

Are Actors Really Real in Reality TV? The changing face of performativity in Reality Television

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Abstract

Reality television (TV) has achieved broad popularity in Australia and worldwide with its ability to permeate a range of social spheres, most notably the domestic sphere. It has also blurred the lines between real people in real situations with 'manufactured' performances in worlds specifically created for narrative. There is probably no better representation of a performative culture than the one that exists in Reality TV, nor one that brings to light so vibrantly the notion of performance within society more broadly. The aim of the present paper is to deconstruct the perception of 'reality' within Reality TV by focusing on the pre-, peri-, and post-production techniques adopted. Theoretically, this deconstruction is informed by symbolic interactionism and in particular the idea that all individuals perform their characters for an audience in their day-to-day lives (Goffman, 1973). Butler's (1990) notion of performativity as central to defining identity will also be drawn upon. As such, the present paper is a discussion paper that explores performativity in Reality TV, using examples from well-known Reality TV programmes to highlight theoretical points. At the pre-production stage the present paper explores the use of audition-related terminology emphasised in the majority of Reality TV programmes, and consider the selection of contestants, which more accurately reflects a casting process. At the peri- and post-production stages, performance and narrative play a significant part in the audience engagement of these programmes, but are not always engineered by spontaneous performance. A range of industry techniques are adopted to influence the perceptions of the viewer and to enhance the sense of reality and conflict. The contribution of this paper is the joint consideration and synthesis of performativity and Reality TV production techniques. As far as the authors are aware, this nexus has not been addressed before. As such, the present paper aims to provide theoretical as well as practical insights in to the area.

1. Introduction

Performativity can be part of a real or fictional world, experienced by live audiences (theatre) or a performance replayed at a later date. The latter is often referred to as an 'illusion of performance' and in particular performed on film or television (TV). Paradoxically, Reality TV is an illusion of performance. It is structured reality (or edited reality) where performers cannot perform in the traditional sense. According to (Corner, 2002, p. 263), a "performative, playful element has developed strongly within new kinds of factual production resulting in a degree of self-consciousness now often displayed by the participants in observational sequences". They are unlikely to have performance training but they are expected to perform for the directors/producers (who structure the reality for TV) and the dotting (and often highly critical) audiences. There is probably no better representation of a performative culture than the one that exists in Reality TV, nor one that brings to light so vibrantly the notion of performance within society more broadly.

Reality TV has achieved broad popularity in Australia and worldwide with its ability to permeate a range of social spheres, most notably the domestic sphere. This will be elaborated upon in section 1.1. *The Allure of Reality TV*. Reality TV has blurred the lines between real people in real situations with 'manufactured' performances in worlds specifically created for narrative. Baltruschat argues that producers have gone beyond what would be considered

socially acceptable viewing of TV programmes and “have accomplished this by staging media events and engaging audiences in online environments”. (2009, p. 42) Reality TV also has the potential to serve the function of normalising antisocial behaviour for the entertainment of others. Interestingly, through this process of normalising, the viewer ‘learns’ what is socially acceptable in contemporary Australia based on the performance observed in what they perceive as ‘reality’ through TV. Silverstone (1999, p.70) cites Hill (2005, p. 176), making the point “that the success of performance, in everyday life as on the bounded space of stage and screen, depends on the judgements and acceptance of an audience”. This new reality actor is uninhibited, creative, innovative and imaginative but is also vulnerable and naïve. Reality TV has normalised their real world thinking.

1.1. The Allure of Reality TV

The popularity of Reality TV has been an economic game changer for the creative industries (Andrejevic, 2008; Biressi & Nunn, 2013; Hill, 2005). Quoting from the *New York Times* (Hill, 2005, p.6) states: “reality programming is so popular it has changed the economics of the television industry”. Record ratings have been confirmed globally, changing the face of advertising and creating unprecedented demand for reality content which lead to a proliferation of reality style productions (Hill, 2005, p.33). The demand for advertising time during episodes of Reality TV programmes is greater than for traditional TV formats because of the broader demographics of potential viewers and the extended capacity for product placement. Production costs are less than producing dramas, prompting programmers to broadcast more hours of Reality TV than episodic dramas. For example *The Block*, *My Kitchen Rules*, *Big Brother*, and *Survivor* provide significant incomes for independent producers and increased advertising revenue streams for the broadcasters (Hill, 2005, p.34). Possibly the best example of independent producers developing successful Reality TV is Simon Fuller’s *Pop Idol*, which first aired in 2001 and was licensed to broadcasters around the world through a myriad of *Idol* spin-offs such as *Australian Idol*, *American Idol*, *Norwegian Idol*, and *World Idol* to name a few. This success of independent producers was in stark contrast to the traditional in-house development of programming concepts by broadcasters, and widened access to the television industry significantly whilst simultaneously boosting employment in the creative industries. For example, *The Voice* employs 250 crewmembers each week for the duration of the series. This is far greater than the approximate 40 crewmembers likely to be involved in the production of a typical drama or metropolitan news programme in a given week.

Obviously there is something alluring about Reality TV not only to viewers but also to possible participants in shows. Reality TV makes expert use of conflict and resolution, themes central to other popular forms of entertainment such as film and theatre. Characters are presented, some likeable, others not so. In Australia in particular there is often a focus on the underdog culture, and the flip side of this in Reality TV narratives often involves the unlikeable characters getting caught out and being served their just deserts. Hill (2005) argues, “another way in which audiences judge performance in reality programming is to consider characterisation and storytelling”. Reality TV has voyeuristic elements in that it allows low risk exposure to people, environments, and social issues, as well as the emotional and behavioural impacts for real people.

Another broadly appealing element is the perceived capacity for an ordinary person to become a celebrity or be discovered for a talent they have no other means to express and receive success for. (Hill, 2005, p. 12) believes “these reality programmes encourage a variety of performances from non-professional actors (as contestants, as TV personalities) and this level of self-display ensures that audiences perceive such programmes as ‘performative”” This contrasts to the previously closed-off domain of TV that was reserved for those already wealthy or famous. However, some limits to this are discussed in Section 2. Reality TV has also managed to evolve with social media trends and has adopted a range of media outlets aimed at engaging viewers by allowing them to vote for or against contestants, go online after the programme and watch ‘behind the scenes’ or other extra content, following various contestants via Facebook and Twitter, and to blog on programme websites about contestants and anything programme related. Streaming Twitter comments has become popular during live Reality TV. This interaction promotes a sense of belonging that audiences enjoy. It is the producers’ way of creating a relationship with the audience suggesting loyalty and trust. Handing over the voting to the audience, allowing them to exhibit approval or

disapproval, is apportioning responsibility and trust with the viewers as participants (Kjus (2009, p. 278).

1.2. Rationale and Aim

The aim of the present paper is to deconstruct the perception of 'reality' within Reality TV by focusing on the pre-, peri-, and post-production techniques adopted. Theoretically, this deconstruction is informed by symbolic interactionism and in particular the idea that all individuals perform their characters for an audience in their day-to-day lives (Goffman, 1973). Butler's (1990) notion of performativity as central to defining identity will also be drawn upon. As such, the present paper is a discussion paper that explores performativity in Reality TV, using examples from well-known Reality TV programmes to highlight theoretical points. From these perspectives, Reality TV can be seen as a mode to highlight, maintain, and/or challenge many aspects of the human tendency to perform their identity, such as saving face, impression management, ritual states, and finally sacred and stigmatised selves (Goffman, 1967; 1973). Section 2 provides a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings and implications of analysing Reality TV through a performativity lens and introduces pertinent theoretical concepts that inform the readers understanding of Section 3. Section 3 serves as a reflection on practice at various stages of producing Reality TV programmes. The contribution of this paper is the joint consideration and synthesis of performativity and Reality TV production techniques. As far as the authors are aware, this nexus has not been addressed before. As such, the present paper aims to provide theoretical as well as practical insights in to the area.

2. Theoretical Implications: Performativity, Dramaturgy, and Ethics

In this section a range of theoretical concepts are introduced, including the two key philosophies of production: expressionism and realism. The production techniques used in Reality TV are discussed in relation to Goffman's (1973) notion of dramaturgy and Butler's (1990) notion of performativity. Both theories are concerned with the ways in which identity is performed in the social world and how such performances relate to a sense of reality through the means of social constructs. From these perspectives, Reality TV can be seen as a mode to highlight, maintain, and/or challenge many aspects of the human tendency to perform their identity. Such a discussion inevitably raises questions around the ethical aptitude of Reality TV and those who produce it.

2.1. Philosophies of Production in Reality TV: Realism and Expressionism

In the 1920s, Andre Bazin (realist) and Sergei Eisenstein (expressionist) posited opposing theories concerning film form. The opposing concepts of interest are the use of long shots vs. montage (mise en scene vs. editing). Bazin and Eisenstein were not to know the important role their theories would play as the foundation of visual literacy a century later. The application of expressionist as compared to realist techniques within Reality TV will be in Section 3.2. Both philosophies are used in various ways to increase the sense of authenticity and reality within Reality TV; however, both are methods of visual manipulation of viewers.

Expressionism in cinematography portrays the subjective experience of the characters, as opposed to objective events as they occur, aiming to "abstract, distort, and hence transcend the look of everyday reality in order to represent the world" (Fabe, 2004, p. 38). In line with the tradition of expressionism, Eisenstein adopted a dialectic approach and was a key proponent of the use of editing and montage in order to enhance the ability for manipulative connotation. Bazin embraced a realist approach to cinematography, where the creation of film is still considered the production of art but "the photographic image is more like a thumbprint...because the object captured by the camera's lens literally leaves its imprint on the work of art" (Fabe, 2004, p. 49). Therefore, the aim within realist cinematography is to show events as they occur, as opposed to attempting to influence the perception of the viewer through expressionistic techniques. To achieve this aim, Bazin promoted the use of long shots and minimal editing, based on his hypothesis that "the film image ought to reveal reality whole, not by cutting it into tiny bits" (Mast, Cohen, & Braudy, 1992). The long shot is key to portraying a pure piece of narrative, it is seamless and storytelling happens in real time without the attempt to alter perceptions of time or space (Fabe, 2004). In realist cinematography, the shots are not only long but also static, editing may occur but is likely to be utilised in subtle

ways to create a seamless narrative, and visual contrast is avoided (Fabe, 2004).

2.2. Reality TV and Performativity

The use of language is central to Butler's (1990; 1997) conception of performativity. Reality is socially constructed and a key means of the construction of reality and our own identities is through the language we use or through speech acts. The words we use in our day-to-day lives to perform our identities and roles within society are means of maintaining ideological conventions. Our identities and the components that comprise them such as gender, sexuality, and religion, not only maintain ideology but are also products of ideology (Butler, 1990). Males and females, heterosexual and LGBTI for example have been differently valued in mainstream society and the language adopted across social institutions and the invisibility of diverse groups serves to perpetuate the marginalisation of some social groups.

Butler (1997, p. 86) states: "In having a speech act silenced, one cannot effectively use the performative". The main method adopted within Reality TV to silence the speech of participants is editing. This allows those with power in broadcast television to decide which parts of who's story will be told by editing language and using it out of context. Reality TV silences speech acts at another more fundamental level; by casting in a homogeneous manner and only casting 'token minorities' for the sake of diversity, many social groups are silenced and rendered socially invisible in Reality TV. Such an approach to Reality TV production maintains ideological conventions and promotes antisocial behaviour amongst participants in programmes by televising the most shocking and therefore entertaining content. The widespread appeal and franchising of Reality TV concepts, such as *World Idol*, also raises potential concerns regarding the representativeness of those cast and the risk of globalised social norms that perpetuate marginalisation.

In the discussion of mainstream discourses it is worthwhile mentioning that the use of casting agencies in the initial phases of contact with potential participants and related terminology provides an immediate cue to perform when compared to audition related terminology. Although the distinction may be subtle in other genres of television, the notion of auditioning based on a related skill or being cast is unambiguous, and brings to mind a distinct discourse that will influence the performativity of those going through the casting process.

2.3. Reality TV and Dramaturgy

Goffman (1973) argued from a symbolic interactionist perspective that individuals actively perform their identity, much like actors in the theatre, for an audience in their day-to-day lives. This idea is referred to as dramaturgy and suggests that all people experience 'front stage' and 'back stage' processes. On the front stage the individual is concerned with actively managing the impressions that other people have of them through feedback cues they receive during all social interactions (Goffman, 1973, p. 4):

Thus, when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for [them] to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others, which it is in [their] interest to convey.

In this way, Goffman's work is distinct from Mead's in that the latter work concentrated on the internal aspects of identity, whereas Goffman gave priority to the external influences on identity formation and maintenance (Allan, 2011). In the backstage the individual prepares him or herself to perform appropriately in the public front stage. A key function of these front and back stage processes is to save face, to perform in a way that will be considered socially appropriate and congruent with the way the individual wishes to be perceived.

2.3.1. Impression Management in the Absence of Feedback Cues

Because performing and maintaining impressions of the self are interaction-based processes, in the case of Reality TV the nature of performing the self becomes augmented. The individual is aware that they are being observed at three levels. They are observed directly by other contestants in the show, directly and indirectly by production crew and producers of the show, and indirectly by the audience. Dramaturgy suggests that each of these three levels of observation will influence the performance of the individual. Individuals can work to manage the impressions they are having on other contestants (and to some extent the production crew whilst off camera), however, they are unable to gauge the reactions of the viewer at home and therefore their broader image in the social sphere.

Often times, this is exacerbated by the fact that Reality TV participants are sometimes intentionally kept together away and from the outside world and are often unable to access media outlets such as newspapers. This inability to gauge audience reactions and the broader perceptions of themselves places the power in the hands of the producers and means that they have the final impression management role. The peri- and post-production techniques outlined in Section 3 are used as narrative tools to influence the perceptions the public have towards the participants and increase interest in the show by making some individuals appear to be likeable with hero qualities, and others to be the character audiences love to hate. The formal rules of the show, as well as the informal rules that develop as an inevitable function of social interaction, constitute a new set of ritual states and versions of sacred and stigmatised selves that are unique to the region of the show. These will never be totally unique however, in that they will be based on a foundation of mainstream ideology and have already been influenced before the cast meet one another because of the contrived manner in which casts and narratives are developed.

2.3.2. The Presence of Cameras: Habituation vs. Sensitisation

It is likely that the filming approach and associated techniques adopted by the production crew will influence the performance given by participants. This relates to the difference in levels of awareness regarding camera presence when comparing the realist fixed rig approach and the expressionist 'multi-cam iso' approach. In fixed rig contexts such as *Big Brother*, cameras are often located behind mirrors or other set pieces and do not move. In such a setting it is likely that participants in the show will become habituated to the setting. Their consciousness of the fact that they are not only performing to each other but for a wider viewership will peak upon entry to the house but will decrease over time and this will alter their performance. By contrast, in 'multi-cam iso' contexts such as *My Kitchen Rules*, participants are constantly aware that they are being filmed. The camera moves with them and is always in close proximity in order to achieve the expressionistic close-up. In this context, performance requirements are omnipresent and participants are sensitised to them.

As such, participants' attitudes, behaviours, and intentions may be different across these two approaches; not based solely on the setting or competition but based on the level of awareness of camera presence. The emphasis on, and use of, facial close-ups in expressionistic Reality TV shows such as *My Kitchen Rules* is intuitive in terms of Goffman's theory of performance. The tendency of editing footage so as to manipulate the sense of time and space, and to increase a sense of narrative based on conflict, has been outlined above. Goffman suggests that there are two streams of communication; the language one might use and the behavioural elements such as facial expressions and mannerisms. Both Butler (1997) and Goffman highlight the potential of language to be used as a means to consciously influence or manipulate other people. But the second stream of communications outlined by Goffman that incorporates facial expressions and initial reactions to events is considered to be less easily monitored by the performer.

Hence there is a propensity of observers of an individual's performance to focus on characteristics that are "considered to be the ungovernable aspects of [their] expressive behavior as a check upon the validity of what is conveyed by the governable aspects". This human tendency is well known by producers and used to their advantage when editing episodes "and sets the stage for a kind of information game-a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation and rediscovery" (Goffman, 1973, p. 8). Goffman also notes that emphasis is placed on the second stream of communication particularly in times when the observer is not acquainted with the performer. In this situation, the contestant is acting in a way that is socially acceptable given the context at the time

of filming, but the editing process misrepresents temporality and alters the final performance of the individual, which the observer must depend on to form an impression of the overall performance. This process results in an increased awareness of what Goffman referred to as the stigmatised self; role-distance has occurred and the participant is unable to manage the impressions that others have of them.

3. Creating a Sense of Reality: Reflections on Practice

The focus of the present paper is to challenge the perception of 'reality' within Reality TV by focusing on the pre-, peri-, and post-production techniques adopted. Each of these three phases will be discussed in turn. At the pre-production stage the present paper will explore the use of audition-related terminology emphasised in the majority of Reality TV programmes, and consider the selection of contestants, which more accurately reflects a casting process. At the peri- and post-production stages, performance and narrative play a significant part in the audience engagement of these programmes, but are not always engineered by spontaneous performance. A range of industry techniques are adopted to influence the perceptions of the viewer and to enhance the sense of reality and conflict. Reality TV has three key elements: interactivity, narrative conflict, and audience engagement and it is essential that the casting process supports these. The contestants need to be able to interact and compete with their fellow players, understand the mechanics of dramatic conflict and create and elicit empathy from the viewing audience. So, from a casting perspective, suitable contestants are essential for the success of the production.

3.1. Pre-Production Techniques – A Focus on Casting

In many cases competitors need not have explicit talents but clearly perform an identity that producers believe will play a significant role in creating an engaging narrative:

Ask any reality show producer what is necessary to create a hit show and the answers are usually the same: an interesting cast and storytelling (Huff, 2006, p. 32).

For the purpose of this paper it is important to differentiate between the processes of *casting* and *auditioning*, and to offer a clear definition of Reality TV casting. The term audition refers to the process of engaging contestants who have attributes that are pertinent to the programme. For example, in auditioning vocalists for a singing competition, selection is based on vocal talent. A particular skill is explicitly assessed and contestants are chosen according to their mastery of that skill. The practice of auditioning for the American reality genre programmes began in 1930s. The host of the original *Amateur Hour*, Edward Bowes, described it as giving “aspiring performers—singers, comedians, impersonators, and others—a chance to perform for a nationwide radio audience” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013, para.1). Many performers got their big break through this means and went on to have successful careers. However, selection of Reality TV programme contestants is rarely based upon the auditioning process, at least not entirely. For example the selection criteria for contestants is the auditioning process used by *Big Brother*. Unlike talent shows (*The Voice* and *The X Factor*) where contestants are chosen based upon their ability to perform, *Big Brother* relies on a more implicit method of casting. According to *Big Brother* Executive Producer Peter Abbott there is a distinction between casting for a drama and a reality television programme. “In a drama you have very defined characters and how they relate [...] in Reality TV it is the opposite [...] You work backwards putting together real people [...] and asking does that make an interesting cast” (Roscoe, 2001, pp. 481-482). Abbott (2001, p. 481) explains the casting process appropriate for *Big Brother*:

In casting the show, the producers were looking for a group of people who would be able to cope with the pressures of being locked away for up to three months, able to deal with the cameras on them 24 hours a day, and psychologically complex enough to be of interest (to themselves and the audience) for that amount of time.

Despite the use of audition related terminology emphasised in the majority of Reality TV programmes, the selection of contestants more accurately reflects a casting process. Professor Robert Thompson argues, “If film is a director’s medium, and television drama is a writer’s medium, Reality TV is without question a casting director’s medium”. (Carr, 2004a, para.4) In many cases contestants need not have explicit talents but clearly have a persona or appearance that producers believe will play a key role in creating a conflict with other contestants. Therefore the definition of casting for reality TV relates to the practice of producers, or casting agents, selecting contestants that will play a distinctive role in the narrative of the production; or more to the point, be able to ‘pull’ a large audience.

Casting as a production process, aimed at increasing conflict and interest in characters and the show, becomes increasingly pertinent the longer a Reality TV show has been running. As the unique concept loses its impact, and the addition of new challenges becomes tiresome, the role of casting becomes more important. In this way it is evident that selection of contestants for Reality TV shows is developmental, and there has been a transition from auditioning for talent to casting for appearance and personality. Within this context, casting agents play an integral role. The role of casting agents and companies in Reality TV is to find “regular people who, trapped in artificial constructions with cameras rolling, are abnormally interesting” (Carr, 2004, para.11). Priority is given to people who have the potential to create differing relationships during the competition. Ratings on the recent series of *My Kitchen Rules* confirm that the number of viewers increases dramatically when there is potential for contestants, who do not have particularly agreeable dispositions, to be eliminated from the competition. (OzTam, 2014, np), The practice of looking for everyday people who are abnormally interesting to populate Reality TV programmes is a clear paradox when considering the perceptions of reality in Reality TV.

Evidently, a considerable amount of background work now goes in to casting contestants, work that would not be necessary were auditions the main process of selection. A more standardised approach has been adopted in recent years, with production companies employing psychologists as part of the casting process. Background checks and personality testing of potential contestants have also become more prevalent as producers and networks aim to ensure that they do not run afoul of the broadcast authorities (Blair, 2010; Carr, 2004b). As an example of how exacting the process is, *The Apprentice* receives over a quarter of a million applicants to be whittled down to 16 contestants. The process is extensive with applicants having to “make it through six rounds of cuts, two extensive questionnaires, a medical exam, an intelligence test and the kind of background check usually reserved for secret agents” (Carr, 2004, para.9).

Although conflict is one of the main goal, it is common practice to select safe or conventional ‘edgy characters’ so as to avoid civil litigation and any embarrassing developments as a result of contestant behaviours before, and potentially during, the programme. This balance of edgy and safe is also important when considering viewers. Social groups that have historically been categorised as ‘other’ or deviant, based on religious, sexual, and other factors are less likely to be cast and so are less likely to be represented as part of reality. O’Dell (2014, para.9) writes that “in the history of *Big Brother* there has never been in any of their seasons more than one black man per cast or more than one African-American woman”. It is also the same situation for LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or an intersex person). The issue is that Network executives are concerned that attempting to move into a relationship distracts some contestant’s focus. If O’Dell’s (2014, para.16) investigations are accurate “the thought of it playing on the unscripted air waves is just too much for TV executives to face”. It is reasonable to expect that a process similar to that of *The Apprentice*, which must drastically reduce the number of applicants in a short period of time, would adopt heuristics or basic stereotypes as a means of quickly categorising potential contestants. In this way Reality TV can serve the function of maintaining social inequalities and misconceptions about various ‘other’ groups.

3.1.1. Who is most likely to be cast?

The casting for Reality TV depends on the particular programme. *The Bachelor*, for example, is quite specific in its casting choices – female, heterosexual, single, and within a specific age frame. The show’s recent ‘apply now’ application initially asks for single men (aged 27 – 38) and single women (aged 23 – 35). This is a clear example of mainstream ideology perpetuated through Reality TV; males should date younger women. If applicants meet the first

criteria, they are then asked for information about a number of personal details including thoughts about their future partner (TenPlay, 2015). The recent call for contestants for *Restaurant Revolution* 2015 on the Seven Network requests photos of the team, a short video, and contact details. The point to be made here is that the casting process is conducted in-house, or by casting agencies, and is not always a transparent process for the applicants and the ways in which they may be portrayed throughout the series.

Graeme De Vallance, from casting agency *Cast of Thousands*, reveals the values that are foremost in the casting process: “There is no hard and fast rule but two things must stand out for me and those are honesty and integrity. We always want to cast people who have some sort of likeability or connection with everyday people”. Pearson 2015 para.12). This likeability and connection is likely to be based on a sense of familiarity and to promote the representation of the same kinds of Australians on Reality TV at the exclusion of other kinds of Australians. When ‘others’ are cast, Reality TV producers or casting agents often cast what is colloquially known as ‘token minorities’. In this particular case the term ‘token minorities’ refers to the casting of a minority group representative to avoid discrimination laws and appease minority group viewers. A study conducted on *The Bachelor* and *Bachelorette* series in the United States found that from 2009 – 2012 there were only one or two minority ethnic contestants, most being evicted in the first round (Cheng, 2015). However in 2013 both programmes had six minority contestants. The reason was for the sudden increase was a racial discrimination class action that had been taken against the show’s producers for the lack of minority group representation (Cheng, 2015).

In 2015 *The Block* had no ‘token minorities’, whilst *My Kitchen Rules* had two. However in past seasons, participants from cultural minority groups have been a cast source of conflict. The very first season of *The Block* (2003) introduced partners Gavin and Warren who went on to win the season. In *My Kitchen Rules* (2012) successful applicants Peter and Gary were portrayed as the villains and very high audience ratings were registered on the nights that they cooked. Whether this was contrived or not cannot be substantiated. However, in an interview with Jessica Chandra (2012, para.5), Gary revealed that:

Certainly a lot of the creation of the characters on the program comes from the editing, there’s no doubt about that. There were a couple of occasions where I was made to seem nasty because of the editing.

On the 2014 season of *My Kitchen Rules*, producers cast gay couple Tresne and Carly who originally did not want their relationship revealed on the show in an attempt to avoid any perceived repercussion from judges or other contestants. Midway through the series they made their relationship public through an exclusive magazine deal. *Sydney Morning Herald’s* Michael Idato’s (2014, para.3) viewpoint is

For a reality TV show where everything hinges on personality conflict and game play, it begs the question: in the heavily manipulated world of reality TV, just who is pulling the strings? [...]The inescapable truth is this: twists and turns are the highest denomination currency in the world of reality television.

All the checks and psychological tests conducted pre-production cannot foresee peoples’ capabilities, or lack thereof, during the actual production. Applications forewarn contestants that they will be committed to three to four months away from their normal environment during the production and in many cases sequestered in a communal residence. This means contestants not only participate in the programme but are not able to be with family and friends, or go to work. Stress, intolerance, lack of communication, and waiting for the unexpected are likely psychological by-products of this Reality TV process.

3.2. Peri- and Post-Production Techniques

When conflict does not naturally occur through the casting choices, it is created through narrative and the use of production techniques. The focus of this section is on the ability of programmes classified as Reality TV, which are produced and edited in advance of their airtime, to create a sense of reality and authenticity through a range of peri- and post-production techniques. Many reality shows, *The Block*, *The Bachelor*, and *My Kitchen Rules* for example, are pre-recorded well in advance of the broadcast date. There are two reasons this occurs. The first reason is that it allows producers to manipulate the narrative in order to attract higher ratings. For example, *My Kitchen Rules* films two alternative endings. Because the show is packaged prior to broadcast the network executives and producers are cautious about the winners being announced prior to the grand final. Two endings are recorded with the correct one going to air when scheduled. It also provides the producers an opportunity to gauge contestant popularity before making the winning announcement and to make the necessary adjustments. Investigative media journalist David Knox (2012, para.5) quoting a Seven Network spokesperson, stated:

Until the final moments of the grand final edition of My Kitchen Rules only a handful of people knew the actual, final result. It was important to let the magic of television and storytelling carry the day. Two endings were recorded in order to preserve the actual result, which is not unusual in the business of television production.

Since its popularity in mainstream entertainment, Reality TV has engaged audiences through two distinct philosophies of production: realism and expressionism (introduced in Section 2.1.). An expressionistic approach to Reality TV can be exemplified in shows such as *My Kitchen Rules*, *The Block*, and *Farmer Wants A Wife*. Montage, or shot juxtaposition, is the process of allowing for manipulative connotation. In the case of Reality TV, it means that events may be presented out of order or context in the attempt to suit the narrative that is expected to be most appealing to viewers. The use of close-ups on contestant faces is central to portraying the subjective experience of those on the show. In a practical sense this is achieved by adopting a 'multi-cam iso' approach on set. This simply refers to the fact that multiple camera operators are on set and individually have a role to play. For example, each pair of contestants in *My Kitchen Rules* or *The Block* is likely to have a devoted camera-operator constantly filming their behaviours and reactions to the environment and people around them.

Even though contestants are aware of the camera presence, they are not always complimentary of the way they have been depicted. The difficulty lies in determining whether this is publicity generated or actually contestants' complaints about being misrepresented. Contestants sign confidentiality agreements so it would be unlikely that anything printed during the show had been generated by them. However, comments in the past have been quite vitriolic about some of the editing practices. Jules Allen, *Masterchief* contestant 2013, made revealing comments to the ABC's *Australian Story*:

The role of a reality TV contestant is a complex one, combining elements of performance and genuine emotion in a contrived environment. Your companions are also your competitors and anything you say or do finds its way back to the show's producers. Living with the same 24 people [for] 24 hours a day is not real. Cooking for three judges is not real. It's not reality television. It's orchestrated television for the purposes of entertaining a viewer (Hassall 2014, para.21).

The most common complaint from contestants, she confirmed, is the way their contributions are edited to fit a particular narrative or character type. She says that once filming begins it is futile trying to modify your behaviour for the cameras. Other contestants from reality have made similar observations.

A realist approach to Reality TV can be seen in programmes such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, and *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out of Here*. These programmes covertly offer a narrative that is captured by a number of hidden cameras, in a

long shot approach, to evoke a sense that events are happening in real time. In a practical sense, this is achieved through the utilisation of a fixed rigged production technique where cameras are partially or totally hidden from contestants and are stationary, as opposed to cameras being operated manually in close proximity to participants and following their movements. The outcome for the viewer is the feeling of being a fly on the wall and that the events portrayed were filmed in an objective manner that merely chronicles the situation as it occurs, reducing the sense of predetermined characters and narrative. This is in stark comparison to the techniques adopted in expressionistic productions, where the feeling for the viewer is one more closely aligned with voyeurism, as the trials and successes of contestants are emphasised along with their associated emotional and behavioural reactions.

Reality TV as a broad production style consists of a range of sub-genres, such as documentary, factual, infotainment, and game show. But for the audience the differences between sub-genres are secondary to the level of entertainment provided. The increased awareness of this point has led to indiscriminant editing of footage that is then reconstructed to portray the most compelling narrative. Often viewers are somewhat conscious of this but are not concerned, like the old saying 'why let the truth get in the way of a good story?' Some audiences see reality TV as light entertainment rather than serious drama. Like World Championship Wrestling, where the action is orchestrated and produced, audiences enjoy it for what it is. Unidentified individuals have made statements to popular magazines about the production process of various Reality TV shows including *My Kitchen Rules*: "During post-production interviews, producers bring with them a script from which they prompt contestants what to say and how to react" (Woman's Day, 2014, para.2.).

Such post-production interviews are inserted in to the footage of each episode, intending to inform the audience of what contestants were thinking at the time. They are often filmed days later. *Daily Mail's* investigative journalist Bianca Soldani (2015, para.5), uncovered that "teams are encouraged to strike up rivalries to increase the drama in the show's storylines and are given scripts to help them narrate the action in hindsight and react accordingly". It is not uncommon for couples to have suffered from producers editing shots out of context. Jessie Khan and Biswa Kamila, from *My Kitchen Rules* 2013 series were subjected to death threats because of the way they were portrayed during the season (Reality Raver Blog, 2013). Khan indicated that the most upsetting part of the production was the editing apparently showing her joy at other contestants losses and dismay when they succeeded. The reality of Reality TV editing left the two women in tears over their portrayal and the hateful public response that followed:

That (editing) really upset me in the end because I knew that wasn't me. They filmed me smiling when actually I was reacting to them being praised by the judges and that wasn't what it seemed like on (air) (Reality Raver, 2013 citing Daily Telegraph, para.7).

Finally, on a number of Reality TV shows, participants will be called to set early and asked to wait in small rooms together for hours at a time without food or water before filming begins. *Daily Mail's* Danielle Gusmaroli reports "*The Bachelor Australia* (2015) is a highly-skilled production crew at Shine Australia primed to engineer catfights in a bid to produce riveting TV through sleep and food deprivation". (Gusmaroli, 2015, para.2) This serves the function of increasing irritability and potential for conflict amongst participants. It is also the case that some segments are filmed late but edited in to the show timeline as though they are happening during earlier more reasonable hours. So when someone fails to handle an emotional or stressful situation with ease the expectation of the viewer is that this reaction is the result of the challenges faced as part of the show story line, not because they have been deprived of food and sleep, or because they have been sitting and waiting to film for hours.

4. Conclusion

There is probably no better representation of a performative culture than the one that exists in Reality TV, nor one that brings to light so vibrantly the notion of performance within society more broadly. The present paper

deconstructed the perception of 'reality' within Reality TV by focusing on the pre-, peri-, and post-production techniques adopted. Theoretically, this deconstruction was informed by symbolic interactionism and in particular the work of Goffman (1973) and Butler (1990). The notion of performativity was drawn upon to consider the ways in which Reality TV can be seen as a mode to highlight, maintain, and/or challenge many aspects of the human tendency to perform their identity.

This paper has analysed Reality TV production techniques, viewers' perceptions, and contestants' behaviours in terms of performativity theory. As far as the authors are aware, this nexus has not been addressed before. The implications are both practical and theoretical. From a theoretical standpoint, the application of performativity within the domain of television not only allows for in depth analysis and understanding of human behaviour but also provides a promising arena for future performativity research. This arena (TV) is particularly interesting as few modes of communication, and therefore performativity, are as pervasive and globalised as television. From a practical viewpoint this paper draws attention to the production techniques that are employed to change the performativity of its contestants. Pre-recording and pre-publicising in conjunction with the understanding by contestants that their attitudes and social interactions may be misconstrued, allows Reality TV producers the wherewithal to manipulate the narrative whenever they choose; beginning with the casting process through to the final selection of the winners.

Reality TV has blurred the lines between real people in real situations with 'manufactured' performances in worlds specifically created for narrative. Reality TV most frequently serves the function of normalising antisocial behaviour for the entertainment of others. It suggests to the viewer what is socially acceptable and desirable in contemporary Australia based on the performances observed in what the viewer perceives as 'reality' through television. However, there is also a genuine capacity for Reality TV to challenge mainstream ideology. Rather than adopting stereotyped casting processes that marginalise 'other' groups and editing footage to increase a sense of conflict in the narrative, Reality TV could be used to promote a sense of social acceptance and cohesion across diverse groups and to break down the predominance of white upper-class hegemony in TV. Such an approach to Reality TV production would aim to promote diversity and in doing so serve to increase the social awareness of marginalised groups in Australian society.

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