, as well as the specific medical aid of many of the *Survivor* locations.²¹

Overall, the *Survivor* franchise has had a positive impact environmentally, economically, and culturally on the international locations it films within. Through its protection of the physical

²¹ Some scholars suggest that this does little but fuel a sense of compassion fatigue (where we feel we have helped much more than we actually have just by watching seemingly altruistic programs), as well as situate America as a dominant Western society, continuously in need of colonizing the rest of the world. For more information on these views, see H. Leslie Steeves article, “Commodifying Africa on U.S. Network Reality Television”, as well as Susan Moeller’s article entitled, “Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death”.

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setting, job creation, tourism influence, and increased cultural awareness, *Survivor* is an entertainment vehicle unlike any other. Not only is it a television product consumed by millions of Americans week after week, but it also allows populations all over the globe to soar to new heights. It seems the nations that host the production of the show don’t just survive after the taping of *Survivor*, they thrive.

**Concluding Thoughts on RTV’s Impact on The American and Global Economy**

By creating mass-consumed and highly connectable media, RTV has the unique ability to drive affective consumption to new heights. This consumption can be found in corporate spending, as well as in time investment in new interactive technologies that allow for the gathering of consumer labor. Budgets can remain low for RTV programming, thanks to effective consumer participation in content generation, as well as in creating and maintaining corporate sponsorships and product placement deals. However, this overwhelming power does come with responsibility, as it can affect the rest of the world as well. It is because of this that ethical accountability is needed from those who work in RTV as they continue to affect other world populations. *Survivor* is an excellent example of a socially responsible brand that promotes consumption, while also creating jobs across the world and taking care of all environments it films within. While we see many of RTV’s implications at home in America, its effects bleed throughout economic, labor, and environmental issues internationally.
Concluding Remarks

What’s Next for RTV?

So where do we go from here in the grand scheme of reality television? As I have said several times throughout this piece, RTV is often deemed a trashy\textsuperscript{22} media outlet to be scoffed at, but this couldn’t be further from the case. Scholars, viewers, friends, and family members alike can all find something in this piece that they can directly relate to, speaking to the vast populous RTV reaches. With this large scope, comes a large responsibility. It’s not that the content of RTV needs to be made classier, or promote different agendas, as I think there is a pure entertainment value in even the trashiest programs, and encouraging individual responsibility and morality can only help society if viewers pick up on it. Rather, RTV should place its focus more on being a socially responsible media outlet. Just as in the case study at the end of the final chapter, RTV impacts much more than just the national economy and ideologies.

Survivor, like many other shows that have similar filming processes, have a duty to not only produce consumable content back home, but also need to remain cognizant of the international effects of its programming. Whether they film domestically or internationally, RTV needs to be aware of environmental impacts of its production, national and international impacts of its product placements and market creations, and its duty to create fair labor compensation and conditions for its employees at home and all over the world. Since RTV does not seem to be going anywhere anytime soon, this is the direction I urge that it must go in. More programming should follow in the footsteps of Survivor and other responsible brands in the genre, as many other RTV brands do not show this attempt for ethical completeness.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22}“Trash” has gained significance recently, as analyses of our “trash culture” have arisen. For more information, see Gillian Pye’s, Trash Culture: Objects and Obsolescence in Cultural Perspective.

\textsuperscript{23}Although scripted, Lifetime’s UnREAL is a great source for looking at the potential damage caused from ethical incompleteness in RTV.
No matter what the content, what agenda it is promoting, or who is watching, underneath it all, RTV needs to remain aware of, and ethically committed to, its ability to shape many global forces. Regardless of how many drunk Bachelors and Bachelorettes are put on the screen, or how many fights they’re getting into, it is the program’s duty to be mindful of their ever-expanding impact both at home and across the globe. While RTV is consistently ascertaining that to be right is to take responsibility for oneself, it needs to follow its own agenda and be conscientious and moral in how it affects the rest of the world behind the cameras.

RTV On the Whole

Overall, it is clear to see that RTV is a massive media force in both American and global societies. We construct our world based in part on the images presented to us, specifically by the media, and RTV makes consistent use of this. Reality television possesses several unique attributes, such as its distinctive casting economy, and ability to garner incredible amounts of productive consumer labor. These characteristics, among many others, make it a true force to be reckoned with in our daily society. I hope to have enlightened both scholars and average American viewers at home on just how critical this genre is. By taking a wide lens focus and analyzing many large aspects of RTV, I hope the importance of its study has been conveyed.

RTV possesses much more than what meets the eye. Critical engagement of many RTV texts we passively watch, and inadvertently produce, every week can provide a window into today’s American society, as well as provide a glimpse into its future. I hope to continue avidly watching reality television with both a critical eye and a desire for entertainment. I also sincerely hope to continue my studies on this topic in the future, as I do not see this media giant going anywhere, anytime soon.
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