

**REMODELING TV TALENT: PARTICIPATION AND PERFORMANCE IN
MTV'S *REAL WORLD* FRANCHISE**

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This dissertation performs a historical analysis of MTV's *Real World* programming and an ethnographic study of two of its most prominent participants. In it I examine reality TV's role in television's ongoing transformation as a technology and cultural form from the perspective of those who work in the industry as reality-talent. By adopting this perspective, I indicate some of the ways reality TV's construction of celebrity has altered the economic and performative regimes that have traditionally structured television stardom. One of the central issues this dissertation works to address is the way in which many participants are limited by the singular nature of their fame. To do this, I explore how the participant's status as on-camera talent is rooted in an ability to perform as if always off-camera.

The participant's amateur image is argued to serve two critical functions. Because the participant's image appears more real than the show itself, it exists as an element within the text that lets the viewer know that what they are watching is staged. This in turn requires that the participant's performance always be restricted to the reality that his or her image represents. Recently, this has meant that participants who transition into reality-talent often rely on their status within the media industry as the basis for their performances. In the case of MTV's stable of *Real World* participants, continued participation in one of the longest running reality franchises indicates the repurposing potential offered by a form of talent that is typically understood to be disposable.

Ultimately, this project calls attention to the new manner in which reality TV's representational logic and industrial deployment uniquely situates viewer and participant in a shared space of labor.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Reality TV's use of participants is what distinguishes it most from other television programming. However, if we define reality TV in this way – if we identify it as any kind of programming that is about people being themselves on-camera – then most television is reality TV. News programming, talk shows, game shows, cooking shows, travel shows, infotainment and a variety of other types of nonfiction programming fit this description. We might, then, argue that reality TV showcases amateur performers instead of television personalities. But thinking about the participant solely as an amateur performer potentially ignores the way television has always depended on 'ordinary people' (who often transition into television personalities) for talent. This analysis of the participant assumes reality TV's rise at the turn of the century represents an entirely new genre of television. When I began researching reality TV, I shared a similar perspective. I approached the growth of popular factual television as moment in which television was undergoing a fundamental transformation. And like others (Kilborne 1994, 1998; Nichols 1994; Corner 1995, 1996), I was primarily interested in the way reality TV framed its depictions of 'ordinary' people.

Today, I find myself thinking about reality TV in terms of how it accentuates television's status as a technology and a cultural form that stresses immediacy and familiarity. As reality TV has become a more permanent part of the media landscape, the questions at hand have less to do with the ways in which reality TV is changing television and more to do with the ways it has come to epitomize it. In the discussion that follows,

and the chapters that comprise it, I attempt to add something to the growing body of scholarship studying reality TV by focusing on the participant as a new kind of television personality. But to do this also means thinking about how reality TV's participants also attend to the established standards and routines that have traditionally governed television's institutions. Consequently, this work examines reality TV from the standpoint of those who work within the television industry as 'reality-talent.'

Conceptualizing the participant as a form of talent is essential in order to understand the rapid growth of popular factual television. It also provides a unique vantage point from which to consider reality TV's reliance on 'ordinary people.' One of the most interesting things about reality TV's use of amateur performers is the way in which the participant represents a common point of reception and production. Not only can we as viewers influence the outcome of a show by calling in or sending a text message from a mobile phone, but reality TV's invitation to 'get real,' to participate on-camera, makes us the narrative precondition for its depictions of 'real life.' From the standpoint of industry, this interactivity makes reality TV appealing because it guarantees highly adaptable programming that is easy and inexpensive to produce. For audiences, it provides an opportunity to experience television as both a viewer and a producer. But at its most basic, reality TV is about reconstituting the viewer into a form of labor. More specifically, it is television that asks us to perform the task of enacting our identities as viewers for the camera.

So what happens when someone goes on reality TV and becomes a form of talent that makes a living from being real? This question is not easy to answer. Not all reality TV asks the same thing of its participants, and not every participant approaches

participation in the same way. But this question is ultimately what the following discussion sets out to address by looking at a particular type of participant that works within a specific franchise of reality programming. By approaching reality TV from this perspective, the traits that unite one group of reality-participants can be thought about in terms of the larger issues connected to television's growing reliance on ordinary people. In what follows, these issues will be thought about in terms of labor, celebrity and performance.

1.1 SELECTING A TEXT: *THE REAL WORLD* FRANCHISE

When MTV's *The Real World* debuted, I was fourteen years old. At the time, it was something new to watch on television. Its depiction of 'real people' living 'ordinary' lives in New York City was far more entertaining than the majority of the programming targeting my age group. It was nonfiction television made for a generation that grew up watching music videos in the 1980s and 1990s. In this environment, *The Real World* marked a radical departure from standard television fare. Because it was on MTV, it was supposed to be fun to watch (or more fun to watch than the bulk of television that seemed far less innovative by comparison). *The Real World* also debuted at a crucial point in television's transition from a network based broadcast model to a multi-channel cable based model. Up until the early-1990s, network programming defined US television. Even with cable's rapid growth in the 1980s, cable stations like MTV, HBO and CNN had been unable to produce a competitive alternative to the networks' primetime schedule. NBC's Thursday night block of programming, for example, owned television's

most lucrative night. Sitcoms like *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992), *Cheers* (1982-1993), *Family Ties* (1982-1989), *Friends* (1994-2004) and *Seinfeld* (1990-1998), followed by hour-long dramas like *L.A. Law* (1986-1994) or *E.R.* (1994-Present), embodied this, the best of the networks' primetime broadcasting repertoire. It was not until 2002 that more US televisions were tuned into cable during primetime viewing hours. Although *The Real World* debuted ten years before this date, its instant popularity with MTV's young viewers provided one of the first of many roadmaps that would eventually lead to television's restructuring at the turn of the century.

The Real World was in its eighth season when 'reality TV' burst onto the US television scene in 2000 with *Survivor* (2000-present). Television's changing landscape (which reality TV was both an effect and cause of) meant that cable networks like MTV would produce more original programming for primetime television. Today, in an environment that is awash with cable-based reality TV, *The Real World* is no longer unique. Because cable television has grown at an exponential rate over the past ten years (and because all but a few cable networks are owned by a handful of media conglomerates), reality TV is the only viable programming option for companies like Viacom that want to produce a large amount of channel-specific shows. But what continues to set *The Real World* apart from other cable- and network-based reality TV is the innovative way in which it has repurposed its participants into a form of reusable talent. Consequently, as it enters its twentieth season of production, *The Real World* and the numerous spin-offs that comprise its franchise, embody the first (and arguably most extensive) reality-star system to date. This has not only made *The Real World* franchise profitable for MTV, it has played a major role in constructing the parameters that today

define the participant's status as talent. Consequently, *The Real World's* progression from a piece of nonfiction television that predated 'reality TV' to a franchise credited with being one of the first programs to usher in the reality phenomenon (Andrejevic 2004), makes it an especially fertile backdrop against which to consider the participant's transition from amateur performer to reality-talent.

1.2 LABOR

My interest in thinking about the participant as a form of labor is rooted in the way reality TV blurs the boundary between participant and viewer. This is what makes reality TV 'real' and it is also what makes reality TV financially viable. Or, to put it another way, the participant is both a viewer and a performer. This duality fosters a uniquely symbiotic relationship between the participant's status as a form of talent and reality TV's position within television's larger field of production.¹ Put another way, reality TV's rise at the turn of the century echoes the participant's emergence as a mode of on-camera talent. Reality TV is an emerging form of television. But it is television that is not entirely new. It flaunts an aesthetic of liveness and immediacy that television has always been fond of exhibiting.² Reality TV also represents something different. For the

¹ When I speak about reality TV in this context, I am referring to all of its dimensions. This includes textual factors like the way its storylines are structured to fit a specific format as well as extra-textual factors such as branding and franchising.

² Speaking about television's early deployment, Raymond Williams notes that its greatest strength as a broadcasting medium was liveness: "[w]hat television could do relatively cheaply was to transmit something that was in any case happening or had happened. In news, sport, and similar areas it could provide a service of transmission at a comparatively low cost" (1974: 24).

viewer, it offers a heightened sense of interactivity. For the television industry, it embodies a lucrative product. In both cases, this has to do with the singular way in which reality TV's use of the participant incorporates an element of interactivity into its production process. And because the participant's presence on-camera is predicated on the fact that they have been cast to be themselves, reality TV's workforce is by definition expendable. That is to say, the reality-participant's value is connected to the actuality that they are an unexceptional form of talent.

From the standpoint of labor, this works itself out in a number of ways. Reality TV's reliance on ordinary people guarantees a seemingly endless amount of talent. This not only makes reality TV inexpensive (reality-participants do not get paid very much and are not eligible to join unions), it allows reality TV's formats to be more successfully duplicated. Because the television business is by its nature risk adverse, programs that prove to be successful are always copied. For example, Fox's teenage drama *The O.C.* (2003-2007) was a remake of the *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990-2000), and MTV's reality program *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* (2004-present) is, as the title suggests, another version of *The O.C.* Although the television industry has always relied on recycling successful programming, there is an inherent difficulty in this production practice. Copying successful shows can be unpredictable because it usually means assembling a new cast of actors and writers. The creative chemistry that produced a hit like *Seinfeld*, for example, did not transfer to its cast members Jason Alexander, Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Michael Richards when they were featured in their own sitcoms.

Reality TV mitigates this risk by making participants – amateurs like you and me – the basis for its content. In other words, reality TV's formats are easily duplicated

because reality TV redefines what it means to work in television as on-camera talent. Reality TV does not rely on the kind of labor that is traditionally associated with being ‘talent’ but, instead, eschews these performers in favor of ones that are presumed to be anything but talent(ed). Consequently, most of the skill involved in producing reality programming would appear to exist off-camera. This is where I attempt to make a critical intervention. Although the use of amateur performers indicates a lack of talent or skill on the part of the participant, reality TV’s recycling of participants points to a much more complex labor scenario. In the case of *The Real World* franchise, it will be seen that the participants who work within it, as recurring cast members, are quite skilled in the way they comport themselves both on- and off-camera so as to manufacture storylines based on their individual personas. In what follows, MTV’s construction of an ad hoc reality-star system will be seen as the best way to gauge the extent to which the participant functions as a form of skilled labor. For example, after being cast on a *Real World* program, the most entertaining (and consequently most profitable) participants are recast on other shows within the franchise. These participants are also booked on public appearance circuits and speaking tours. Consequently, MTV’s management model not only will be shown to reveal how participants can be assembled in order to optimize the earning potential connected to their personas, the subsequent analysis will provide a blueprint for thinking about the participant’s value as labor that is not in every situation expendable.

1.3 CELEBRITY

Previous paradigms explaining television stardom have argued that television creates personalities instead of stars (Langer 1981; Ellis 1982). The ‘personality paradigm’ serves as the theoretical point of departure for my discussion of how MTV’s *Real World* participants negotiate fame. It asserts that television stardom is not articulated in terms of the public/private, exceptional/unexceptional dichotomies that have been credited with defining film stardom (deCordova 1991; Dyer 1998, 2004). By contrast, the fame associated with television’s personalities is argued to be one-dimensional. According to Langer (1981), this is the effect of the way television features personalities who rely on personas that are based on their identities as real people. For Langer (ibid), these personalities are essential for television because it is a technology that is predicated on everyday interaction. One of the most important functions of the television host, for example, is to act as a friendly interlocutor for the viewer to engage television on a daily basis.

If familiarity causes television to create personalities instead of stars, then reality TV’s promise to transform ordinary people into celebrities can be understood as another iteration of this capacity. At the same time, however, reality TV can be seen to modify the personality paradigm by overextending it. This is one of the central claims my work will make. Through my examination of MTV’s *Real World* participants it will be shown that unlike other television personalities, reality TV’s participants become famous by constructing personas that are based on their private identities as real people. Thus, the celebrity that reality TV produces is always rooted in the participant’s ability to enact an

off-camera persona while on-camera. For example, while a talk show host's persona is based on their identity as a private individual, it is still coded as being public. By contrast, the reality-participant's persona is always articulated with the highest degree of intimacy.

In the case of MTV's stable of *Real World*-talent, this is taken one step further. Because the celebrity that reality TV generates is shaped by the off-camera quality of the participant's performance, the participant's performance corresponds with his or her identity as a real person. Consequently, MTV has made its *Real World* participants' experience with celebrity the narrative basis for the programming itself. In what follows, this will be seen to reflect two important features of the participant's status as reality-talent. First, it will provide another way of thinking about how the participant's status as a real person enables reality TV's production. In this instance, the celebrity that surrounds MTV's *Real World* participants plays a significant part in shaping individual storylines and the franchise's larger ongoing narrative. Second, MTV's reality-celebrity will be seen to mark reality TV's institutional progression as a form of television that invests its occupants with a brand of celebrity that is specific to its structure and objectives.

1.4 PERFORMANCE

“Who I am on the show is who I am in real life. What you see is what you get.”

Audrina Patridge, reality-actor on *The Hills*³

“I hate to say we schedule their lives, but we definitely schedule out what we want to cover.”

Adam DiVello, executive producer of *The Hills*⁴

As the above quotes illustrate, reality TV is television that depends on authenticity to fabricate its artificial depictions of ‘real life.’ This is what makes reality TV so engaging. Mark Andrejevic explains it as an interest in demystification: “it is an appeal that incorporates its own self-critique in a seeming concession to the savviness of its viewers” (2004:14). For evidence of this appeal we need only consider that the majority of the public discourse surrounding reality TV is dedicated to exposing the extent to which it manufactures reality. And although it is correct to assert that reality TV’s depictions are staged, it would be incorrect to assume that they are inaccurate. This is a crucial point that my discussion sets out to make. Where Andrejevic focuses on the significance of reality TV’s contrivances for the reflexively savvy viewer, I will argue that reality TV’s artificiality serves a similar function with regard to its participants.

³ This interview appeared in a *TV Guide* article titled “MTV’s *The Hills*: Burning Questions Answered” (Gazan 2007).

⁴ Ibid.

If we are to understand how reality TV's participants function as a form of labor, which inhabits a unique mode of celebrity, it is essential to acknowledge the manner in which the participant's performance relies on his or her identity as a real person. In other words, reality TV's impossible premise is the condition of possibility for its participants' performances. Because reality TV constructs contrived depictions, its claim to the real calls attention to the artificiality of its texts, which in turn frees the participant to misrecognize their authenticity as being separate from their performances. Put simply, because participants only have themselves to play, they must believe they are at some level acting in order to execute the task reality TV asks of them. Consequently, the line of inquiry that sets out to unearth reality TV's ruses misses the point. Or, to put it another way, this search for artificiality echoes the rationale under which reality TV's representations function.

One of the central issues that my work seeks to examine, then, is how reality TV situates the participant as a form of labor whose job it is to attend to their status as reality-talent in such a way as to meet reality TV's representational objectives, as well as the particular storylines connected to their persona. Here, the connection between viewer and participant cannot be overstated. As reality TV has grown to become a staple of commercial television's repertoire, the ebb and flow of its content has become (like all television) highly predictable. This has resulted in a situation in which participants are cast knowing the parts they will play if for no other reason than their ability to estimate how their identity fits the narrative structure of a show's format. In the case of MTV's *Real World* programming, the participant's ability to reflexively construct their personas will be seen to act as the engine driving their performances.

1.5 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This project begins with a broad discussion of reality TV's emergence and with each subsequent chapter moves toward more specific considerations of the reality-participant. Chapter 1 reviews the research addressing reality TV's rise at the turn of the century from both industrial and textual perspectives. In so doing, this chapter provides a historical account of the changing business models that have helped to usher in the 'reality TV phenomenon.' To do this, I examine reality TV's rapid growth in terms of labor unrest, deregulation and the expansion of cable television in the 1980s and 1990s. I also identify and describe a number of industrial factors that worked together to create a hospitable climate for the prolific dissemination of popular factual television. One of the key developments that will be looked at is the FCC's deregulation of the financial and syndication (or 'finsyn') rules which prohibited ABC, CBS and NBC from producing more than 2.5 hours of primetime content. The repeal of these regulations in 1991 and 1995 meant that the 'big three' networks were free to produce a seemingly endless supply of primetime programming. This, combined with the above- and below-the-line union strikes that plagued the U.S. television industry in the late-1980s and early-1990s, will be seen to have spurred industry executives to look for new kinds of programming that was inexpensive to produce and not reliant on traditional forms of creative labor. Consequently, much of reality TV's success will be seen to be the result of how its use of participants instead of actors made it a timely product for an industry that was struggling to take advantage of deregulation and undercut unions.

One of the most contentious issues surrounding reality TV's use of 'non-traditional' talent has been the debate over whether or not editors should be allowed to join the Writer's Guild of America as scribes. What makes this debate so interesting is the way it has brought to light the actuality that reality TV is scripted by teams of editors in order to construct coherent and entertaining storylines. This practice is known in the industry as 'frankenbyting' and is the point of departure for this chapter's review of the research examining reality TV's genealogical connection to nonfiction television dating as far back as the Ford Foundation's educational series *Omnibus* (1952-1961). Consequently, the latter part of this chapter attempts to think about reality TV in terms of how its many formats maintain noticeable connections to the documentary tradition. These connections will be approached from the standpoint of the celebrity and media rituals that popular factual television constructs for viewers and fans. Reality TV's status as a form of interactive TV *verité* will also be seen to compliment new viewing practices associated with developing technologies like digital video recorders and programming data banks.

Chapter 2 builds on the theoretical concepts covered in Chapter 1 by performing a historical analysis of MTV's *Real World* franchise. My discussion of MTV's *Real World* programming takes Jason Mittell's call for a discursive approach to studying television genres as a methodological point of departure for its analysis (2001, 2004). Consequently, this chapter considers MTV's creation and maintenance of a system of reality-talent from the standpoint of both the textual and extratextual factors surrounding *The Real World's* evolution into the longest running U.S. reality franchise. To do this, I adopt a generational model that charts the participant's transition from viewer-turned-

participant to participant-turned-talent. Through this generational consideration, I examine how MTV's development of its *Real World* franchise is dependent on the manner in which its participants' performances reflect MTV's iconic role in popular culture as well as its institutional structure as a cable channel.

This chapter distinguishes between first- and second-generation programming by focusing on the first ten seasons of *The Real World* and the spin-offs that now comprise its franchise. These seasons reflect in their textual structure and cultural dissemination reality TV transition from make-shift programming used by fledgling networks like FOX to inexpensively fill their primetime schedules to the kind of 'dynamic' programming used by CBS to unseat NBC's coveted position as the most watched network. First-generation programming includes the first four seasons of *The Real World*. At this point (between 1992-1995), participation on *The Real World* and its sister program *Road Rules* did not carry with it the negative stigma that is today associated with being on a reality show. Participation also did not hold the implicit promise of continued employment as a reality-actor that it does today. The period of transition between first- and second-generation participation (1996-2000) will also be seen to reflect the role MTV played in pioneering two of the most copied reality-formats (the docusoap and the gamedoc). These formats will be looked at in order to examine how the participant's status as a durable production material was capitalized on by MTV when it began to produce programming designed to recycle former cast members from its *Real World* programming.

Second-generation participation will be seen as the effect of this process. By the tenth season (2001), MTV's attempt to profit from its participants' status as reality-talent

is reflected in the way many of its participants are siphoned from feeder shows like *The Real World* into programming that is designed to feature past participants. For these participants, going on *The Real World* is viewed as an opportunity to profit from the celebrity connected to being on the show. For MTV, second-generation participation on *The Real World* represents a crucial vetting process in which the most entertaining participants can be identified for future castings. Today, it is not uncommon for second-generation participants to be cast on MTV's *Real World* spin-offs before their season of *The Real World* airs. Consequently, this chapter attempts to think about second-generation participation as part of a business model that grew out of the process through which MTV redefined its participants as talent. The critical point to take away from this part of my discussion is the way MTV's development of reality franchise corresponds with the participant's evolution into a new form of television-based talent.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 are ethnographic case studies of two reality-actors that work in MTV's *Real World* franchise. Although each case study focuses on one participant's particular experience, they each work in tandem to compliment one another's analysis. The commonalities that are expressed between the two will also serve as the basis for my discussion of performance in the subsequent and final chapter.

Chapter 3 looks at the experiences of reality-actor Susie Meister. Meister has appeared on six of MTV's *Real World* spin-offs: *Road Rules: South Pacific* (1998), *The Real World/Road Rules Extreme Challenge* (2001), *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Gauntlet 2* (2005), *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno III* (2007) and *Road Rules: Viewers Revenge* (2007). Although she is not a second-generation participant, Meister's persona as a small-town girl with heartland values is one

the character archetypes most frequently cast for in second-generation programming. As already mentioned, the primary means by which MTV's *Real World* participants profit from their participation comes from the celebrity that attaches to their reality-personas. Consequently, the nature of the participant's performance will be seen to encode reality-actors like Meister with a celebrity that is dependent on their status as talent tasked to perform their 'ordinariness' within the confines of a reality-persona. In the case of Meister, the quality of her celebrity will be seen to be traumatic. This has to do with the way in which the participant's identity as a reality-celebrity is indistinguishable from their on-camera personas. In order to examine how this kind of celebrity is unique to reality TV and specific to *The Real World* franchise, this chapter explores the way Meister's fame diverges from other modes of televisual stardom. Different from other types of television personalities (talk show hosts and news anchors, for example), MTV's reality-celebrities must continually act *as if* they are off-camera. Thus, the 'behind-the-scenes' quality of Meister's fame is examined in order to trace some of the ways in which MTV's construction of celebrity challenges past notions of televisual fame.

Chapter 4 looks at the experiences of reality-actor Tim Beggy. Beggy participated on the second season of *Road Rules* (1994) and is therefore a first-generation participant. Since being on *Road Rules*, Beggy has had a moderately successful career working in television. He has appeared as himself on Mark Burnett's *Eco Challenge Fiji Islands* (2003) and hosted both FOX Sports Net's *The Slant* (1997-2002) and The History's Channel's *Guts and Bolts* (2003). Beggy has also been on the following *Real World* programs: *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: Battle of The Seasons* (2002), *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno* (2004), *The Real World/Road Rules*

Challenge: The Gauntlet 2 (2005) and *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: Inferno 3* (2007). Because Beggy is one of the few first-generation participants still active in MTV's *Real World* franchise, this chapter juxtaposes his self-described status as a television personality who got his start on reality TV with Meister's description of herself a one-time fan turned cast member. One of the critical differences that will be seen to distinguish Beggy from Meister is the way in which their inaugural participation colors their experiences. Where Meister relies on her status as a one-time fan to condemn the one-dimensional quality of her fame, Beggy references his early participation as a way to distinguish himself from other reality-participants. Thus in both cases, the reality-personas they enact on-camera are supported by the way in which they each disavow the quality of their fame and the requirements of their participation.

Because both Beggy's and Meister's reality-personas depend on their identities as individuals, their performances function under a common representational logic. Reality TV uses the realness of the participant's image to call attention to the artificiality of its representations. This in turn allows viewers to detect what has and what has not been constructed with an eye to their amusement. Chapter 5 explores this by examining how reality TV's use of participants infuses the small-screen with an element that stands out as being realer than the text itself. I end my discussion with this chapter because its discussion of performance situates MTV's *Real World* franchise within the broader debate addressing reality TV's significance. Here I will approach reality TV's framing of the participant as a paradox that reflects the cynicism with which mediated reality is so often perceived to be an inherently deceitful product of the culture industry. This paradox is best illustrated in the way reality TV's use of real people incites viewers to mistrust its

phony depictions. In other words, it is not reality TV's contrived environments that compels the viewer to mistrust what it sees, it is the authenticity of the participant's image that makes reality TV's representations appear counterfeit.

Therefore, in order to fully comprehend the nature of the participant's performance, we must first understand the way in which reality TV constructs its texts to highlight the authenticity of the participant's image. Using Beggy's and Meister's experiences as the basis for my analysis, this chapter will argue that the participant's performance is underwritten by a belief in the aforementioned inaccuracy of reality TV's depictions. Consequently, the participant's ability to feel secure in the knowledge that they will inevitably be misrepresented provides them with a model (or part) on which to base their performances. In this instance, the viewing perspective that takes pleasure in detecting reality TV's contrivances can also be seen to shape the participant's performance. And in so doing, the participant's authenticity not only caters to a post-ideological atmosphere of media skepticism, it is ultimately what makes reality TV's performances possible.

2.0 CHAPTER ONE

TELEVISION'S NEW SWEATSHOP: APPROACHING REALITY TV AS PARTICIPANT-BASED TELEVISION

Raymond Williams, writing about television in the mid-1970s, begins his seminal work, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, by describing the societal effect of television as a technology: “[it] is often said that television has altered our world. In the same way people often speak of a new world, a new society, a new phase of history, being created – ‘brought about’ – by this or that new technology: the steam-engine, the automobile, the atomic bomb” (1974: 3). Williams’ point is still useful. The difficulty in analyzing any technology in terms of its ‘effects’ as a cultural form continues to be part of the discourse that surrounds television at the beginning of the twenty-first-century. The tension that exists between television as a technologically determining medium, and television as a culturally responsive form of technology, remains hard to negotiate. This is in large part due to television’s constantly changing sets of technologies, which deploy audio-visual content and representational structures that shape, and are shaped by, the institutions and individuals responsible for television’s subject matter. Thus, in order to study one type of television, it is necessary to acknowledge how all television is affected by a variety of independent and connected elements that work in concert with one another to make up television’s field of production. In this light, television can be viewed as a number of interrelated social experiences (both group and individual) that often blur the boundary between production and reception.

The rise of reality TV at the turn of the century calls attention to this porous boundary in a unique way. Unlike other forms of television, reality TV's incorporation of 'ordinary' people within its *mise-en-scène* embodies many of the ways television is both changing and remaining the same. Reality TV's use of the participant, for example, has allowed for the construction of formats that modify previous business models while simultaneously attending to the routines and standards that have historically guided the industry's production of commercial television. And because reality TV takes the participant as the primary emphasis of its content, its narratives and storylines are framed in populist, often egalitarian, discourses that celebrate instead of dismantle contemporary notions of celebrity. Finally, reality TV's use of participants comes at a moment in which television is embracing new forms of interactivity in order to remain competitive in an environment of digitalization and media convergence.

This chapter will discuss reality TV from all of these perspectives. In so doing, I will borrow Williams' framework for approaching television as a 'particular cultural technology' (ibid). To address reality TV in this way is to consider it critically from the dimensional standpoints of its development, its institutions, its forms and its effects. But (as will be discussed in Chapter 2), the parameters defining what it means to call something 'reality TV' are far from clear. This has resulted in numerous and varied considerations of reality TV. Unfortunately, this has also meant that much of the scholarship studying reality TV often lacks cohesion. Therefore, I will limit my discussion to four overlapping areas of research: industry, realism, celebrity and interactivity. By taking this approach, I hope to provide a comprehensive overview of the research that shapes the subsequent chapters' analysis of MTV's *Real World* franchise.

2.1 LABOR UNREST AND NEW BUSINESS MODELS

Ted Magder's essay (2004), "The End of TV 101: Reality Programs, Formats, and the New Business of Television," and Chad Raphael's essay (2004), "The Political Economic Origins of Reali-TV," present compelling arguments for why reality TV has flourished at the turn-the-of-century. Their work raises an important question: to what extent is reality TV's recent prominence the effect of the financial concerns that faced the U.S. television industry in the 1980s and 1990s? Underpinning both of their discussions is a similar premise: reality TV has come to dominate the televisual landscape because its reconfiguration of accepted business models has kept the television industry profitable in the face of rising production costs, labor unrest and the rapid expansion of niche cable channels. In so doing, reality TV has changed what it means to produce, participate and view commercial television. In 2003, *The New York Times* suggested something similar when it reported that reality TV was the television industry's new golden calf:

[t]he success of shows like "American Idol," "The Bachelorette" on ABC and "Joe Millionaire" on Fox are so impressive that numerous executives [say] they [are] now ready to embrace plans for a radical restructuring of the network business, which previously had been talked about only as dimly possible, long-term adjustments. (Carter: 25 January 2003)

Although hit shows like *American Idol* (2003-), *The Bachelor(ette)* (2001-) and *Joe Millionaire* (2003) were some of the earliest reality programs to dominate in network primetime, popular factual programming had been a staple of television's repertoire since the 1980s. Early on, Richard Kilborn identified reality TV as a number of different kinds

of fact-based television that included observational techniques reminiscent of documentary filmmaking, infotainment and televisual reenactments of factual events (1994: 423). Bill Nichols offered a similar definition in his book, *Blurred Boundaries*, when he described reality TV as “...all those shows that present dangerous events, unusual situations, or actual police cases, often reenacting aspects of them and sometimes enlisting our assistance in apprehending criminals still at large” (1994: 45). For Nichols, this included crime-based television such as *Cops* (1989-), *America’s Most Wanted* (1988-), *Rescue 911* (1989), and tabloid journalism such as *Hard Copy* (1987-), *Entertainment Tonight* (1981-) and *Inside Edition* (1988-) (ibid).⁵

Raphael connects and expands both of these early definitions under the term ‘Real-TV’ in order to describe how the economics of fact-based programming is associated with the television industry’s larger institutional restructuring in the late-1980s and early-1990s (2004). According to Raphael, the majority of these fact-based television formats depend on what Annette Hill calls, in her book *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* (2005: 53), ‘see it happen’ footage that is captured by placing cameras in ‘on-scene’ locations (2004). Raphael notes:

⁵ Susan Murray addresses reality TV’s restructuring of the televisual landscape from a different perspective (2004). In her article, “I Think We Need a Name for It: The Meeting of Documentary and Reality TV,” Murray notes the importance often associated with documentary television programming like *An American Family* (1977): “[d]ocumentary is seen as a valid and productively social, as well as artistic endeavor, while reality TV is often vilified or dismissed. Consequently, generic placement becomes a way in which to gauge a program’s cultural value and import through discursive means” (2004: 43). Ultimately, Murray struggles to attach a generic classification to reality TV in the same way that both John Corner (2002a; 2002b) and Kilborn (2003) did when they addressed reality TV’s blurring of the audio-visual lines that once defined documentary television.

[p]roduction practices common to most of these programs include the extensive use of ‘actuality’ footage of their subjects, whether these are police staking out a drug den or mom and dad yukking it up in front of the camcorder; reenactments of events performed by professional actors, the people who experience them, or a mix of both; a tendency to avoid the studio in favor of on-scene shooting, sometimes at the same place where the events they represent originally occurred; mixing footage of shot by unpaid amateur videographers with that of professionals; appealing to the conventions of ‘liveness’ and ‘immediacy’ through on-location interviews, subjective camera work, and synchronized sound; and appropriating traditional conventions of new coverage, such as the use of anchors or hosts, remote reporting, and the pretense to spontaneity (ibid: 120).

The extent to which these production techniques were implemented in the late-1980s and early-1990s varied between formats. Where newsmagazines and tabloid programming continued to rely on professional cameramen and editors, shows like *America’s Funniest Home Videos* (1990-) only used professional editors to clean up and piece together amateur video submissions. Consequently, Raphael’s discussion of Reali-TV not only highlights the television industry’s waning dependence on traditional forms of creative labor, it foreshadows a growing tension over the new types of labor created in reality TV’s wake.

Speaking about the ongoing controversy over whether or not editors of reality TV can be unionized as scribes, The Writer’s Guild of America’s (WGA) Prexy Daniel Petrie Jr. echoed this tension: “ [t]he secret about reality TV isn’t that it’s scripted, which it is;

the secret is that reality TV is a 21st century telecommunications industry sweatshop.⁶ Because reality TV does not rely on traditional scripts, its producers can argue that its shows' editors are not in fact writers, and should not be allowed to join unions like the WGA. As already mentioned, the substitution of actors with participants was done for a number of reasons. Bypassing union labor, for example, was one of the most important parts of the cost-cutting strategy implemented by the television industry when it began to rely on fact-based programming in the late-1980s and early-1990s. According to Raphael, before reality TV became a ratings juggernaut there was already a substantial amount of unrest among a number of unions: "[i]n the 1980s and 1990s, the NABET, Directors Guild, American Federation of Musicians, Screen Extras Guild (SEG), and The American Federation of Radio and Television Artists all struck, while the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) struck twice, and The Writers Guild three times" (2004: 123). This may have ultimately caused network executives to see fact-based programming as the most fiscally sound option for combating a hostile workforce. This is why Raphael points to the twenty-two-week writers strike in 1988 as a determining factor in reality TV's rise: "[e]xisting Reali-TV shows were largely unaffected by the strike as they already relied very little on writers. In addition, the delay of the season gave producers and programmers the impetus to develop future shows that did not depend on writing talent" (ibid: 125). From this standpoint, unionized labor played a critical role in the networks' reformulation of some of the fundamental production methods used to manufacture commercial television.

⁶ Joseph Adalian's *Variety* article, "WGA Reality Check: Scribe Tribe on War Path Over unscripted TV" (20 Jun 2005).

2.2 FINSYN DEREGULATION

Another key development that has led to the rise of reality TV is the industry's shift away from producing television that is only profitable in syndication. The television industry has traditionally received the majority of its revenue from syndicated programming.⁷ In the U.S., this essentially equates to leasing already-aired shows to local markets and cable channels for a set number of runs. This kind of syndication is typically done when a show's catalogue reaches the 100-episodes-mark. At this point, there are enough episodes to air on a daily basis. But according to John Caldwell, this picture of syndication fails to address the important role first-run television has played in making syndication television's historic cash-cow:

[m]ost academic histories of television focus almost exclusively on network television and ignore the fundamental role that the sale of independently produced series to individual and affiliated stations have played in the history of the medium. While the popular press typically conflates syndication with 'reruns' of network shows, this gloss overlooks the vast number of series sold directly (usually for primetime) across both domestic and international markets. (2004: 42)

This is also why Raphael argues that reality TV's proliferation in the late 1990s was due in large part to the relaxing and eventual repeal of the FCC regulations that limited the production of in-house television (2004). Under the financial and syndication, or 'finsyn,'

⁷ See Derek Kompare's discussion of syndication in *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television* (2005).

rules of the 1970s and 1980s, the ‘big three networks’ (NBC, CBS and ABC) were prohibited from producing more than 2.5 hours of primetime content. The finsyn rules were originally put in place to encourage diversity by offering local and independent programming room on primetime. However, the finsyn rules ultimately did not achieve their goal. The independent production houses were always too dependent on winning contracts with large Hollywood studios in order to cover the expensive costs associated with manufacturing new programming.⁸

As the finsyn rules were scaled back in 1991, and ultimately repealed in 1995, the big three networks were given *carte blanche* to produce programming in-house.⁹ Although this meant that the networks were promised more revenue through distribution rights, it also meant that they had to figure out new ways to produce television that guarded against the kinds of financial risks associated with developing unsuccessful programs. According to Magder, reality TV filled this need through its unique production and franchising of formats (2004). Most notably, Endemol’s highly successful *Big Brother* franchise has been successfully exported to international markets because its participant-based narratives make the show’s subject matter extremely adaptable to local audiences (ibid: 147). He notes:

⁸ Raphael describes this imposition as having to do with the financial constraints put on the independents by the market in order to stifle any ‘real’ creativity: “[i]ndependents did not exercise much financial or creative power over the development of new programming, especially when compared with the major studios or top agent-packagers” (2004: 128).

⁹ It should be noted that Fox, because it was considered a ‘new network,’ never had to follow the finsyn rules. Thus since its inception in 1986, it produced the majority of its primetime programming in-house. This included shows like *Cops* and *America Most Wanted*.

Endemol supplies a ‘playbook’ (or a bible) and ‘coach’ (or producer) who consults with the local producer on the adaptation of the show’s basic elements. In the case of *Big Brother*, those fundamental elements include a closed set, length of time the show lasts, number of contestants, weekly competitions, weekly eliminations of a contestant, and round-the-clock use of cameras that reduces to nil the contestants’ privacy. If things work well, a format becomes an international brand with distinctive and carefully modulated local variations – the formula is tweaked, like the sugar content in Coca-Cola.” (ibid)

Magder’s description of this process in terms of a typical franchise agreement is useful because it underscores the extent to which reality TV can be viewed as a relatively simple solution to the networks in-house production dilemma. It also highlights another way in which reality TV acts as an inexpensive production alternative for an industry attempting to lesson its reliance on skilled labor. Consequently, the repealing of the finsyn rules allowed the television industry to restructure itself so that its production processes were more amenable to franchised formats. In this model, revenue is secured through the mass production of low-cost programs that can be easily modified to suit the appetites of regional markets. In so doing, reality TV only needs to be moderately successful in order to make a profit.

In an age of media conglomeration and synergy, the repeal of the finsyn rules also spurred the television industry’s dependence on economies of scale. Eileen R. Meehan notes that of the five major media conglomerates with stakes in television (AOL Time

Warner, G.E., Viacom, Disney and News Corporation), four have invested in multiple production houses:

Disney produces television under four labels: ABC Studios, Disney Productions, Touchstone Television and Buena Vista productions. Viacom produces under eight major labels: CBS International, CBS Enterprises, King World Productions, Paramount Television, Big Ticket Television, Spelling Television, Viacom Enterprises and NickToons; News Corporation uses three labels – Twentieth Century Fox Television, Fox Television Studios, and Twentieth Television – and owns a 20 percent stake in Regency television. Time Warner produces television entertainment under seven labels: Castle Rock, HBO Downtown Productions, HBO Independent Productions, New Line, Fine Line, Telepictures Productions, and Warner Bros. Television. (2005: 248)

In order to produce the amount of shows necessary to supply these outlets with programming, media conglomerates have come to depend on the ease with which reality TV's formats can be duplicated to create inexpensive television. For example, Viacom not only produces programming for CBS and UPN, it also produces programming for a number of its cable subsidiaries (MTV, MTV2, MTVX, VH1, BET, BET Jazz, CMT, Showtime, Nickelodeon, Nick at Nite and TV Land). According to Jack Banks, media conglomerates' use of reality TV as a way to fill airtime with inexpensive content is best exemplified by the kinds of original programming found on cable networks like MTV:

One of Viacom's main strategies for its media subsidiaries is to strictly limit expenses for productions, maintaining tight control over budgets.

MTV Networks has embraced this objective by focusing on low-cost programming. The music videos played on its many music-oriented program services are a very cheap source of material that is supplied mainly by record labels. Viacom has signed contracts with the labels to allow all of its services to present these music clips. In recent years, MTV Networks has moved toward 'reality shows' like *The Real World* and *Road Rules* that have limited costs because the company does not have to pay for writers, actors or other creative personnel associated with traditional television shows such as sitcoms or dramas. (2005: 259)

As we will see in Chapter 2, the production of reality shows like *The Real World* and *Road Rules* not only provided MTV Networks with low-cost television, it redefined the way cable television would eventually employ its on-camera talent. Today, Viacom's dependence on reality TV for its cable outlets is not unique. Whether watching The Food Network or The Outdoor Life Network, it is hard to find original cable programming that cannot be classified as some form of reality programming.

2.3 PRODUCT PLACEMENT

Reality TV's storylines also lend themselves to a number of potential revenue sources. Product placement is arguably one of the most lucrative. Reality TV's use of participants in game-based formats, for example, allows for a level of product placement and sponsorship that harkens back to when Proctor and Gamble first bankrolled the radio soap opera *Guiding Light* (1937-). The types of product placement found on a program

like *Survivor*, for example, generated \$12 million in placement deals in its first year (Magder 2004). This is how reality TV provides additional security to an industry that is historically averse to taking risks. Consequently, reality TV's use of product placement can be viewed as another way in which fact-based programming further negates the financial hazards that television has traditionally been subject:

[t]here are only so many good writers, actors and other talented people to go around, and the medium of TV requires hundreds – even thousands – of hours of new programs each year. The talent problem is real enough; it becomes an even more serious problem because of the peculiar economics of television production – a problem that characterizes the creative industries as a whole. (ibid: 143)

The 'peculiarity' of which Magder is speaking has to do with the high costs that are incurred in making the first few episodes of any television program. Very few pilots actually get picked up. And even after they are, there is no guarantee they will garner high ratings. Thus, reality TV reduces the danger involved in creating new series by securing sponsors that finance production before the show airs. In return, reality TV builds narrative arcs into its shows' that garner a uniquely high level of publicity for corporate entities willing to bankroll production costs.

On a reality cooking show like Bravo's *Top Chef* (2005-), for example, the program's narrative structure is based on competitions that feature sponsored merchandise. In a recent episode,¹⁰ this entailed competing in a 'quickfire challenge' sponsored by Bombay Gin in order to secure immunity from that episode's succeeding

¹⁰ 11 Jul 2007

‘elimination challenge.’ To do this, the participants had to prepare an appetizer that complimented a Bombay Gin cocktail in thirty-minutes using General Electric appliances,¹¹ Calphalon cooking utensils and an assortment of Glad food products. Anyone who is familiar with reality TV knows that this kind of blatant promotion is not unique to any one specific show or format. In fact, *RealScreen* magazine reported that the top three television shows for product placement in 2005 were very different reality programs: *The Contender* (2005-), NBC’s boxing-themed reality show hosted by Sylvester Stalone, came in first with 7,514 brand occurrences in just 15 episodes resulting in twelve hours of product placement; FOX’s talent-search reality program, *American Idol* (2002-), was second with 3,497 brand occurrences and seven hours of product placement; and ABC’s home repair reality show, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (2003-), placed third with 3,318 brand occurrences and a meager five hours of product placement.¹² All of these shows exemplify the high level of product placement found on reality TV. But *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* best embodies the way reality TV’s use of franchised formats compliments television’s changing business model. The format for *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* was created by Endemol USA and licensed to Disney/Buena Vistas’ Greenhouse Productions. Because Disney owns ABC, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* is the kind of in-house production that would not have been allowed under the previous finsyn guidelines. Sears, Craftsmen Tools and Kenmore

¹¹ It should be noted that General Electric owns Bravo’s parent company, NBC Universal.

¹² Kimberly Brown notes in her *Real Screen* article, “Top 3 Shows for Product Placement,” that “US Networks saw the number of primetime product placement rise 30% in 2005 to 106,808 occurrences – a jump from 82,014 the year before. In total, product placement logged 191 hours in primetime in 2005, an increase of 22% over 2004, which clocked 157 hours” (2006).

Home Appliances sponsor the show, making it cheap to produce. And to date, versions of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* have aired in Mexico, The United Kingdom, Scandinavia and Greece.

2.4 THE FUN IN FRAKENBYTING

The already mentioned embroilment over whether or not editors of reality TV should be considered writers, and thus classified as scribes with eligibility to join the WGA, has also called attention to the way the television industry has been writing ad copy into its reality programs' storylines.¹³ In a position paper released by the WGA, the guild exposed this practice by asserting that scribes were being locked out of hidden revenues:

The WGA asserts that TV writers are being forced to write ad copy and disguise it as a storyline. 'The result is that tens of millions of viewers are sometimes being sold products without their knowledge, sold in opaque, subliminal ways and sold in violation of government regulations'...The position paper [also] asserts that use of products in 2004 features jumped 44% and generated revenues of more than \$1 billion while product-related TV revs soared 84%, with Burger King, Sony PlayStation, Dove Body Wash, Verizon and Visa all paying as much as \$2 million per episode during the third season of [*The Apprentice*], for example. (McNary 2005)

¹³ See Dave McNary's *Variety* article, "Scribes Chase Blurb Bonanza: Product Placement Perturbs WGA" (2005).

The ongoing publicity surrounding the struggle to unionize reality TV's off-camera workforce has not been limited to trade publications. Both *Radar Magazine* and *Time* have covered the debate over the role 'story editors' play in crafting storylines for reality shows. *Radar* was the first to use the term 'creative dialogue cutting,' or 'frankenbyting' as it is called within the trade, when they interviewed five disgruntled story editors.¹⁴ Even more recently, *Time* came out with a similar article entitled "How Reality TV Fakes It," which chronicles the use of editing practices such as frankenbyting in creating unofficial scripts for MTV's popular reality series *Laguna Beach* (2004-).¹⁵

The possibility that these kinds of reports will have any real effect on audiences' enjoyment of reality TV remains questionable. If anything, there is strong evidence to suggest that it only fuels a growing appetite for this kind of television. After all, reality TV often goes out of its way to expose the many levels of its construction by making available behind-the-scenes footage of everything from casting-calls to on-air style conversations with producers. On the sixth season of VH1's *Surreal Life* (2003-), for example, an episode was dedicated to revealing how the cast took an active role in the fabrication of their on-camera personas. Behind-the-scenes footage of Omarosa, the 'villainess' from NBC's *The Apprentice*, was viewed in order to illustrate how she 'managed' interviews with the producers. The footage shows Mark Cronin, the executive producer, frustrated, asking Omarosa, "[d]o you think the American people can tell the difference between who's acting and a person who's being real and honest?" To which she replied, "[a]bsolutely not." Of course, the importance of this exchange is not

¹⁴ Goldman, Andrew (2005).

¹⁵ Poniewozik, James (2006).

Omarosa's insistence that she is a performer but that the producers chose to incorporate this 'off-camera' revelation within the actual episode.

We are, in the image of Omarosa, confronted with the central paradox underlying reality TV representations.¹⁶ Because reality TV is television, its depictions are assumed to be less than entirely authentic. Consequently, reality TV's status as a 'realer' form of television is the very thing that negates its premise. Following Roscoe and Hight (2001),¹⁷ Hill addresses this by arguing that instead of thinking about reality TV from the standpoint of a 'fact vs. fiction dichotomy,' it is more useful to consider it from the standpoint of a 'fact/fiction continuum'" (2005: 49). She notes,

[t]here is a fact/fiction continuum between contemporary documentaries and popular factual television. There is also a sliding scale of factuality in reality programming. At the far end of the continuum are more informative based programmes such as *Animal Hospital*, and at the other end are documentary gameshows such as *Survivor*. (ibid: 50)

Mark Andrejevic approaches this same question from a different, though somewhat related, perspective when he suggests that some types of viewers enjoy reality TV precisely because it gives them the opportunity to debunk the media's authenticity claims (2004). For Andrejevic, this kind of cynical engagement with television is predicated on an ideological illusion that is sustained by the distance cynicism provides media savvy viewers (ibid). Borrowing from Slavoj Žižek's adaptation of Peter Sloterdijk's

¹⁶ For early considerations of the debates surrounding the factuality of reality TV's depictions, see Bill Nichols (1994), John Corner (1995, 1996) and Richard Kilborn (1994, 1998).

¹⁷ See Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight's book *Faking It* for an analysis of how mock-documentaries' play the audio-visual expectations attached to fact-based media like documentaries and nonfiction television (2001).

discussion of *kynicism* (1990), Andrejevic argues that the cynical perspective adopted by savvy viewers provides them with a feeling of personal security by affording a place of privilege from which to attend to media content that is inaccurate and often exploitive.¹⁸

From this perspective editing practices like frankenbyting, and the labor struggles that publicize them, work to further ingratiate reality TV to savvy viewers because they draw attention to contrivance. Today it seems as if the media industry as a whole caters to this sensibility. Much of the growth in cable television has been dedicated to creating entertainment that is crafted especially for cynical viewers. Jack Banks' discussion of Viacom's investment in niche cable programming is, here, applicable (2005). Banks argues that companies like Viacom are reshaping the televisual landscape by designing channels that 'narrowcast' to very specific groups of television viewers:

[a]part from its music services, Viacom operates Nickelodeon for children, Noggin for preschoolers and The N for teens and pre-teens. Nick at Nite and TV Land focus on old television series like *Bewitched*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Happy Days*. Spike TV is a new reincarnation of The National Network (formerly The Nashville Network) that targets a male audience, and Comedy Central presents shows like *South Park* and the faux news program, *The Daily Show*. (Ibid: 258)

¹⁸ This kind of cynical reading of fact-based television is not new or restricted to reality TV. As early as David Morely's 1980 study of the news program *Nationwide*, it had become clear that television viewers were quite skilled at deciphering the ways in which all fact-based programming constructed its depictions of authenticity (1980). Morely observed this in his comparative analysis of the decoding practices used by working class youths in Britain to debunk the claims made by news programs that did not represent their class interests. However, Morely also notes: "[despite] the overall tone of rejection and cynicism, most of the main items in [*Nationwide* were] decoded by these groups within the dominant framework or preferred reading established by the programme" (ibid: 138).

Viacom's breadth of programming not only reflects how the television industry is attempting to target the specific phases of its viewers' lives, it betrays the extent to which much of its programming is being made for the kind of cynical audiences that Andrejevic suggests find pleasure in reality TV's contrivances (2004). In fact, it is likely that one begets the other. From the lighthearted educational children's programming of Noggin and Nickelodeon, to the pointed cynicism found in Comedy Central's news spoofs, television's restructuring of itself into an abundance of lifestyle programming necessitates a viewing disposition that is knowledgeable enough to navigate many types of audio-visual experiences. Here, we can see how reality TV's proliferation is tied to its inclusion of real people within television's *mise-en-scène* in two important ways: from an industry standpoint, reality TV's exchanging of actors with participants makes it inexpensive television that can be recycled and reconfigured into flexible-format-based systems of distribution; While from the perspective of reception, the participant's image offers viewers who have grown up as heavy media users a form of television that plays with the boundaries associated with the medium's construction of authenticity by accentuating television's representational limitations.

2.5 TV VERITÉ: FROM AN AMERICAN FAMILY TO PUNK'D

Jean Baudrillard's discussion of PBS' *An American Family* (1973), in his book *Simulations*, was one of the first pieces of scholarship to address reality TV from the standpoint of this limitation (1983). Baudrillard observed that nonfiction programming like *An American Family* (which documented the day-to-day lives of the Loud family)

was a symptom of a hyperrealist society in which the space between signifier and signified had increasingly become evacuated (ibid: 52-53). He notes,

TV-verite. Admirable ambivalent terms: does it refer to the truth of this family, or the truth of TV? In fact, it is TV which is the Loud's truth, it is it which is true, it is it which renders true. A truth which is no longer the reflexive truth of the mirror, nor the perspective truth of the panoptic system and of the gaze...No longer is there any imperative to submit to the model, or to the gaze. 'YOU are the model!' YOU are the majority!' Such is the slope of the hyperrealist society, where the real is confused with the model as in the statistic operation, or with the medium, as in the Loud's operation. (ibid: 52-53)

Baudrillard's critique of *An American family* touches on the populist promise that reality TV makes to its viewers when it invites 'ordinary people' to become the premise of its production. At the same time, Baudrillard's suggestion that *An American Family* is only egalitarian in the sense that it authenticates every viewer's experience of American domesticity by making a white upper-middle-class family the basis for its exposition, echoes the concerns expressed by the Frankfurt School. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, one of the culture industry's goals is to 'confuse the real with the model,' or to bring us to a moment when "[n]ot Italy is offered, but evidence that it exists" (1969: 148). For Baudrillard, then, TV *verité* like *An American Family* takes 'us' as its subject matter so that we may be provided with some proof that our day-to-day lives are, by comparison, authentic.

Spigel, in her book *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, points to an even earlier form of TV *verité* (1992). For Spigel, hyperreal television began in the 1950s when networks sought to create a feeling of community for viewers through simulation. She notes,

[t]elevision producers and executives [in the 1950s] often took the promise of hyperreality quite seriously, devising schemes by which to merge public and private worlds into a new electronic neighborhood. One of the central architects of the new electrical space was NBC's Pat Weaver, who saw television as an extension of traditional community experiences...Implementing these ideas in 1949, Weaver conceived *The Saturday Night Revue*, a three-hour program designed to 'present a panorama of Americans at play on Saturday Night.' The program took the segmented format of variety acts and film features, but it presented the segments as a community experience shared by people just like the viewers at home. As *Variety* explained, 'For a film, the cameras may depict a family going to the neighborhood theatre and dissolve from there into the feature.' Thus, television would mediate the cultural transition from public to private entertainment by presenting an imaginary night at the movies. (ibid: 134)

The context in which Spigel puts hyperreality provides another way of thinking about how television has historically constructed environments that attempt to connect the outside world with a private viewing experience. In the case of *Saturday Night Revue* (1950), it meant using the television as a kind of portal through which viewers could

transport themselves into ‘the city’ for a ‘night on the town.’ Thus, if reality TV is, as Baudrillard claims, a kind of ‘truth experiment’ predicated on collapsing the space between ‘self and Other,’ between ‘subject and model,’ then his and Spigel’s account of hyperreality reveal the extent to which television has for some time experimented with this by producing different kinds of TV *verité*.

Anna McCarthy, in her essay “Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt, and Me: Postwar Social Science and the ‘First Wave’ of Reality TV,” traces television’s penchant for realism to possibly its purest form, the unaware participant (2004). Comparing Allen Funt’s *Candid Camera* (1948-1950) and the social scientific work of Phillip Zimbardo and Stanley Milgram she notes,

...these men shared a sense of theatricality, simulation, and dissimulation as necessary tools for understanding the complex dimensions of human behavior in modern society. Each saw techniques of deception as components of empirical investigation, and each articulated a working model of realist representation as the foundation for such investigations. (2004: 29)

Although reality TV’s connection to this kind of social scientific experimentation is reflected in the way producers continue to consult social scientists and psychologists when constructing and casting new programming,¹⁹ it is most apparent in the striking similarity between *Candid Camera* and a program like MTV’s *Punk’d* (2003-). *Punk’d* modifies *Candid Camera*’s format only slightly by showcasing celebrities (instead of ordinary people) who are caught in awkward, potentially traumatizing situations. In one

¹⁹ Most reality programming that can afford it hires consultants with backgrounds in psychology and other areas of social science.

episode, actors pretending to be Los Angeles police officers questioned *Friends* (1994-2004) star Matthew Perry about the purchase of stolen vehicles. In another episode, actors pretending to be U.S. agents working for the Internal Revenue Service seized Pop-star Justin Timberlake's house and belongings. Consequently, the premise under which *Punk'd* functions is the same as *Candid Camera*: participants are placed in uncomfortable situations in order to capture authenticity on film. And like the social scientific experimentation of Milgram and Zimbardo, *Candid Camera* and *Punk'd* accomplish this by confronting participants with authority. In the case of *Punk'd*, this often entails putting participants in situations where they unknowingly commit a crime. Thus, the pleasure that *Punk'd* offers its viewers is found in moments when celebrities are forced to abandon their public personas and 'be real' for the camera.

2.6 RITUALIZING MEDIA-SPACE

The use of celebrities as participants in *Punk'd* touches on another important aspect of reality TV. Because reality TV uses participants instead of actors, it calls attention to the divide that exists between media and non-media space. And although a show like *Punk'd* features participants that are already famous, the scenarios in which the program places them are supposed to compel these celebrities to divulge a moment of candor for the camera. In other words, *Punk'd* reverses reality TV's populist function by momentarily transforming the celebrity into a participant. In either case, reality TV is highlighting a media/non-media divide. Nick Couldry's discussion of media framing is, here, relevant because it offers another way to conceptualize the genre's appeal by focusing on media-

centric norms of behavior (1998, 2002). In his essay, “Teaching Us to Fake It: The Ritualized Norms of Television’s ‘Reality’ Games,” Couldry points to the way audiences and reality participants negotiate reality TV’s framing of social space by taking part in the media rituals found in game-based formats, or ‘gamedocs’ (2004). Couldry defines this process of media ritualization as follows: “...media rituals are formalized actions organized around key media-related categories and boundaries whose performances suggest a connection with wider media-related values” (ibid: 58). Part of Couldry’s point is that game-based formats act as potential sites of meaning-making because their structure reproduces the myth that media-space is preferable to non-media space.

In the case of a show like *Big Brother*, the importance placed on fame is explicitly tied to the promise of transitioning from the ordinary non-media world to the far more glamorous one associated with contemporary celebrity. Couldry points to the weekly eviction of participants from the *Big Brother* house as an example of this transition:

[t]his weekly pattern has been repeated in each British *Big Brother* series until the series’ final week, when the last inmate leaves the house as a winner. In its regularity, we have a clever simulation of other forms of television ceremonial. But it is not the formalization that I have most in mind in calling this a media ritual; rather it is the way the whole sequence is based around a fundamental boundary between ‘ordinary person’ and ‘media person’ – in other words, around the media-value of celebrity. A basic point of *Big Brother* is to enact a transition for each housemate from ordinary person to media person; The eviction ceremony is designed to make the transition seem natural...But its signification is greater, since

underlying the idea that the housemates become celebrities is another more basic media value: that being in the house is somehow more significant than being outside the house. (2004: 60-61)

Almost all of the reality programs that adhere to a gamedoc format depend on a similar ceremony. Some of the most successful primetime reality programming to do this include: *Survivor*, *The Bachelor(ette)*, *The Apprentice* and *American Idol*. These shows all use the eviction ceremony as a kind of weekly *dénouement* in which the cast is pruned and the season's evolving storylines are brought into sync with each program's narrative arc. To do this, gamedocs construct their eviction ceremonies in such a way as to reflect the program's unique narrative premise and stress the drama associated with its participants' struggle to remain in a media-space.

On *Survivor*, for example, contestants are voted off the program by fellow cast members at a 'tribal council.' Once a participant has been selected for dismissal, a flame that symbolizes that participant's presence on the show is extinguished. In the case of *The Bachelor(ette)* franchise, the 'rose ceremony' decides who will be eliminated from the pool of prospective mates. In this ceremony, the program's puerile depiction of heternormative courtship is represented by the Bachelor(ette)'s allocation of red roses to the participants that he/she wants to remain on the show. In the case of *The Apprentice*, the weekly eviction reinforces the program's nostalgic presentation of corporate America as a space that rewards hard work and entrepreneurialism irrespective of socioeconomic factors like race and gender. This is done by assembling the participants in a mahogany-paneled boardroom where real estate mogul and media personality, Donald Trump,

forcefully says ‘you’re fired’ to one unlucky contestant.²⁰ *American Idol*’s eviction ceremony showcases the dismissed participant by requesting that they sing a farewell song. But although *American Idol* clearly follows the conventions associated with the gamedoc format, it is different from these other programs in one important respect: *American Idol* lets viewers select who will get to stay on the show.

Putting aside the possibility that the voting is in some way rigged, the interactive dimension of *American Idol*’s format can be seen to further illustrate Couldry’s point. If Couldry’s argument is that these game-based formats construct a bridge over which ordinary people are allowed to transition into media-space, then *American Idol*’s inclusion of its viewers as the decision makers in that process secures the legitimacy of the show’s populist mission. This also provides viewers with an opportunity to reaffirm through the democratic ritual of deliberation and vote-casting the symbolic media-value associated with being famous. In so doing, *American Idol* can be seen to literally enact for its viewers what Joshua Gamson (2001: 261) and Su Holmes (2005: 25) identify as industrialized celebrity’s conflation of egalitarian democracy and the myth that stars rise to an iconic status as a result of their uniqueness.

American Idol’s emphasis on ‘personality’ instead of skill is also illustrated by the way participants are asked to sing only well-known songs. Although this is likely done so that viewers will be able to recognize the music and better judge the performances, performing songs that are immediately familiar to *American Idol*’s audience can also be

²⁰ It should be noted, however, that when Martha Stewart hosted a season of *The Apprentice*, the dismissal ceremony was modified to reflect her image as the businesswoman who built a media empire on decorum. Instead of ‘firing’ a participant from the show in a dark boardroom, Stewart gave the dismissed participant a handwritten letter that thanked them for their service and ‘let them go.’

seen as an acknowledgement by the producers that the show's competitions are little more than personality contests masquerading in the form of televised *karaoke*. If this seems cynical, consider how *American Idol* accurately reflects the business that these participants are struggling to enter. After all, most pop-stars are highly managed forms of talent that frequently perform music written by producers like *American Idol*'s creator and co-judge, Simon Cowell. In this light, *American Idol*'s practice of regularly rejecting its more skilled vocalists in favor of participants that are able to generate the kinds of extra-textual publicity that is associated with the legitimate manufacture of celebrity makes sense (Gamson 1994; Holmes 2005). That is to say, the talent that *American Idol* appears to be in search of has less to do with singing and more to do with manufacturing a celebrity persona. Or, to put it in the context of John Langer's (1981) and John Ellis' (1982) early observations about televisual fame, *American Idol*'s populist premise compliments television's fondness for personalities instead of stars.

The recent controversy over *American Idol* participant Sanjaya Malakar's 'unwarranted' success not only demonstrates this, it calls attention to the way reality TV's interactive game-based formats encourage the kinds of active audience engagement theorized by cultural studies scholars throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Morely 1980; de Certeau 1984; Ang 1985; Gray 1992). Sanjaya was widely considered to be the least talented participant on the sixth season. Therefore, it came as a surprise that each week he received enough votes to avoid being kicked off the show. This caused a whirlwind of publicity which was fueled by the way Sanjaya flaunted his poor singing ability by dressing in extravagant outfits and sporting eccentric hairstyles. This, combined with speculation that Sanjaya's success was due in part to websites and radio shows that urged

viewers to vote for him as a way to disrupt the show, represented a moment of crisis for *American Idol* fans. One fan remarked that “if [Sanjaya] wins, [she] really [doesn’t] think *American Idol* will be back” (Gunderson 2007).

Here, I want to challenge the claim that Sanjaya’s success was unwarranted by suggesting that it was not Sanjaya’s poor singing that made him such a controversial figure but the reality that his shockingly bad performances were so enjoyable to watch. That is to say, Sanjaya’s success was not disquieting because he lacked talent but, on the contrary, because he showed great skill at constructing a persona that different kinds of viewers found compelling enough to watch and vote for each week. From this perspective, the Sanjaya controversy accurately reflects Couldry’s point: reality TV’s game-based formats are, regardless of their individual narratives, a competition for celebrity (2004). Consequently, Sanjaya can be seen as having won the competition even though he was not awarded the title of *American Idol*. For proof of this, consider the fact that after being voted off the show, Sanjaya, not the *American Idol* winner, was *People Magazine*’s celebrity guest of honor at The White House Correspondents’ Dinner.²¹

Here, Holmes’ argument that gamedocs like *American Idol* embody a reaction against the criticism that reality TV manufactures celebrities who are ‘famous for being famous’ is particularly pertinent:

...we might suggest that, while repeatedly dismissed as the epitome of manufactured celebrity, the Reality pop texts could in fact be perceived as a site on which there has been an attempt to rework older, *traditional* discourses of fame, precisely because they are otherwise under

²¹ See Arnesa Howell’s article “Sanjaya’s a Hit at White House Correspondents’ Dinner” (2007)

attack...given that it is around the particularly visible contestants from these shows that there is the perception of a deserving , ‘extraordinary’ talent – in this case, singing. (2005: 33)

In the case of Sanjaya, however, we can see this sentiment expressed in reverse. Aware of what is really at stake, Sanjaya and a large segment of viewers chose to protest *American Idol*’s premise by adopting strategies for participation that over conformed to the show’s populist structure. In this way, both participant and viewer engaged in the kind of cultural subversion that Slavoj Zizek suggests is often the most effective way of disrupting the implicit ideological frameworks that substantiate explicit systems of power (1994). Zizek explains, “[t]he lesson of this is that – sometimes at least – the truly subversive thing to do is not to disregard the explicit letter of the Law on behalf of the underlying fantasies, but to stick to this letter against the fantasy that sustains it” (1997: 29). From this perspective, Sanjaya’s success disrupts *American Idol*’s egalitarian premise by effectively revealing the extent to which pop-stardom is itself the result of market-driven populism.

2.7 TELEVISION CREATES PERSONALITIES, NOT STARS

If the point of participating on a program like *American Idol* is to traverse a non-media/media divide – to realize a ‘media-self’ (Couldry 2004: 60) – then the celebrity created by reality TV is not limited to its game-based formats. That is to say, because the competition that takes place on *American Idol* has less to do with singing, and more to do with establishing a marketable persona, the prize that is actually at stake when

participating on reality TV is celebrity itself. From this perspective, all reality TV holds the same reward because the fame connected to being on reality TV is ultimately a byproduct of playing oneself on-camera. This returns us to Langer (1981) and Ellis' (1982) observation that television constructs personalities who are famous instead of actors who are stars. This 'personality paradigm' asserts that television de-emphasizes the ordinary/extraordinary dichotomy that film studies has traditionally associated with classical Hollywood cinema (Dyer 1991, 1998, 2004; Ellis 1992; DeCordova 1985) by constructing personalities that are familiar to viewers. In so doing, television rejects the aura created by the film star's distance in favor of a personality that is accessible and offers a constant level of intimacy (Holmes 2004: 116).

Thus for Langer (1981) and Ellis (1982), the critical difference between film stars and television personalities has to do with the way celebrity is shaped by the context in which it is experienced and, consequently, for which it is cultivated. Langer notes,

[t]he 'magic' of the silver screen still lingers, even if this is only in terms of a collective but very powerful memory of what Hollywood 'as it used to be.' It is left to television's personality system to take up this process of embourgeoisment and move it forward, considerably advancing the 'intimate vision' to the point that where what is presented on television is precisely that which is 'the ordinary,' where 'the everyday' has superseded and supplanted 'the exceptional,' where 'the exceptional,' is the exception rather than the rule. (ibid: 354)

Referencing Langer, Holmes sees this kind of familiarity exemplified most by reality TV's use of ordinary people: "...if 'ordinariness' and familiarity are seen to structure

televisual fame, reality TV offers a literalisation of this rhetoric in its focus on ‘ordinary’ people who come to be seen regularly in a familiar context” (2004: 116). Holmes also notes that such a personality paradigm may be too simplistic to be useful when considering reality TV’s complex construction of celebrity (ibid). She, like Couldry (2004), points to *Big Brother’s* eviction ceremony as being symptomatic of this complexity: “... it is surely difficult to reconcile this paradigm with the image of *Big Brother’s* staging of celebrity – the screaming crowds, the flashing camera bulbs, the waving banners – as the latest evictee-turned-celebrity leaves the house” (2004: 117).

But, *Big Brother’s* eviction ceremonies seem to both support and contradict the personality paradigm. They enact the kind of extraordinary spectacle that is commonly associated with celebrity functions in order to celebrate a mode of fame that is predicated on performing one’s ordinariness on-camera. Consequently, reality TV’s construction of celebrity does not appear to entirely break with past, often problematic, considerations of televisual fame for the same reason that it does not fit within them; it asks ordinary people to play themselves in order to stage their transition from non-media-space to media-space, which in turn marks them as uniquely unexceptional celebrities. Without going into a more in-depth discussion of how reality TV supports and challenges preexisting conceptions of televisual fame (something Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 take up in much more detail), it is clear that reality TV’s use of participants instead of actors necessitates the kinds of theoretical interventions that media scholars like Holmes are advocating.

2.8 REALITY TV'S MOVEMENT TOWARD, AND DEPARTURE FROM, INTERACTIVE TELEVISION

If television is an inherently familiar medium, then the intimate relationship that reality TV constructs between its participants and viewers is exceedingly 'interactive.'²² This is not only the case with reality TV that depends on viewer-based feedback, it also includes programming which takes the 'everydayness' of the viewer's image as the basis for its storylines and, more importantly, the logic under which its representations function.

Hidden-camera shows like *Punk'd*, and amateur video programs like *America's Funniest Home Videos*, approach viewers and participants as essentially one and the same thing.

Couldry terms this interactivity 'surveillance-entertainment' (2004). He notes, "...in surveillance-entertainment, the impacts on 'performance' are surely the *key* issue since its underlying premise is that we can expect *any* everyday activity legitimately to be under surveillance and monitored by a huge, unknown audience" (ibid: 66). Unlike Foucault's panopticon, surveillance-entertainment does not serve a prohibitive function but, instead, operates as a kind of constant invitation to perform.

Andrejevic suggests something similar when he argues that there is a growing attitude that perceives electronic surveillance as self-empowering (2004:15):

[it] is perhaps not a coincidence that the emergence of relatively inexpensive highly sophisticated technologies for comprehensive consumer monitoring coincides with a trend in popular culture towards the

²² For a comprehensive discussion of interactive television see William Boddy's essay (2004), "Interactive Television and Advertising Form in Contemporary U.S. Television."

portrayal of surveillance as a means to self-expression and short cut to fame and fortune. (ibid: 8)

In the case of television, this equates to having a greater hand in the way programming is consumed. To this end, television's once linear schedule – what Williams termed television's 'flow' (1974)²³ – has been transformed by the popularity of TV-related DVDs, digital video recorders (DVRs) and Video on Demand (VOD). According to William Uricchio, new television interfaces like DVRs and VODs and their convergence with personal computers, will eventually do away with the disruptions that characterize commercial television (2004).²⁴ The convergence between these technologies ultimately necessitates a reconsideration of television's past deployment. The DVR, for example, enables viewers to engage in the same kind of 'time-shifting' that the VCR does but with the added benefit of being able to save, pause and rewind live-television in real-time.²⁵ VODs, on the other hand, provide a similar function but, because they are programming banks maintained by subscriber-based cable or satellite companies, they only allow viewers access to programming that is part of a catalogue. Working behind the scenes in this environment are metadata protocols that archive and catalogue programming into user-friendly categories. This not only allows for indexing, it determines how viewers conceptualize and locate the shows they want to watch. The metadata protocols further aid 'adaptive agent interfaces' like TiVo by incorporating 'people-powered metadata

²³ Williams notes: [i]n all developed broadcasting systems the characteristic organization, and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence or flow. This phenomenon, of planned flow, is then perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form" (1974: 80).

²⁴ Urrichio credits this to the advances made in digital compression and the increasing presence of optical fiber in cable infrastructure (2004: 173).

²⁵ *Wired* estimates that by 2008 more than 25% of viewers will be time-shifting (McHugh 2005: 109).

systems' that continuously search for and compile programming which matches viewing habits and recording preferences.²⁶ For example, Phillips (the maker of TiVo) is developing a next generation adaptive agent interface nicknamed 'Double Agent' that will be sophisticated enough to predict and record what subscribers will want to watch without any direct action or input on the part of the viewer (ibid: 176).

Thus, the suggestion that television's growing interactivity equates to a more active relationship with the medium may not be entirely accurate. In the case of adaptive agent interfaces, for example, viewers relinquish a measure of control to metadata systems in order to make watching television a more convenient, less arduous task. If it seems odd to think about watching television as a laborious activity, consider the amount of effort that goes into keeping up with a favorite show or sport while also tending to the activities of everyday life. In his book, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek describes something similar when he suggests that transference, or 'interpassivity,' is the reason for television's canned laughter:

[a]fter some supposedly funny or witty remark, you can hear the laughter and applause included in the soundtrack of the show itself – here we have the exact counterpart of the Chorus in classical tragedy... That is to say, why this laughter? The first possible answer – that it serves to remind us when to laugh – is interesting enough, because it implies the paradox that laughter is a matter of duty and not of some spontaneous feeling; but this answer is not sufficient because we do *not* usually laugh. The only

²⁶ According to Bradley Horowitz, Senior Director of Yahoo!'s Technology Development Group, this was pioneered by Google: "Google's original stroke of genius was figuring out how to piggyback on human judgment by following the links people make between Web sites" (McHugh: 111).

correct answer would be that the Other – embodied in the television set – is relieving us even of our duty to laugh – is laughing instead of us. So even if, tired from a hard day's stupid work, all evening we did nothing but gaze drowsily into the television screen, we can say afterwards that objectively, through the medium of the other, we had a really good time. (1989: 35)

In this context, television's movement toward metadata systems and adaptive agent interfaces is, like canned laughter, about letting viewers fully enjoy television by eliminating their obligation to watch it in the first place. Of course, this is not to say that viewers watch less television because their TiVo has already watched it for them. On the contrary, if we apply Žižek's theory of interpassivity to adaptive agent interfaces, it is likely that viewers watch more television because they are freed of the responsibility entailed in keeping up with the medium's growth and abundance of content. From this perspective, the interactivity found in services like TiVo renders viewers more passive by making them better spectators.

This is just one of the ways in which 'interactivity' can be seen to redefine the manner in which audiences experience television as a medium and a cultural form. Caldwell echoes this by calling for a broad reconceptualization of the role adaptive agent interfaces will eventually play in altering how television does business and how viewers watch television:

[u]nlike the first generation of 'unruly' analog users who threatened ad rates with VCR time-shifting and remote-control surfing, digital meta-browsing means not only that editorial control is in the hands of the users

but that it is also immediately and widely distributed by others. The syndication industry will again have to reinvent itself to insure profitability, even as advertisers have had to reinvent strategies in the face of personalized ‘bots’ that aggregate and individuate content automatically for viewer-users. Given this kind of dynamic, it is clear that new modes of media delivery and television-Net convergence also have an impact on television’s textual forms and the ways we relate to television itself. (2004: 43)

If we think about reality TV in this context, it becomes clear that the rise of nonfiction programming at the turn-of-the-century corresponded with the availability of these viewing technologies. Reality TV’s practice of incorporating non-broadcast content within its formats, for example, made it appealing to an industry that was trying to combat viewing practices like time-shifting. By encouraging viewers to participate with television in real-time through the use of other media, reality TV, as Magder puts it, “...extends the program, beyond the confines of the box in the living room” (2004: 150).

Arild Fetveit takes Caldwell’s observation a step further when he suggests, “[i]n a deeper psychological sense, the proliferation of reality TV could be understood as an euphoric effort to reclaim what seems to be lost after digitalization” (1999: 798).

Estella Tincknell and Parvati Raghuram describe this scenario in terms of reality TV enacting a ‘re-simplification’ of the televisual experience: “[r]eality programmes also seemed, at one level, to represent a return to the ‘basics’ of television and re-simplification of its aesthetics and its subject matter in a age of increasingly technology

driven and spectacular media” (2004: 256).²⁷ Thus, reality TV’s proliferation can be seen as both a movement toward and away from interactivity. That is to say, reality TV’s interactive formats mitigate the risks associated with interpassive viewing practices while also serving to reestablish a more ‘basic’ viewing experience. Here, we can see how surveillance-entertainment works in conjunction with television’s re-simplification. The inclination to put oneself on display for the purpose of enabling audience-adapted entertainment is part of the same cultural climate that celebrates the opportunity to perform one’s authenticity on-camera. Therefore, the trend to ‘get real’ on-camera not only works to re-simplify television, it functions to produce a televisual workforce that is infatuated with media-space and celebrity.

2.9 CONCLUSION

Since the late-1980s, networks have come to depend on a wide assortment of ‘popular factual television’ for programming that meet the demands of the industry’s changing institutions (Hill 2005: 39). In the 1990s, this not only included the production of early turn-of-the-century fact-based programming (shows like *Cops* and *America’s Most*

²⁷ This nostalgia for a more ‘basic’ form of television can also be seen to reflect television’s one-time status as, what Marshall McLuhan termed, a ‘cool medium’ (1964). McLuhan famously distinguished media as being either ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ based on the way audiences interacted with a given medium’s physicality: “a hot medium is one that extends one single sense in high definition... Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience” (ibid: 25). In the 1960s, this meant that television’s audio-visual limitations guaranteed a relatively high level of sensory participation. Today it seems that the opposite is true. Similar to the interpassivity found in the adaptive agent interface’s removal of the injunction to watch, high definition programming lessens the extent to which the ear and eye have to participate with television’s audio-visual content.

Wanted, for example), it entailed a larger, more extensive, restructuring of television's relationship with labor. Because of union unrest and FCC deregulation, the television industry began to manufacture programming that depended on amateur performers and contracted above-the-line labor. This labor substitution not only provided networks with inexpensive television, it allowed large media conglomerates like Viacom to produce in-house programming on a massive scale for all of their media outlets. And because the majority of this programming was based on the performances of non-contracted labor, fact-based television also provided the industry with a highly malleable workforce. Companies like Viacom were able to purchase already proven reality formats from international production companies like Endemol, which they would then cast with participants that could be easily discarded and replaced. This not only mitigated the risk involved in developing new fact-based programming, it provided a proven blueprint for auxiliary revenue sources like product placement and media tie-ins.

Although reality TV can be seen as a symptom of this restructuring, its success was also the result of a cultural climate that welcomed television about ordinary people. In other words, reality TV's proliferation at the turn-of-the-century was due in large part to the changing audio-visual appetites of viewers. The early fact-based programming of the 1990s can be seen to have paved the way for what is today commonly categorized as reality TV (e.g., infotainment, docusoaps, lifestyle programming and gamedocs). In so doing, it also cultivated a market for programming that served media savvy viewers who had lost interest in standard television fare. Shows like *Cops*, for example, broke with the monotony of the thirty-minute sitcom and hour-long drama by offering a frenetic on-scene view of the daily activities of America's law enforcement. And although this

programming also worked from a narrative formula, its depictions of ordinary people provoked a new way of thinking about television's relationship with its viewers. That is to say, reality TV can be seen to have purposefully blurred the lines between fact and fiction in order to bring the performer and the viewer closer together.

By the late-1990s, television's use of participants in fact-based television had come to embody something more than a reworking of nonfiction television. With the popularity of programs such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, viewers and participants started to perceive of reality TV as a pathway to fame and fortune. Today, this comprises much of the discourse that structures reality TV's storylines. Reality TV often has less to do with portraying the everyday and more to do with reinforcing the myth that media-space is preferable to non-media-space. Reality TV does this by promising all of its participants – even the unknowing ones – a form of publicity that is assumed to be positive. Reality TV not only glamorizes its participants' transition into media-space, it positions celebrity as something attainable by constructing populist narratives that call attention to the way contemporary fame is manufactured. This in turn secures reality TV's condition of possibility: everyone should want to be on television. Although the claim that everyone wants to be on television is likely far from accurate, it does highlight the reality that a striking number of people are excited about the prospect of engaging in its process of celebrification. Consequently, reality TV's status as interactive television is about more than being on-camera. It also relates to the many ways in which people are anxious to take part in the development of a given show's plot and gain access to extra-televisual content.

Since Vladimir Zworykin introduced the electronic camera tube in 1923, television has been a technology shaped by industry, as well as a cultural form tied to social experience. Today, we can see this relationship between production and reception play itself out in reality TV's use of ordinary people. Reality TV has not only helped to usher in a new era of interactive television, it embodies a critical way in which the industry is expanding the parameters defining what it means to participate with television. Consequently, reality TV's rise over the past two decades offers a unique perspective from which to view the industrial and cultural factors that have been driving television's recent advancement. Thus, one way of understanding the role the 'reality phenomenon' has played in this restructuring is to consider more extensively how reality TV's use of participants instead of actors embodies this transition. This necessitates a reconsideration of what it means to participate with television as both a viewer and a performer. Reality-participants need to be approached as a particular kind of televisual workforce that shares both differences and similarities with previous and already existing forms of televisual labor. This is the goal of the subsequent chapters' analysis of MTV's *Real World* programming and its participants.

3.0 CHAPTER TWO

THE ANATOMY OF A REALITY FRANCHISE: TRACING GENERIC CODES IN MTV'S *REAL WORLD* PROGRAMMING

Reality TV is often thought of in terms of the production codes that it shares with other kinds of television. Over the past decade, these codes have become increasingly standardized. They are not only used by producers to duplicate reality TV's formats, they enable viewers to identify (and in some cases directly participate with) the reality shows they watch. For television studies, this has led to the use of hybrid classifications in order to characterize and categorize specific types of reality TV in terms of infotainment, gameshows, soap opera and lifestyle programming (Humm 1998; Dovey 2000; Brunsdon *et al.* 2001; Turner 2001). Richard Kilborn's use of the term 'docusoap' to indicate a type of non-fiction television that blends the codes of documentary with the dramatic structure of soap opera is one of the earliest examples of this cross-genre classification (1994). While more recently, terms like 'gamedoc' have been used to position competitive game-based reality shows like *Big Brother* somewhere between the gameshow and the documentary (Couldry 2004; Hill 2005). According to Jane Feuer, this kind of subcategorization is often necessary when attempting to group mass media like television that is culturally specific and temporally limited (1992: 139). At the same time, this process of classification poses the problem of further muddying an already unclear idea of what it means to call something reality TV. Su Holmes and Deborah

Jermyn suggest that because reality TV was first approached as a ‘catch-all-phrase’²⁸ for non-fiction television, the debates and discussions that attempt to define it are invested in a concept of generic hybridity (2005: 2). This has lead Hill to observe that “[s]cholars of popular factual television can be in danger of genre overload when defining the reality genre.” (2005: 49).²⁹

For evidence of the theoretical, critical and methodological issues that might arise from an over dependence on generic hybridity, we need only consider a show like Animal Planet’s *Meow Mix House* (2006). *Meow Mix House* follows ten cats living in a ‘house’ constructed within a storefront window on Madison Avenue in New York City. According to Animal Planet, the felines compete for ‘best mouse-catcher,’ ‘most prolific sleeper’ and ‘loudest purr.’ As the season progresses, cats are voted off by audiences via the meowmixhouse.com webpage.³⁰ Although *Meow Mix House* is clearly spoofing a number of reality shows (most notably *Big Brother* and *American Idol*), it would be a mistake to assert that it exists outside the generic confines of the gamedoc format. Even though *Meow Mix House* does not place human participants at the center of its narrative,

²⁸ See also Richard Kilborn’s early essay on reality TV, “‘How Real Can You Get:’ Recent Developments in ‘Reality’ Television,” in *The European Journal of Communication* 9: 421-39.

²⁹ This type of generic analysis is similar to the literary method for defining genres where classification is sought between two objects through comparison. Feuer explains this in terms of taxonomy: “...the taxonomist begins with already existing examples of the type. From these, She/he builds a conceptual model of the genre, then goes on to apply the model to other examples, constantly moving back and forth between theory and practice until the conceptual model appears to account for the phenomenon under consideration” (1992: 141).

³⁰ The website also follows standard online conventions for supplemental web-based television content: meowmixhouse.com contains a “Meow Library,” where you can access cats bios and the latest blog entries, a “Meow Theater,” in which previous episodes can be viewed, and a “Feline Kitchen” containing information about sponsors and products.

the program adheres to the generic codes associated with the gamedoc. *Meow Mix House* does this in two ways: the program's narrative is contained within a domestic (albeit miniaturized) setting and its game-structured storylines hinge on the regular dismissal of one of its feline cast members. In the case of reality TV that purposefully constructs itself with a measure of reflexive humor, then, the production codes defining the gamedoc subgenre appear to be at once accurate and unproductive.

This is why media ecologists like Susan Murray argue for a consideration of reality TV that goes beyond the kinds of textual accounts that classify reality TV in terms of generic hybrids (2004). Adopting Jason Mittell's call for a discursive approach to studying television genres (2001, 2004), Murray advocates a methodology that examines reality TV from an extratextual perspective (ibid: 41). Or, to use Mittell's words, "[the] goal in analyzing generic discourses is not to arrive at a genre's 'proper' definition, interpretation, or evaluation, but to explore the material ways in which genres are culturally operative" (2004: 14).³¹ Thus, both Murray and Mittell are proponents of a methodology that extends past textual generic criticism in order to account for the various cultural, industrial and audience practices that shape television's constantly shifting meaning and value (Murray 2004: 54; Mittell 2004: 22-3).³²

This approach is useful for my consideration of MTV's cultivation of reality-talent because it provides a way of thinking about the participant's transformation from a

³¹ John Fiske notes something similar when he observes that television "[g]enres are intertextual or even-pretextual, for they form the network of industrial, ideological, and institutional conventions that are common to both the producer and audiences out of which arise both the producer's program and the audiences' readings (1987: 110).

³² This also echoes John Corner's 'post-documentary' critique in which he urges that media scholars ask whether something is a 'documentary project' rather than a proper 'documentary' (2000; 2002).

novel element within television's *mise-en-scène* to a highly profitable form of television-based-talent. Consequently, this chapter will focus on MTV's use of the amateur performer in order to 'decenter' the text in such a way as to address the unique nexus that reality TV configures between viewer and participant. In other words, because reality TV's participants inhabit the multidimensional space of spectator and performer, it is necessary to consider their status as talent from a number of interconnected (textual and extratextual) perspectives. In the case of MTV's production of *Real World* programming, the participant will be seen to function as a site of cultural production where television's viewers and performers come together to form a new mode of television-based talent.

To do this, I will adopt a generational model that examines MTV's *Real World* programming from the standpoint of the viewer-turned-participant as well as the participant-turned-talent. This chapter will provide a history of MTV's adaptation of a specific type of television-based performer in order to relocate the emphasis of analysis from the text to the participant. In so doing, my generational model will also serve as an important reference point for the subsequent chapters' examination of reality-generated celebrity and reality-based performances. Both first-generation and second-generation participation will be seen to reflect MTV's desire to appeal to the audio-visual appetites of its coveted youth demographic (Banks 2004). At the same time, each generation will be situated in relation to the shifting industrial practices and cultural contexts that surrounded reality TV's broader restructuring of the televisual landscape. Ultimately, this chapter's consideration of MTV's development of reality-specific talent aims to isolate

one aspect of reality TV's (re)emergence at the turn-of-the-century³³ in order to provide a more comprehensive model for understanding the reality phenomenon.

3.1 FIRST-GENERATION: *THE REAL WORLD* AND *ROAD RULES* (1992-1995)

In 2004, *Variety Magazine* ranked the most influential reality programs of the 1990s. *The Real World* was at the top of the list. According to *Variety*, “[s]even people stopped being polite – and started the reality revolution. While it would take almost a decade for reality TV to move into broadcast television, MTV’s docusoap from Bunim-Murray Prods., served as the ‘Sesame Street’ of reality TV for an entire generation” (Adalian 2004). This is how *The Real World* broke the production barrier between documentary television and popular ‘nonfiction’ programming like daytime talk shows and court TV. With *The Real World*, MTV proved commercial television could support certain ‘fact-based’ formats if properly conceptualized in accordance with a specific viewer demographic. Thus, *The Real World’s* melding of observational documentary with an aesthetic conducive to MTV’s highly stylized youth-centered programming distinguished it from other kinds of nonfiction television. Interestingly, the producers of *The Real World* (Jon Murray and Mary-Ellis Bunim) came from very different backgrounds.

³³ Following Anna McCarthy in her essay (2005), “‘Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt and Me’: Postwar Social Science and the ‘First Wave’ of Reality TV,” I use the terms ‘(re)emergence’ and ‘turn-of-the-century reality TV’ as a way to identify reality TV’s second wave of production and date its subsequent proliferation in the U.S. In so doing, I am acknowledging reality TV’s early history as well as limiting my analysis to the reality programming that has been deployed in the U.S. over the last two decades.

Before joining to create Bunim-Murray Productions, Mary Ellis-Bunim was an established soap opera producer for *As The World Turns* (1956-Present) and *Santa Barbara* (1984-1993), while Jon Murray was a documentary filmmaker. It is not hard to imagine how the melding of these ostensibly disparate media lineages helped to structure *The Real World's* presentation of the real in such a way as to generate entertaining storylines in the form of a serialized documentary.³⁴

The production techniques that *The Real World* first employed to accomplish its blending of soap opera with documentary have become routine among many of reality TV's formats. For example, *The Real World's* use of 'confessionals' for to-camera monologues and onset interviews (as well as its adherence to the domestic realm as a preferred site for camera deployment) are today standard methods of producing participant-generated content. These production techniques represent the extent to which *The Real World* (and by extension, reality TV as a whole) depends on filming practices commonly associated with the documentary. *The Real World's* solicitation of first-person dialogue to fabricate participant-generated narration, for example, grounds its exposition of real life in the emic perspective of its cast members. And the use of domestic space as the primary set further grounds *The Real World's* depictions in a kind of anthropological rhetoric by selecting a locale that is often associated with privacy and intimacy. Consequently, *The Real World's* early use of the participant can be seen to have laid much of the groundwork for turn-of-the-century reality TV. And although *The Real World* – when compared to more contemporary MTV docusoaps like *Laguna Beach*

³⁴ In fact, Murray is quoted in an interview with Mark Andrejevic in which he states that when developing *The Real World* he wanted to produce a version of *An American Family* (1973) for MTV's young audiences (2004: 71).

(2005-) and *The Hills* (2006-) – appears antiquated and unpolished, it was the first reality program to show how documentary could be reworked into a highly profitable form of television.

Once *The Real World* had achieved a moderate amount of success, Bunim-Murray began production of *Road Rules* (1994-2003). *Road Rules* was originally intended to duplicate the basic premise of *The Real World* by filming seven strangers in a communal setting. But from the start *Road Rules* modified this formula by including prefabricated narrative elements that were meant to enhance what the producers saw as the most entertaining aspects of *The Real World*. The most obvious of these modifications was the domicile in which the *Road Rules* cast was asked to live for six months. *Road Rules* placed its participants in a Winnebago motor home in order film them traveling to various locations where they would compete for prizes.³⁵ These competitions not only guaranteed a level of tension between castmates, they reconfigured *The Real World's* open-narratives into a more linear structure by strategically placing conflicts at critical points in each season's narrative arc. For example, the first task given to the cast of *Road Rules: Latin America*, was to identify and apprehend one among hundreds of Chihuahuas that had the key to that season's Winnebago attached to its collar. This task was shot in a stadium traditionally used for bullfighting in Chihuahua, Mexico. In this season premier, then, the cast had to overcome an obstacle that reflected that season's theme in order to begin their journey through Latin America.

³⁵ On the eighth season of *Road Rules* (2002), however, the Winnebago was exchanged for a cruise ship. This season of *Road Rules* was part of The University of Pittsburgh's Semester at Sea Program.

Unlike future gamedoc programming that incorporated ceremonial dismissals as built-in intervals for plot maturation,³⁶ the stakes of *Road Rules*' 'games' never guaranteed expulsion. Instead, *Road Rules*' linear structure appears to have offered MTV a way to distinguish it from *The Real World*. It also proved to be another outlet for participants who had gone through *The Real World* casting process but were, for whatever reason, not chosen. Thus, Bunim-Murray's repurposing of potential *Real World* participants into *Road Rules* in 1995 can be argued to be the earliest instance in which the television industry recognized that the participant was a specific kind of talent with a use-value that directly corresponded to the process through which it was cast. Or to put it in terms of commodity production, these participants, like any readied material, are, once assembled, inherently valuable.³⁷ Bunim-Murray/MTV first exploited this revelation by reallocating leftover participants from *The Real World* to *Road Rules*. As we will see later, this practice of repurposing participants has become the narrative basis for a slew of *Real World* spinoffs that are predicated on the storylines attached to recurring participants. Thus in the time between *The Real World*'s 1992 debut and the creation of *Road Rules*, the participant's status as a highly adaptable form of talent comes into focus. Bunim-Murray/MTV's discovery that its participants embodied a durable

³⁶ As already mentioned, the previous chapter, gamedocs routinely eliminate a cast member at regular intervals in order to facilitate the resolution of the show's competition.

³⁷ I am using Karl Marx's definition for use-value as a theoretical reference point for outlining the reality-participant's status as a commodity. Marx's assertion that the physical nature of the object defines its use-value is especially helpful: "[use-value] is conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity, and has no existence apart from the latter. It is therefore the physical body of the commodity itself, for instance iron, corn, a diamond, which is the use-value or useful thing" (ibid: 126). Marx's location of use-value in the physicality of the object itself is, thus, particularly relevant because the nature of the participant's value for producers and viewers is often connected to their physical presence before the camera.

production material, with a lasting value, laid the foundation for *The Real World* franchise.

3.2 'CUTTING-EDGE TELEVISION'

During this period, MTV was also in the process of transitioning from a television outlet dedicated to airing music-related-content to a cable television channel that produced the bulk of its own programming. And because *The Real World* was MTV's first commercially viable non-music-related program, it can be seen as an early move in this direction. But this does not mean that MTV abandoned its brand image. On the contrary, shows like *The Real World* came to reflect MTV's dedication to producing television that connected with mainstream music tastes and, more generally, the cultural atmosphere and disposition of its young viewers. By the time *Road Rules* was in production, *The Real World* had gained a reputation for casting participants that echoed MTV's corporate image as a channel dedicated to producing moderately progressive, highly stylized, experimental television. Consequently, *The Real World* and *Road Rules* were first marketed as a kind of televisual experiment for MTV's generation-X audience. Author Dave Eggers, writing about *The Real World's* casting process in his celebrated generation-X memoir, *A Heart Breaking Work of Staggering Genius*, describes *The Real World's* depiction of a generation thought to be 'illiterate, uninspired, flannel-wearing slackers' (2000: 166). In doing so, Eggers speculates about the *The Real World's* allure to gen-X-ers like himself:

Everyone has seen the show. We all despise it, are enthralled by it, morbidly curious. Is it interesting because it's so bad, because the stars of

it are so profoundly uninteresting? Or is it because in it we recognize so much that is maddeningly familiar? Maybe this is indeed us. Watching the show is like listening to one's voice on tape: it's real of course, but however mellifluous and articulate you hear your own words, once they're sent through this machine and are given back to you, they're high-pitched, nasal, horrifying. Are our lives like that? *Do we talk like that, look like that?* Yes. *It could not be.* It is. *No.* The banality of our upper-middle-class lives, so gaudily stuck between the mindless drunk-driving of high school – that was meant as metaphor only – and the death that is homeowning and family-having, especially when packaged within a comfort zone of colorful couches and lava lamps and pool tables – wouldn't this make interesting television only for those whose lives are even more boring than those *The Real World's* cast? But it's impossible to ignore. As half the people we know, in secret or unabashedly, are scrambling to get their applications in, we wonder what sort of fun we can make to put our much needed spin on it all. (ibid: 167-168)

Eggers' commentary further illustrates the permeable barrier separating reality TV's viewers from its participants. It also reveals the importance of the cultural climate in which *The Real World* and *Road Rules* were first produced and received. That is to say, because these shows were able to captivate generation-X by being (in Eggers' own cynical estimation) cutting-edge television, they proved to be a breakthrough for cable television. In short, MTV had stumbled upon a way to produce inexpensive serialized television that compelled a critical segment of viewers known for priding themselves on

the high level of indifference with which they regarded mass culture. In this light, *The Real World's* pseudo avant-garde appeal appears to have less to do with the documentation of its casts members' lives and more to do with the self-effacing media relationship it afforded within a cultural climate of hip apathy.³⁸

After this, its third season (San Francisco), *The Real World* would begin to make its way into much higher ratings. At this time, Bunim-Murray/MTV moved from casting a moderately diverse selection of 'real people' to casting far more homogeneous types of participants. This would mean avoiding participants like Eggers. Thus between the third season and the fourth season (and with the subsequent introduction of *Road Rules* in 1995) Bunim-Murray appeared to be developing a casting model from which to more narrowly guide their selection of future *Real Worlders* and *Road Rulers*. Age, for example, became one of the most obvious casting shifts. By the sixth season of *The Real World* (Boston), and the third season of *Road Rules* (South Pacific), the 'diverse' age groups seen in the casts of New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco was replaced with consistently unemployed college-age participants. Consequently, Bunim-Murray's attempt at producing television that focused on the lives of young adults sharing a living space in an urban-hub was retooled to account for the growth of *The Real World* franchise and the changing makeup of MTV's core audience. Today, Bunim-Murray's second-generation participants are, by contrast, not only more easily recuperated and redeployed in other *Real World* programming and *Real World* related events, they reflect

³⁸ As already discussed in Chapter 1, it is important to think about reality TV's appeal in the context of a viewing atmosphere inundated with media saturation and, consequently, cynicism. The reality-participant's status as a kind of symptom of this environment is explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

the disposition of MTV's current audience – viewers that are perceived as having more consuming power and being far less cynical.

3.3 DEVELOPING AN ARECHETYPE

When *The Real World* debuted in 1992, its participants had no idea that their time on-camera would come to embody many of the generic conventions associated with reality TV's turn-of-the-century (re)emergence. The seven individuals cast on this inaugural season of *The Real World* were the first participants in what Anna McCarthy terms reality TV's 'second wave' (2004).³⁹ Consequently, they were not presented with the same opportunity that subsequent participants have had to reflexively construct their personas. This is significant because *The Real World* and *Road Rules* attempt to cast participants that will in some way reenact the same principal storylines that comprise the franchise's overarching narrative. Thus as both shows have progressed, participants are able to understand their performances in the context of an approximate role or type. But because reality TV is 'unscripted,' these performances are always rooted in a persona. As will be detailed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, the celebrity connected to these personas is the means by which MTV's *Real World* participants secure employment related to their fame. The celebrity that surrounded the participants from *The Real World's* debut season illustrated this when only one participant went on to become a television personality.

³⁹ Although reality shows like *Cops* predate *The Real World*, I do not place them in the same category as *The Real World* because they do not situate their participant in a serialized narrative.

Kevin, a cast member from the first season, explains this in terms of the unexpected attention he and the rest of his cast received after the show had aired:

I had no clue *The Real World* would become as big as it did. If I had known, I would have negotiated a better deal. I mean, we were making like \$100 a week, and at the time none of us had steady jobs. After the show, I'd see people on the subway, and they'd say, 'how come you're riding the IRT?' Everyone recognizes you and thinks you're living high, but we were all broke. Norman had lost his company, and the rest of us were struggling. I think the only one of us who got a gig was Eric, on MTV. (Johnson and Rommelmann 1995: 20)

Kevin's words indicate the extent to which the first *Real World* cast was unaware of the aftereffects of their participation. His comment that Eric was the only participant from that season to go on to work in television is also significant because it indicates the first instance in which one of MTV's reality-participants would be recast as a television personality. Because Eric was immediately selected to host *The Grind* (1992-1997) and *Hangin' with MTV* (1992), it seems fitting that his persona has become the most copied participant-type in the history of *The Real World* franchise.

After *The Real World's* debut season, Bunim-Murray/MTV would begin the long process of perfecting their casting practice in order to select participants that would recreate the most entertaining storylines. As a result, the majority of the housemates from the first seasons of *The Real World* would not meet Bunim-Murray's current casting guidelines. Some of the most dated cast members from the first four seasons of *The Real World* include: (with the exception of Julie and Eric) the entire first season; Irene, a 25-

year-old Deputy Marshall for Los Angeles County (Los Angeles); Pam, a 26-year-old third-year medical student (San Francisco); Neil, a 24-year-old Ph.D. candidate at Oxford studying experimental psychology (London); and Jacinda, a 22-year-old London-based model represented by Storm modeling (London). Each of these participants brought with them the kinds of time-consuming obligations, and ironically corresponding ‘real world’ perspectives, that made their on-camera personas less hospitable to the production demands and plot manipulations needed to create *The Real World*’s narrow storylines.

From the perspective of casting, the first four seasons of *The Real World* can, again, be seen loosely borrowing from the anthropological conventions of the documentary. These four seasons’ castings achieved this in two ways: the majority of the casts from each of these seasons already lived in, or were familiar with the host-city and, even more significant, many of these first-generation participants continued to attend to previous personal obligations and professional commitments during filming. At first, Bunim-Murray appears to have encouraged its first-generation participants to include their extra-curricular activities as part of their on-camera persona. Early *Real Worlds* often dedicated a number of episodes to following specific cast members as they went about their day-to-day lives outside of the house. In this way, Bunim-Murray appears to have cast for, and thus depended on, its early participants real world obligations to aid in each season’s portrayal of authenticity.

In this light, housemates like Irene and Pam can be seen as productive tradeoffs for Bunim-Murray: on the one hand, they nicely incarnated the show’s stated goal of diversity and engagement in ‘the real world.’ While on the other hand, the same off-camera activities that allowed them to do this also restricted the amount of time they were

able to spend within the purview of MTV's cameras. Remembering that producers of reality TV essentially write each season after it has been shot, the more footage they are able to assemble of each housemate, the easier it becomes for them to fabricate coherent plotlines. Irene's on-camera presence as a Deputy Sheriff (and a Hispanic female), for example, made her a rare but fertile site for storylines. For instance, when her fellow housemate David was accused of sexually assaulting another cast member, Irene's status as a Deputy Sheriff created the kind of 'see it as it happens' footage that Corner credits as "[p]opular factual television's core attraction for viewers [with] its capacity to let viewers see for themselves" (Corner 1995; Hill 2004: 53). These moments of tension, when we as viewers are allowed to 'see it as it happens,' as opposed to how it has been edited and thus scripted, are of great value to producers.

In the case of Pam, her status as an Asian-American and a third-year medical student afforded producers with similar, though less sensational, storylines. For example, Pam's pursuit of a career as a medical practitioner seemed to underscore the seriousness of the San Francisco season (a season that would eventually become famous for casting Pedro, a homosexual Cuban-American inflicted with HIV/AIDS). And even though Pam's off-camera duties at the hospital yielded compelling footage of her first year of medical residency, it also meant that she was only superficially involved in the day-to-day goings-on of the house. In this way, Irene and Pam can be seen to exemplify the diversity that has been abandoned by Bunim-Murray in their movement to cast single, out of work participants that approach their time in the host-city as a tourist instead of a resident.

This is why Julie and Eric, from the first season, are so remarkable. Unlike the rest of their first-season cohorts (Andre, Becky, Heather, Kevin and Norman), the dramatic travails found in both Julie's 19-year-old personification of a 'simple Midwestern-girl' coping with life in the city, and 20-year-old Eric's embodiment of a 'hyper-masculine love interest,'⁴⁰ are, today, manifest in some form across the majority of MTV's original programming.⁴¹ In subsequent seasons of *The Real World*, this usually equates to casting at least one white male participant whose heteronormative masculinity is balanced by a correspondingly feminine white female cast member. More often than not, this dynamic is connected by a romantic subplot. Thus in the first-generation, we see this casting practice reflected in distinct heteronormative dyads. In Los Angeles, Beth was depicted as the 'all-American girl' from Ohio. She was juxtaposed with Aaron, who co-creator Mary-Ellis Bunim described as a "surfer/hunk/frat-boy" (Johnson and Rommelmman 1995: 45). In San Francisco, Rachel's persona took on the air of a rebellious-Catholic-school-girl. She in turn became involved with Puck, who was presented as a kind of *louche* bike messenger. In London (the final first-generation season of *The Real World*), Kat was depicted as a wholesome twenty-year-old college student who was infatuated with twenty-four-year old Neil's nihilistic ways and bad-boy

⁴⁰ For an analysis of how *The Real World* mediates racist depictions of progressive urban dwellers see Jon Kraszewski's essay, "Country Hicks and Urban Clicks: Mediating Race, Reality, and Liberalism on MTV's *The Real World*" (2004).

⁴¹ This also corresponds with MTV's larger effort to market to young viewers using gender-centric archetypes. As reported on *Frontline*, the male, or 'mook' character type, and female, or mid-rift character type, work to glamorize male teenage angst and empower female promiscuity as its corresponding part (Rushkoff 2001). Aside from *Real World* programming, some of the shows that represent this programming shift include: *Bam's Unholy Union* (2007), *Beavis & Butt-Head* (1993-2000), *Homewrecker* (2005) (Jackass (2000-2002), *MTV Spring Break* (2000-), *Punk'd* (2003-2007), *Scarred* (2007-), *The Tom Green Show* (2000), *Undressed* (1999-2002), *Viva La Bam* (2003-2005) and *Wildboyz* (2003-2004)

rock star image. After the fourth season, this casting dynamic would continue to be duplicated with greater frequency. And by *The Real World's* ten-year-anniversary-season, the majority of its participants would embody in their persons, to varying degrees, the Julie/Eric archetype.

3.4 FROM INDIGENOUS HOUSEMATES TO NOMADIC ROADIES

The first three seasons of *The Real World* set about constructing their narratives in conjunction with a kind of 'field naturalism,' a complicated task considering that the 'residencies' in which participants were placed contained obvious set infrastructure. *The Real World* houses have built into their structures: lighting equipment, microphones, cameras, control rooms (Figure 3), and confessionals (Figure 3.1). Thus in order to achieve an aesthetic of field naturalism, Bunim-Murray cast participants familiar with the program's host-cities. Consequently, the relationship that first-generation participants had with urban space can be seen as another instance in which Bunim-Murray/MTV was engaged in what Corner identifies as reality TV's struggle to establish itself outside of, but still in relation to, some kind of documentary lineage (Corner 2002). This early commitment to field naturalism was echoed by Julie when she expressed her surprise at being the only participant on the first season who was not familiar New York City:

I didn't know what the show was going to be about, but [the producers] did say, 'oh, it'll be seven people from all different parts of the country.' When I got to loft, I felt kind of setup. I was the only one who didn't know New York. I think the reasons the cameras followed me around so

much was because I didn't know anybody else in the city. I only had the camera crew to hangout with. (Johnson and Rommelmann 1995: 20)

Here, we can see how all but one of *The Real World's* earliest participants maintained an indigenous relationship to the host-city. This practice of casting 'native' participants was phased out over the next two seasons as it likely created difficulties in post-production. In the case of Julie's season, for example, her cohorts 'knew' New York City and thus were at home enough in this environment to participate in activities that were not always conducive for MTV's cameras. This meant that producers were not given an equal amount of footage of each participant, making the task of assembling coherent storylines that included all the participants much more arduous. For a number of reasons, then, it became more advantageous for Bunim-Murray/MTV to cast participants that were not familiar with the host-city. This may be why after three seasons of casting 'indigenous housemates,' Bunim-Murray only picked two Britons for *The Real World's* fourth season that was set in London (1995).



Figure 3.0: the tenth season's control room⁴²

⁴² Images and histories of *The Real World* houses are courtesy of RealWorldHouses.com.



Figure 3.1: the tenth season's confessional room

The debut of *Road Rules* at this time showed an even more pronounced commitment to casting participants that were unfamiliar with their surroundings. Because *Road Rules*' premise was based on participants living in a traveling mobile home, it effectively positioned its entire cast as televisual nomads. Here, *Road Rules* indicates an even larger shift on the part of Bunim-Murray in the direction of confining participants. By sequestering casts within a moving home, *Road Rules* continually kept participants 'out of their element.' This in turn increased the likelihood that there would be conflict among the cast members. It also reduced the opportunity for those participants to find solace in activities outside the confines of the traveling set and the purview of the *Road Rules* cameras. In this way, Bunim-Murray's movement away from indigenous participants in both *The Real World* and *Road Rules* served to make filming

and post-production much more manageable. In the case of *The Real World*, for example, Bunim-Murray's attempt at pre-scripting narrative content by casting participants who fit established roles was aided by its selection of individuals who were unfamiliar with the host-city. This essentially provides a common starting point from which to synchronize each new cast's experiences.

Between *The Real World*'s movement away from casting indigenous housemates, and the *Road Rules* dependence on placing casts in a nomadic relationship to the faraway locales they visited, Bunim-Murray/MTV's continued production of *Real World* programming reveals a growing commitment to developing a format model whereby the field naturalism associated with the documentary is reconfigured to better serve television's serialized structure. This can also be seen as one of the first instances in which turn-of-the-century reality TV emphasizes abstraction and seclusion.⁴³ But as much as *The Real World* and *Road Rules* attempted to relocate its participants into foreign environments, each show also imbedded within these locations a space that was entirely familiar to both cast members and MTV's viewers. For *Road Rules*, the Winnebago anchored the show's presentation of distant locales in a middle-class fantasy of experiencing the open-road without actually having to leave the comfort of one's

⁴³ This trend becomes common in most turn-of-the-century reality TV that depends on placing participants in foreign environments with the hopes that they will react on-camera to whatever stress this may cause. In her essay, "*Big Brother Australia*: Performing the 'real' twenty-four-seven," Jane Roscoe compares the kinds of confinement seen on *Big Brother* to a 'human zoo' (2004: 315). In doing so, she reveals that *Big Brother Australia*'s producers have approached this kind of reality TV as a psychological experiment that incites reactions from participants based on various stimuli. Although *The Real World* and *Road Rules* do not go to the same lengths that programs like *Big Brother* and *Survivor* do in order to seclude participants, Bunim-Murray/MTV's movement away from filming participants in their native environments can be seen as a very early manifestation of this trend.

home. In the case of *The Real World*, Bunim-Murray made metropolitan life accessible by designing domiciles that resonate with a kind of puerile appreciation of urban domesticity.⁴⁴

3.5 NATIVE INTERIORS

Bunim-Murray/MTV's highly stylized fabrication of domesticity is arguably *The Real World* franchise's most recognizable trademark. It began with the way *The Real World* furnished a broad range of urban structures to broadly suit the appetites of its young inhabitants' mass-produced life-styles. *The Real World's* construction of domesticity portrays for MTV's youth audience a kind of material fantasy of the city that is similar to what Charles Jencks terms the *musée imaginaire*, or the conception we have of faraway places that is fashioned from our limited exposure to them in the form of tourism and the media (2002). Dave Sirulnick, MTV's senior vice president of strategy and planning, explains this in the context of MTV's general production topos:

[i]t's principally to make our programming relevant that, we believe, is the first turnstile that we must adhere to at all times – that anything that we do has to be relevant to the viewer. So many times we hear so many young people complain, and many adults as well, that they watch TV or they interact with any medium and they think, 'What does this have to do with me?' We believe that . . . we're able to bring that to life on air, be it

⁴⁴ Here, again, we can see the relevance of Roscoe's 'human zoo' metaphor (2004: 313-14). *The Real World* houses not only represent a space of confinement, they are also designed to simulate its participants' original environment.

through *The Real World* or things like that. We understand the kinds of products that they're actually using. We're able to actually translate that on air in terms of set design, in terms of subjects that people talk about, the issues they're grappling with as well. (Sirulnick 2001)

From this perspective, the most realistic component of *The Real World* is located squarely in Bunim-Murray's product-laden construction of domestic space. *The Real World* houses are furnished with merchandise from companies like IKEA and Urban Outfitters. This form of product placement allows Bunim-Murray to inexpensively construct its sets in such a way as to present its viewers and participants with a version of urbanity that is highly appreciable. In other words, *The Real World's* depiction of urban-life is backlit with an eye to fulfilling the consumerist expectations of MTV's audience. And according to Sirulnick, this is what makes *The Real World* appear 'relevant' in the growing absence of field naturalism (ibid).

To this end, *The Real World's* domestic foundation has typically functioned within the program's narrative to combine two seemingly oppositional aesthetics in order to present urban life through the lens of suburban domesticity. As Jonathan Raban explains in *Soft City* (1974), urban life has, since the social movements of the 1960s, been thought to encourage a certain amount of play so that its occupants could reconfigure their identities into a shape that best suits their perceived individuality. The plasticity associated with urban life, then, can be seen to facilitate *The Real World's* narrative of self-discovery. But in order to do this, *The Real World's* presentation of city-life must be articulated through a picture of urban domesticity that is recognizable to its young, mostly non-urban, viewers.

For Bunim-Murray, these residencies turned six-month sets offer another immediate advantage. Because *The Real World's* aesthetic depends on consumable products, the show's sets must accommodate a wide variety of goods that are accessible to MTV's young viewers. As a result, the houses' interiors are comprised of little more than what amounts to reality-srag from companies eager to be associated with viewers' conception of hip urbanity. And although *The Real World* was not the first reality show to take advantage of product placement, part of its remunerative genius was its early practice of constructing entire sets using discounted, or freely donated, accoutrements that buttress the show's presentation of a heavily stylized metropolitan aesthetic. Consequently, MTV's fabrication of domesticity on *The Real World* is not only an economically prudent alternative to traditional modes of set fabrication, it can be viewed as another instance in which reality TV creates environments whose relevance entices participants to function as another form of donated production material.

3.6 THE MOST DURABLE CAST MEMBER: TRANSITION INTO THE SECOND GENERATION

To date, the houses used for *The Real World* have been located in the following cities: New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, London, Miami, Boston, Seattle, Honolulu, New Orleans, Chicago, Las Vegas, Paris, San Diego, Philadelphia, Austin, Key West, Denver and Sydney. Though the houses' architecture and decoration are different in each new season, they all share a dedication to showcasing what might be identified as a 'postmodern' ornamentation of historical space. This in turn situates the city as an

appropriate place for the show's premise of personal exploration. In this light, *The Real World's* houses are symptomatic of what David Harvey identifies as a contemporary disposition to imagine the city as a place organizing spectacle and theatricality through the playful diversification of surfaces (1990: 93). Although all the houses share this feature, I am going to focus on the first ten houses because these houses best exemplify Bunim-Murray/MTV's development of, and transition into, its second-generation *Real World* programming.

The first season of *The Real World* was shot in a Soho loft space in downtown New York. Originally five stories, this marble-fronted building was constructed in 1860 for Ball Black & Co., New York's leading jeweler, across the street from Tiffany & Co. The loft looking out onto Broadway included a lift, a pool table and an aquarium (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). This location laid the groundwork for what would become *The Real World's* customary presentation of urbanity. Its large windows and post-industrial loft design afforded the producers a number of backgrounds to shoot interviews and to-camera monologues. Frequently, this entailed shooting participants on a fire escape that overlooked the busy intersection of Broadway and Prince Street. Of all *The Real World* houses, New York's interiors were the most understated.



Figure 3.2: the first season's exterior



Figure 3.3: the first season's kitchen with cast

The second season was shot in a beach house in Venice, California (Figures 3.4 and 3.5).



Figure 3.4: the second season's front exterior



Figure 3.5: the second season's rooftop deck

By selecting Los Angeles for the second season's host-city, Bunim-Murray/MTV stretched *The Real World's* depiction of urbanity beyond Soho's nineteenth-century cast-iron storefronts. Los Angeles made *The Real World's* depictions of the city a bicoastal experience. Because the set was located in a beach house, the producers were able to stage the participants' interviews and to-camera monologues against a background that represented the kind of 'palm tree' aesthetic commonly associated with television shows set in Los Angeles.⁴⁵ Again, we can see *The Real World's* presentation of the city in terms of Jenck's *musée imaginaire*. In the same way that the first *Real World* used the busy Soho intersection of Broadway and Prince Street to infuse its participants' self-expression with a particular kind of 'downtown' urbanity, the Los Angeles *Real World* employed coastal images of the Santa Monica mountain range and the Venice Beach Pier to assemble its participants' introspective moments. The remaining first-generation houses would continue to portray urbanity in terms of the host-city's imagined character. For example, the third season's house was located on San Francisco's famous Lombard Street in the fashionable Telegraph Hill district (Figures 3.6 and 3.7), while the fourth season's house was set in a chic four-bedroom Notting Hill flat in London (Figures 3.8 and 3.9).

⁴⁵ For example, programming like *L.A. Law* (1986-1994) and *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990-2000) constructed a similar Southern California aesthetic.



Figure 3.6: the third season's front exterior



Figure 3.7: the third season's living room



Figure 3.8: the fourth season's front exterior



Figure 3.9: the fourth season's living room with cast

The fifth season's house, in Miami, was the first to be located outside the actual city (Figures 2.11 and 2.12). The Rivo Alto House (like the Venice beach house) returned *The Real World* to a warm climate. But unlike the Los Angeles season, the Miami house embraced a kind of holiday aesthetic not yet seen in any of the previous sets. Located on 125 feet of water frontage, the house came furnished with a pool, Jacuzzi and jet skis. MTV's depiction of an authentic city-space from this point on oscillates between tropical locations just outside of large urban-hubs like Miami, and older industrialized cities where the actual house was located inside the city's center. This is an important change. It marked the beginning of a critical transformation of the narrative scheme governing Bunim-Murray/MTV's exposition of its participant's experience of living in a city. We see in the Miami house a space that shuns the day-to-day life of its host-city in favor of the types of leisure activities associated with vacationing in the tropics.



Figure 3.10: the fifth season's rear exterior



Figure 3.11: the fifth season's living room

After Miami, Bunim-Murray/MTV made another change in the way it presented urban domesticity. It began to select 'houses' that present a highly nostalgic picture of cities that might not otherwise be, in Sirulnick's words (Rushkoff 2001), immediately 'relevant' to MTV's target demographic. For example, *The Real World's* sixth season was shot in a firehouse in Boston's Beacon Hill (Figures 3.12 and 3.13).



Figure 3.12: the sixth season's front exterior



Figure 3.13: the sixth season's living room

The 2,500 sq. foot Firehouse formerly housed the safety inspectors for the Boston Fire Department. For the seventh season's 'house' in Seattle, Bunim-Murray/MTV leased a 51,823 square foot pier that was built on Elliott Bay in 1902 (Figures 3.14 and 3.15).



Figure 3.14: the seventh season's exterior



Figure 3.15: the seventh season's living room

And because the pier was not zoned for residential use, the producers had to obtain a special permit designating Pier 70 a '24 hour' film set. The eighth season, in Honolulu, returned *The Real World* to a structure that was originally intended for residential use. The Honolulu beach house consisted of a main house and two guesthouses. It was located next to Diamond Head State Monument. The house's interior was decorated with Hawaiian themed ornamentation. And its grounds were lit with tiki-torches and a flaming volcano that was installed on a cement island in the center of the swimming pool (figures 3.16 and 3.17).



Figure 3.16: the eighth season's rear exterior



Figure 3.17: the eighth season's billiard room

In many respects the Honolulu house was a tropical compound that embodied the proverbial Hawaiian vacation. The New Orleans' *Real World* was also shot in a structure that enacted a similarly stereotypical depiction of the host-city. The ninth season's participants were housed in a 7,000 square foot Greek Revival Mansion located in New Orleans' Garden District (figure 3.18).



Figure 3.18: the ninth season's front exterior

The house, titled “The Belfort Mansion,” was built in the nineteenth-century and had fallen into significant disrepair when Bunim-Murray/MTV selected it. After being completely rebuilt inside, the house contained New Orleans themed rooms like ‘The Voodoo Bedroom’ (figure 3.19).



Figure 3.19: the ninth season's 'voodoo bedroom'

But as was the case with the other houses, The Belfort Mansion's exterior was left intact in order to capitalize on the manner in which its nineteenth-century architecture evoked and antebellum image of the first Southern city picked to host *The Real World*.

Each of these 'houses' was reconfigured in order to offer similar accounts of the cities in which they were located. For example, they all contained within their physicality an element of the host-city that allowed participants to take long sojourns in the house without sacrificing the producers' ability to incorporate the city within the show's storylines. To that end, the urban renewal embodied by the architecture of all four houses was combined with the jumbled interior designs and brash color schemes that had become a trademark of *The Real World's* construction of domestic space. From this perspective, the historicity of these structures, as well as their locations in the host-city,

reflect a continued attempt on the part of Bunim-Murray/MTV to embed their participants' performances within a metropolitan atmosphere that its viewers would find appropriate. Consequently, these structures offer another example of *The Real World's* transition from a text that highlights the participant's search for inner meaning in the day-to-day activity of urban-life to a text that positions self-discovery as something best accessed through a nostalgic experience of the city.

The tenth season returned *The Real World* to downtown Manhattan. This season's set was located in a large brownstone on Hudson Street in the West Village (Figures 3.20 and 3.21).



Figure 3.20: the tenth season's front exterior



Figure 3.21: the tenth season's interior

This structure represents the end of *The Real World's* maturation into its second-generation configuration. *The Real World's* reunion with New York finds the show established as arguably the most recognized docusoap on U.S. television. By the time the tenth season aired, Bunim-Murray/MTV was already in-step with the rest of its primetime competitors, developing gamedocs and follow-up shows by recasting past participants in *Real World/Road Rules* spinoff programming like *Road Rules: All Stars* (1998), *All Star Challenge* and *Challenge 2000* (2000). This programming would lead to the creation of *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge* series which specifically showcases former *Real World/Road Rules* participants competing with one another in a

gamedoc format. Thus upon entering the confines of this tenth season – aptly titled “Back to New York” – these cast members were embarking on a very different relationship with fame than their New York predecessors. Therefore, as much as this season’s house was in keeping with the residencies that preceded it, it also represented something very different to its participants and viewers.

By the time *The Real World* returned to New York City, the house had come to embody an iconic space that reflected the way in which being on *The Real World* (and reality TV in general) translated into a new kind of television-based celebrity. Today, *The Real World* begins every season with this in mind. Each season’s hour-long premiere features an extended prologue introducing the cast to one another and eventually to the house. This ritual is a rite of passage that symbolizes the participant’s initiation into *The Real World* franchise. That is, the house can be seen to embody a passageway to celebrity and future employment because it holds the transformative promise of turning the participant into one of MTV’s *Real World* actors. It is not a coincidence that upon entering the house for the first time, the cast always reacts with amazement at their good fortune. They are, at this moment, effectively sutured within *The Real World*’s serialized narrative as both prop and talent. Put another way, this moment symbolically marries the house with the housemates. In so doing, it authorizes their image to carry on *The Real World*’s depiction of the real by connecting their participation with all the casts that have gone through the same initiation ritual.

Second generation: from ‘The Challenge’ to ‘Freshmeat’ (1998-2007)

Similar to *Road Rules*, which was born out of an auxiliary need to capitalize on *The Real World*’s casting overflow, Bunim-Murray’s production of gamedocs that

showcase former *Real Worlders* and *Road Rules* recuperates participants whose personas are too valuable to discard. Since *Road Rules* was retired in 1998, MTV has aired eleven gamedocs as vehicles for previous cast members of *The Real World* and *Road Rules*.⁴⁶ In order to continue to profit from already established reality-personas, the ‘Challenge shows’ have appropriated many of *The Real World*’s production techniques. However, the primary distinction to be made about these spinoffs is the way second-generation participants on *The Real World* and *Road Rules* matriculate as reality-talent into programming specifically designed to benefit from persona-centric narratives (romances and rivalries between certain participants and casts, for example). Thus, MTV’s second-generation of *Real World* programming is characterized most by the way it imports the personas developed on *The Real World* and *Road Rules* into larger ongoing narratives within shows like *Real World/Road Rules Challenge*.

To do this effectively, second-generation programming depends on a highly reflexive mode of participation. Recurring participants must mine their authenticity in such a way as to generate useful footage for the show’s producers. This in turn increases the likelihood that they will continue to be cast. In other words, because their personas become associated with storylines, their presence in subsequent seasons will be needed to continue the franchise’s trans-seasonal arc. Consequently, the fame generated from being

⁴⁶ To date these programs have included: *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge* (1998), *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge 2000* (2000), *The Real World/Road Rules Extreme Challenge* (2001), *The Real World/Road Rules Battle of the Seasons* (2002), *The Real World/Road Rules Battle of the Sexes* (2003), *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Gauntlet* (2003), *The Real World/Road Rules Battle of the Sexes 2* (2004), *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno* (2004), *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno 2* (2005), *Real World/Road Rules: The Gauntlet 2* (2006) and *Real World/Road Rules: Fresh Meat* (2006), *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno 3* and *Real World/Road Rules Battle of the Seasons 2* (2007).

on *The Real World* and *Road Rules*, combined with Bunim-Murray/MTV's practice of casting college-age participants, has with time provided a seemingly endless supply of reality-laborers that perform their realities in conjunction with the franchise's overarching narrative structure. Thus in the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly consider MTV's increasing dependence on reality-specific-talent in order to introduce three aspects of the *Real World* franchise that will be taken up in more detail in the chapters that follow: how second-generation programming depends on casting durable reality-personas who are able to successfully traverse formats, the way these *Real World* environments have extended beyond the bounds of the city and Winnebago to encompass extramural activities like public appearances and, finally, how programming is evolving beyond the confines of the storylines connected to its participants' time on *The Real World* and *Road Rules*.

3.7 TRAVERSING FORMATS

In order to discuss MTV's second-generation reality programming, it is necessary to keep in mind the televisual terrain upon which it was built and on which it continues to function. As MTV continues to derive its second-generation content from the basic premise of the first *Real World*, its structure continues to invest in what Ellis might call 'the universality of *The Real World* format in the everyday lives of its viewers (2004).' From a production standpoint, such an investment is little more than a continued attempt to capitalize on the obvious fluency with which even casual viewers of MTV are able to engage *Real World* texts.

From the perspective of the seven individuals selected to participate on the show as housemates, *The Real World* can be seen as a kind of staging ground for future reality employment. Unlike the first-generation of *Real Worlders* and *Road Rulers*, current participants are more aware of how their individual realities might best accommodate the narrative dimensions of the show. This reflexivity goes beyond a tacit understanding of *The Real World's* tendency to 'typecast.' Because second-generation participants are cast with an eye to maintaining narrative cohesiveness and building storylines that stretch beyond one show, they must display in both their person and their persona an ability to perform across the spectrum of *Real World* texts. Where first-generation participants were originally selected based on the 'individuality' that best suited *The Real World* and *Road Rules* documentation of 'authenticity,' second-generation participants conform to a more narrow casting criteria, one that situates *The Real World* as a point of departure for its participants' longer sojourn with MTV's particular brand of reality-celebrity.

Second-generation participants are also frequently selected from large casting calls on college campuses. And today, *Real Worlders* cannot be older than 24 years of age when they apply to go on the show. This casting practice not only works to feature MTV's target demographic, it increases the flexibility with which former participants can be cast for up-coming *Challenges*. By casting college-age participants, producers are able to work with individuals who are ostensibly at a transitional phase in their lives. College-age participants also afford a measure of predictability when assembling each season's cast because they rarely enter the show employed, married, or with children. This guarantees that each new season will be staffed with a number of relatively unfettered individuals who are often agreeable to being cast in future *Real World*

programming. This homogeneity also guarantees that if a participant is successful – if their reality-persona generates entertaining storylines – they will easily transition into future *Real World* programming.

3.8 A MEDIATED HOLIDAY

Aside from casting college-age participants, MTV's most notable transition from first-generation to second-generation programming can be seen in its implementation of a spring-break ethos. Where urban life was once the preferred theme for plotlines showcasing self-discovery, today *The Real World* franchise presents urban life as a kind of necessary backdrop for specific leisure activities (going to clubs and bars, for example). By the eighth season in Hawaii, this reformulation of *The Real World* as a six-month space of intoxicated recreation takes on the look and feel of a semester abroad. College-age participants relocate to foreign cities with the hopes of achieving personal growth while shopping and lunching during the day and barhopping in the evening. But remembering that Bunim-Murray/MTV is casting for a specific kind of talent, those invited to participate on *The Real World* must also express in their personas a responsiveness to the narrative demands of the *Challenge* shows on which they will eventually be cast. This suggests a rather complex practice of selecting cast members who are able to properly negotiate their persona in order to be a part of MTV's stable of reality-actors. In this context, *The Real World's* second-generation programming appropriates a holiday aesthetic in order to achieve two mutually dependent goals: to construct sets that coincide with MTV's attempt to appeal to young viewers through

programming that glamorizes excessive amounts of leisure creating a highly appealing form of employment for college-age participants. Consequently, being cast today for *The Real World* not only holds the implicit promise of a career in the media, it also assures a seemingly effortless, highly pleasurable, foray into the world of celebrity.

Bunim-Murray/MTV's production of a holiday aesthetic also serves the practical function of priming *Real World* casts for the time they will spend working off-camera as reality-specific-talent. Because *Real World* gamedocs like *The Inferno* and *The Gauntlet* are shot at the same time as *The Real World*, there is a planned break between shooting. In this time, cast members from the most recent *Real World* can migrate into upcoming seasons. Also at this point, established participants are rotated out to make room for the fresh talent. In the interim, veteran participants often book paid promotional appearances on college campuses, at bars and as part of larger spring-break packages. Here we can see a clear connection between the aforementioned holiday-aesthetic and the extramural labor that MTV's reality-actors perform when not filming a show. Because *Real World* gamedocs tend to be filmed in a vacation setting,⁴⁷ these programs often replicate the buoyant environments that MTV's reality-celebrities are paid to promote between seasons. These extramural activities work as a kind of secondary delivery system for MTV's *Real World* programming. By recasting already established talent within this gamedoc format, MTV not only recuperates its former participants, it codes their

⁴⁷ These have included: Cabo San Lucas, Mexico (*Real World/Road Rules Battle of The Seasons*); Montego Bay, Jamaica (*Real World/Road Rules Battle of The Sexes*); Acapulco, Mexico (*Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno*); Santa Fe, New Mexico (*Real World/Road Rules: Battle of The Sexes 2*); Manzanillo, Mexico (*Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno 2*); Trinidad and Tobago (*Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Gauntlet 2*); Australia (*Real World/Road Rules Challenge: Fresh Meat*); Búzios, Brazil (*Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Duel*) and Cape Town, South Africa (*Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno 3*).

personas with an aesthetic that befits their extramural employment, which in turn functions to promote the franchise to its viewers by letting them experience firsthand the advantages of working as a reality-celebrity.

3.9 **TRANSITIONING NARRATIVES**

Because MTV's recurring participants are the primary textual element producing second-generation narratives, *The Real World* franchise not only relies on these participants to authenticate its content, it uses their continued participation to fabricate the plotlines and themes from which its new programming operates. In this light, MTV's repurposing of the participant continues to set its *Real World* programming apart from other franchised docusoaps and gamedocs. Although recasting popular participants has become a common practice across a range of spin-off programming, MTV's execution of this production technique is much more extensive. Unlike other reality franchises like *Survivor*, which occasionally produce 'all-stars' spinoffs, the majority of MTV's *Real World* programming centers around its veteran participants. MTV is able to do this because these participants are constantly employed in the service of their reality-personas. Consequently, Bunim-Murray is afforded a resource for on-camera talent that constantly maintains and replenishes itself.

This is why *Real World* spinoffs like *The Challenge* series have become reliant on their participants' identities as reality-specific talent to provide the narrative material necessary to manufacture a steady stream of *Real World* related storylines. Put another way, Bunim-Murray/MTV's recasting of former participants is a viable production

strategy because it *does not* attempt to hide all the ways in which these returning cast members are working as onscreen talent. On the contrary, Bunim-Murray/MTV goes out of its way to call attention to its participants' status as reality-specific talent. But this was not always the case. It took a number of years for the *Challenge* shows to fully incorporate its cast member's identity as reality-celebrities into the storylines of its programs. The first two *Challenge* shows, *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge* (1998) and *The Real World/Road Rules Extreme Challenge* (2000), only had a perceived rivalry between *Real Worlders* and *Road Rulers* from which to generate plotlines. Although this division provided a useful prologue for MTV's first attempt at a gamedoc, it lacked the reflexive dimension characteristic of today's second-generation programming. By the third *Challenge* show, *The Real World/Road Rules Battle of the Seasons* (2001), the program's participants were divided into teams that enacted a more industry-reflexive storyline. Producers also attempted to represent the growing breath of *The Real World/Road Rules* phenomenon by selecting a cast member to represent each respective season. In this way, MTV began to restructure its second-generation programming in order to take full advantage of the subtle, more sophisticated storylines developing as a consequence of their casts' continued relationship with each other and their fame.

MTV's ongoing portrayal of reality-celebrity in its second-generation programming is exemplified most in the recent *Challenge* shows: *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Gauntlet 2* (2006) and *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: Fresh Meat* (2006). Both programs make a point of structuring their narratives around the reality that the cast members' status as celebrities is now more compelling than any of their previous affiliations with either *The Real World* or *Road Rules*. As a consequence, teams are not

sorted by affiliation but, instead, are arranged in accordance with the amount of time each participant has spent working as reality-talent. In the case of *The Gauntlet 2*, the teams are separated into two camps, ‘veterans’ and ‘rookies.’ While on *Fresh Meat*, this theme is developed further as first-time-reality-participants are partnered with an assortment of MTV’s most established reality-actors. Both seasons portray in their storylines an element of tension between ‘veteran’ cast members (who approach their time on the *Challenge* shows as the highpoint of their professional year) and ‘rookies’ who share the same professional aspirations as their more experienced cohorts but lack experience. Of course, the line dividing these camps is incredibly hard to decipher. Even the newcomers on *Fresh Meat* appear to possess the necessarily reflexive dispositions to compete in the games and participate in the trans-seasonal storylines. That is to say, these first-time participants display an almost uncanny ability to take part in some of the longest running plotlines from past *Challenges*. Even more interesting, these participants are able to do this without ever having been indoctrinated on either *The Real World* or *Road Rules*.

3.10 CONCLUSION

The rise of reality-specific talent has come at a time when the parameters of the reality genre are beginning to solidify around a handful of formats. These loosely include: docusoaps, gamedocs, and various kinds of lifestyle programming (Hill 2004). Although such attempts to categorize the genre are necessary in order to talk about reality TV in relation to other kinds of television – something Fiske argues is inescapable with such a highly generic medium (1987) – the resulting analysis, however insightful, is often

limited. This is primarily the result of not envisioning the genre's emergence in the context of the cultural activity linking its production to its reception. More often than not, this task proves quite unwieldy as the genre lacks a uniting factor from which to adequately discuss reality TV's institutions. This is why a discussion of MTV's cultivation of reality-specific talent is useful. As both text and labor, the participant embodies the textual and extratextual dimensions forming the genre's use of ordinary people as its performers.

Albeit MTV's practice of managing participants is uncommon, there is a connection between the genre's reemergence in the 1990s and Bunim-Murray's successful development of the docusoap and gamedoc. *The Real World* not only reshaped documentary television into a commercially viable format, it produced in its wake a new kind of television-based performer with a corresponding mode of celebrity. As a generational comparison shows, MTV's development of its *Real World* franchise in many ways works outside classic generic classifications while simultaneously existing as a product of their influence within the industry. Today, MTV's *Real World* participants relationship with their status as reality-talent provides a necessary site for narrative fabrication. And it also exemplifies reality TV's ability to stretch the televisual relationship by recuperating former participants as a form of talent that uniquely meets the reflexive demands of its manufacture. It is this last point that the following chapters will work to explore.

4.0 CHAPTER THREE

“A FAN CRASHING THE PARTY”: RETHINKING TELEVISUAL FAME IN MTV’S REALITY-CELEBRITY

In the summer of 2005, E! Television debuted *Kill Reality*, the latest in a long line of reality programs showcasing former reality participants. The premise of the show was the making of *The Scorned*, a B-horror film cast with reality-actors. To do this, *Kill Reality* implemented a common generic production formula: during periods of shooting *The Scorned*, the cast was also filmed living in a large beach house, furnished in accordance with the communal party aesthetic often associated with reality TV’s sensationalized depiction of domesticity. In this space, *Kill Reality* focused almost entirely on mixing gossip, ‘cat-fights’ and drunken escapades among bunk-bed partitioned rooms. But what made *Kill Reality* exceptional was not the format’s recycling of reality participants within this domestic setting, but its acknowledgement of the ambiguous, and often arduous, status held by these reality laborers. And although *Kill Reality* is the first reality program to explicitly use the topic of reality-celebrity as the engine for its plotline, it is merely one instance of a long-standing practice by which the television industry has for some time profited from the quasi-stardom created by the reality phenomenon. For example, *Amazing Race*, *The Bachelor*, *Big Brother*, and *Survivor* have all spawned spin-offs that recycle their participants into franchise programming (e.g., *All-Star Amazing Race*, *The Bachelorette*, *All-Star Big Brother*, and *Survivor All-Stars*). As a result, a subgenre of reality TV has originated by reclaiming former participants and using them as both semi-

professional entertainers (or ‘talent’) and *real* individuals free of a manufactured celebrity facade.

As noted in the previous chapter, the question of whether reality TV can be classified in terms of clear generic tropes has been insightfully debated in recent television scholarship (Kilborn 1994; Nichols 1994; Corner 2002; Andrejevic 2004; Murray 2004; Hill 2005). But what is too often underdeveloped (or omitted) in these accounts is an analysis of how the celebrity created in the wake of reality TV’s turn-of-the-century proliferation has changed the parameters defining televisual fame. Television’s construction of fame is often associated with the way the medium blurs the boundaries between its talent’s on- and off-camera performances (Langer 1981; Ellis 1982; Lury 1995, 2001). And while the intimacy found in reality TV’s ‘first-person’ narratives can be seen to further obscure the line separating participant from viewer (Dovey 2000), it is becoming apparent that we need to consider how being a ‘reality-celebrity’ might potentially alter the dimensions of this boundary. This has led Holmes to call for a reconsideration of the framework used to understand televisual fame in order to better address the celebrity created by shows like *Big Brother* (2004). By reconceptualizing reality-participants as a new form of on-camera talent, this chapter seeks to add to the ongoing discussion through a consideration of MTV’s cultivation and deployment of reality-actors in its *Real World* programming.

To do this, I will argue that MTV’s reality-celebrity exhibits a novel celebrity formation that is the result of commercial television’s shifting institutional structure. More specifically, this chapter will explore the ways MTV’s reality-actors are in pursuit of a television-based fame that is uniquely dependent on, as well as limited by, the way

they play ‘themselves’ as if always off-camera. The aim of this chapter is, thus, not to assert that reality-celebrity exists entirely outside television’s broader manufacturing of fame. Instead, the goal of this discussion is to outline how MTV’s reality-celebrity functions to complicate previous assertions made about television’s production of celebrity, and to explore how MTV’s emerging reality workforce might indicate a significant change in the way audiences interact with televisual fame. In particular, I hope to supplement the growing theoretical discussion of reality TV’s relationship with celebrity through a consideration of MTV’s management of reality-actors and the resulting talent’s handling of fame.

This chapter will work as a case study (in conjunction with Chapter 4) to consider the changing nature of televisual fame from the perspective of two of MTV’s reality-celebrities. This case study’s participant, Susie Meister, was on four of MTV’s most popular *Real World* spin-offs: *Road Rules: South Pacific* (1998), *The Real World/Road Rules Extreme Challenge* (2001), *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Gauntlet 2* (2005), *Road Rules: Viewers Revenge* (2007), and *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno 3* (2007). Meister grew up in a large, lower-middle class family in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. When cast to participate on *Road Rules*, she was a nineteen-year-old college student who identified herself as a conservative evangelical Christian. According to Meister, her background played a significant role in the way she first approached her time on *Road Rules*. Because MTV’s reality-actors depend on their life-story to provide the material for their performances, Meister’s background helped to structure the persona she would come to affect both on-camera and off-camera. Today, Meister continues to reference her religious and working class roots as a way to

contemplate what she perceives to be the anemic character of her celebrity. From this perspective, Meister's time working in MTV's franchise of *Real World* programming, and her struggles with fame, offer a compelling look at some of the tensions found in MTV's assembling of reality-celebrity.

4.1 METHODS

I will discuss Meister's relationship with celebrity in order to call attention to the effect reality TV has had in her life. One of the most compelling aspects of Meister's story is found in her reflections on the way in which MTV fashions reality-talent for its young viewers. MTV's casting of its audiences (a necessity in creating relevant reality programming) has allowed them to establish a beachhead within turn-of-the-century reality TV via the construction of a stable of reality-stars. My subsequent analysis will be informed by the following empirical material: two in-depth interviews with Meister over the period of six weeks, brief correspondence via email and the telephone, secondary materials (pictures she has supplied me with, other interviews she has given in commercial publications), and member checks (a memo summarizing the content of our first interview and a case report emailed to her after our second interview). Of course, these interviews cannot be regarded as representative of the way in which participants on reality TV engage celebrity in general. Nor can we assume that Meister's words correspond with how a specific social category (young women, for example) participates with reality-celebrity. Rather, the primary issue to be addressed in this discussion is how

Meister experienced celebrity in the context of MTV's recuperation of former reality participants.

This approach poses a methodological dilemma. Because the work of being a star includes participating in auxiliary forms of self-promotion (e.g., interviews and public appearances), my conversations with Meister can be seen as instances in which she continues to produce herself as a commodity. This is compounded by the fact that one of reality TV's regularly used techniques for character development, and plot fabrication, is engaging its participants in a reflexive dialogue about their time on the show through to-camera monologues and interviews (Biressi and Nunn 2005: 5). Meister's discussion of her celebrity can, in this way, be thought of as a performance. Thus, unlike previous research that incorporates interviews with industry professionals (Gamson 1994; Andrejevic 2004; Roscoe 2004), fans (Couldry 2000) and viewers (Hill 2005) as a way to offer insights into reality TV's institutions and effects, my analysis of Meister's experience will approach our conversations as part of her larger textual process of self construction. In doing so, I will treat our interviews as discursive sites from which to trace and analyze recurring themes concerning her fame.

4.2 APPROACHING THE PERSONALITY PARADIGM

Reality TV, like other kinds of television programming invested in depicting 'liveness,' depends on personalities 'playing' themselves (Langer 1981; Corner 2002). In the early 1980s, John Ellis argued that this emphasis on personalities was the result of television's structure making it both technologically and institutionally predisposed to depicting the

everyday: “[t]he institution of television (at least in Britain) seems at pains to reduce the star phenomenon by reducing the extraordinariness of its performers, and their status as figures of an equivocal attraction and identification by viewers both male and female” (1982: 105-6). Admittedly, Ellis’ positioning of television stardom, as a lesser mode of fame, is problematic. It evaluates television personalities in terms of other kinds of performers (most notably film stars) without accounting for the way television invests its on-camera talent with a value that is unique to the small-screen.

Although this discussion might at times appear to support this claim, it is important not to uncritically dismiss reality-actors as inhabiting an inherently less valuable mode of fame. Therefore, this case study will approach MTV’s construction of celebrity using a framework that borrows from Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of fields of cultural production. Bourdieu notes that specialized fields of cultural production (like television) are “...spaces of objective relations that are the site of a logic and a necessity that are *specific and irreducible* to those that regulate other fields” (1992: 97). With this in mind, I will examine MTV’s reality-celebrity from the standpoint of how its participants occupy a position within television’s institutional structure that invests them with a value that is unique to their role within the media industry. To put it another way, I will treat reality TV’s penchant for the ‘ordinary’ as an instance in which television purposefully does not structure itself to meet the same objectives as other kinds of media. As a consequence, the value associated with its participants’ fame must be understood in the broader context of commercial television’s changing landscape.

For example, since *The Real World*’s debut in 1992, MTV has come to exemplify cable television’s growing dependence on participants as a form of on-camera talent.

Over the past fifteen years, the majority of MTV's primetime programming has been redesigned in such a way as to recast previous participants in order to capitalize on the storylines connected to their reality-personas. In this way, MTV's use of reality-talent appears to work against Ellis' 'personality' model in at least one important respect: by contrast with the assertion that television creates personalities 'who are famous for being famous' (Langer 1981: 353; Ellis 1982: 107), MTV's reality-celebrities encode themselves as off-camera texts by performing their 'ordinariness' within the confines of their already established reality-personas. Different from talk show hosts, news anchors or game show masters of ceremonies, MTV's reality-celebrities uniquely depend on the 'behind-the-scenes' quality of their reality-personas for the parts in which they are cast.

4.3 'I DIDN'T THINK I WOULD BE A REAL CAST MEMBER, I ONLY THOUGHT OF MYSELF AS A FAN'

What goes into being a reality-celebrity is not clear. Is it based on merit or something else? Holmes notes that 'gamedocs,' like *Big Brother* and *Survivor*, highlight the value of perseverance but do not indicate that hard work is an important component of being a reality-actor (2004: 120). This point touches on one of the primary tensions surrounding reality-celebrity: more so than with other forms of television stardom, the fame garnered from being on reality TV is rooted in an observational aesthetic that seeks to highlight the fact that its participants are not professional actors. Couldry sees the end result of this depiction exemplified in the transition undergone by participants of the first *Big Brother*. Upon being dismissed from the house, and re-entering the general population, fans greet

the transformed participant as a type of newly christened celebrity (2004: 60-1). In both Holmes and Couldry's accounts, reality-participants' fame is tied to an ability to play oneself on-camera. And like other television personalities, the skill that is required to 'be oneself' on reality TV is obscured by the medium's affection for intimacy rather than inaccessibility.

In the current environment of niche cable programming, where viewers are accustomed to watching reality programs that they know cast people who fit already established roles, the extent to which reality participants can be seen inhabiting the traditional mode of a television personality becomes less clear. There is no better example of this than MTV. In the wake of 1990s television designed to 'narrowcast' to specific demographics (Banks 2004), MTV attempted to mobilize its viewers by inviting them to participate as talent. Over time, this formula has resulted in a growing reflexivity on the part of audience members turned reality-participants. Similar to Fiske's discussion of the intertextual codes necessary to read television (1987: 115), long-running reality formats have created certain expectations about what it means to participate on a specific kind of reality show. Today, participants are likely to be familiar with the particular roles and storylines of the programs on which they seek to be cast. This is one of the recurring themes in my interviews with Meister. In fact, Meister applied to be on *Road Rules* using a form included in a promotional guide published by MTV that incorporated detailed biographies of former participants with advice on how viewers could become cast members.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ For an example of these kinds of promotional publications, see *The Real Real World* (Johnson and Rommelmann 1995).

Meister: So, I got all these books and I studied them. And on the back it, like, if you want to apply. But you have to be 18 to 24. So, when I turned 18, two months after that, I sent in a 10-minute tape just talking about myself, where I was at in my life. Just like sitting on my bed in my room. And within five days they called and said, “we’re going to send you this application.” It’s ten pages, and I filled it out. I still have it. But it’s like all the questions, they want to get into your mind, I guess. So that was the first step. Filled it out, sent it in, and then it was like, “okay, now you’ve made the semi-finals now we’re having it in [Washington] D.C.” And then, I did an interview. And then they said we want to follow you in your real life for a few days. So then they came to Pittsburgh with a crew and I was going to community college and working two jobs and they went with me everywhere. And I guess to see if you were willing to be yourself in front of a camera. And while I was being filmed at my work, they called and told me I made the finals. And then I went to the finals in L.A. and then they called and said I had made the show. So it was, like, a two-month-long process.

Meister also explained that at this time she saw the prospect of being on *Road Rules* as a rewarding way to engage a program that she enjoyed and watched as a fan.

HC: What made you want to go on a reality TV show?

Meister: I’ve always been a huge fan of reality TV shows, especially *The Real World* and *Road Rules*. And I have always been sort of obsessed with watching it and I met a guy named Tim who was on *Road Rules* and he

was from Pittsburgh also. And I met him after he did it and I was, like, star-struck. And I wrote him his first fan letter and I thought if I could just get on, then I could be a part of all the fun and meet all these people. I thought I would be a fan crashing the party. Ah, I didn't think I would be a real cast member I only thought of myself as fan so that's why I did it. I wanted to see how it all worked, and experience the adventure. Because, it always looked like they were having so much fun and even though there was a lot of fighting, especially on *Road Rules*. It just seemed like this giant adventure. It had just seemed bigger than life. I wanted to be a part of it.

In this instance, the process by which Meister was cast, and her overall desire to participate as a fan, points to one of the most dynamic attributes of MTV's *Real World* programming: viewers are allowed to become part of the spectacle; they are, quite literally, able to include themselves in the 'giant adventure.' Significant in these excerpts is Meister's desire to participate in *Road Rules* as herself, a fan 'crashing the party.' Couldry's larger argument, that the media functions symbolically to create social realities (2000), is, here, relevant. In describing the media's symbolic power, Couldry makes the claim that it is far from automatic. Instead, symbolic media power is created through what he calls, "various practices and dispositions at every level of social life" (2000: 4). The media rituals inherent in reality TV's gamedocs, for example, work to accentuate the idea that mediated reality is preferable to non-mediated reality (Couldry 2004).

Meister's fascination with *The Real World* and *Road Rules* presupposes this point of view. She appears very much aware of her position as a 'fan,' or non-media person.

Following Zizek's observation that at its most fundamental, fantasy "...tells me what I am to my others" (1997: 9), Meister's early involvement with *Road Rules*, as both a fan and first-time participant, was influenced by the symbolic value attached to inhabiting the on-camera space of a cast member. As Meister herself notes, she perceived the prospect of taking part in this experience – being cast as a person worthy of being on television – as comparable to 'crashing the party.' Not only did Meister anticipate contact with her favorite programming to be analogous to the excitement of a party, she seemed appreciative of the aforementioned media/non-media divide and the exclusivity implied therein. At the same time, because Meister had been a fan of both *The Real World* and *Road Rules*, she expressed an adroit knowledge of what role she might best fit:

HC: Were you aware what the show wanted? Because you had watched six seasons, right?

Meister: Yeah.

HC: So, were you sort of aware?

Meister: I was aware that they would like it if we fought and they would find it fun and juicy. But I had made a vow that I was not going to fight because I was trying to be, like, a role model.

HC: So, what were some of the vows you made?

Meister: That was a big one.

HC: So, no fighting?

Meister: Yeah, I didn't want, because I felt, I knew I was going to be a type. I knew I was going to be portrayed as the religious person and I felt I

had to live up to that because that was part of the belief system I had at the time.

HC: Okay, so tell me about the belief system.

Meister: I went to an evangelical church.

HC: Uh huh...

Meister: And...it was that whole thing that you, I'm sure you know people or have heard of people that, it's very no drinking, no drugs, no swearing, no...sex, anything carnal.

HC: Okay.

Meister: It was just even little things. I even went to my pastor before I went. I was like, "can you give me advice on how to, like, live up to this?" And he was even saying, "be careful what you nod your head to even." Or if somebody walks away and says, "can you hold my beer?" Stuff like that no one would even care about I was aware of because I didn't want there to be any, um, anybody doubting in whether I was insincere in the my beliefs because I really was.

HC: Okay.

Meister: I mean I didn't always live up to it but...I tried.

Meister's words not only indicate an awareness of *Road Rules*' predictable storyline, they also reveal an almost instinctual comprehension of the likely role she would be cast in: something along the lines of the 'naïve religious girl from middle-America.'⁴⁹

⁴⁹ *The Real World* and *Road Rules* frequently cast at least one participant that can be identified as a rural conservative (Krazewski 2004). This scenario also points to an even less equitable casting experience for nonwhite participants who are not afforded the same

Meister's reflexive understanding of her place within the program's use of character types indicates one way in which MTV's reality-celebrities attend to pre-scripted roles when playing themselves on-camera. Because Meister was aware of the type for which she would be cast, and envisioned a media value connected to this participation, her time working as a reality-participant began with a set of clear expectations. The performative component necessary in meeting these expectations is one way in which MTV's participants are similar to other television personalities. However in the case of MTV's reality-actors, participants like Meister are not only asked to play themselves on-camera, but to do so in such a way as to highlight the private quality of their image in order to substantiate *The Real World* franchise's behind-the-scenes aesthetic.

4.4 'THEY PARTIED WITH THE REAL WORLDERS, OR WHATEVER'

One of the central themes driving reality TV's depiction of 'ordinary' people is the opportunity given to its participants to inhabit a privileged media space. Couldry's analysis of *Big Brother* is useful for thinking about reality TV's unique depiction of its participants' movement between mediated, and non-mediated, environments (2004). In the case of MTV's reality-celebrity, former participants often retain the services of agents in order to book public appearances as a way to further capitalize on their celebrity.

These engagements are an attempt to profit from the symbolic media value MTV's

diversity of roles as their white counterparts, and are often restricted to working within an unfavorable character type after being cast. Black males, for example, have traditionally been portrayed on *The Real World* as violent womanizers (ibid).

reality-participants have acquired as a result of being part of *The Real World* phenomenon. Similar to media-infused props, these reality-celebrities carry in their persons a form of stardom representative of the time spent playing themselves on MTV's party-driven reality formats. Meister's extramural experience with promotional vacation packages illustrates this:

HC: So, tell me about Jamaica, no, you went to the Bahamas first, right?

Meister: Yeah, well I wish you had seen it because I was there with a group. I was hired by a spring break company that hires people that have been on these shows to come down and basically mingle with the people who come through their company so they can say, "they partied with *The Real Worlders*, or whatever."

HC: Okay...

Meister: So, we were basically paid just to be nice to people and just lay on the beach and say hello and take pictures, or whatever. So, it's a great gig and that's the reason I did it because I usually say no to all this crap.

But, I mean, you get paid to lie on the beach so I did it.

Here we see how Meister carries with her a value associated with being branded with MTV's mark of celebrity. She embodies in her presence a kind of mediatized aura. This differs from what Couldry perceives as necessary in the ritual attention paid to media artifacts (2000). For example, in Couldry's analysis of fans' reactions when meeting stars on the set of a soap opera like *Coronation Street*, the preferred encounter with a celebrity involved a shared experience of ordinariness: "the star should be behaving in an ordinary, relaxed way but, crucially, *in the same space* that the visitors themselves

occupy” (2000: 95). By comparison, the experience of being in the presence of MTV’s reality-celebrities is not solely underpinned by a desire to get a glimpse at what these reality-actors are ‘really like.’ The idea of vacationing with a cast member from *Road Rules*, while on spring break in the Bahamas, also appears to have to do with visiting the set of MTV’s *Real World* programming as a kind of pseudo-participant. That is, *The Real World* franchise shoots its programs on-location, using the places they visit as their sets (e.g., clubs, bars, shops, parks, beaches and streets). As a consequence, these backdrops play an important role in the seamless integration of recurring reality-talent within storylines dominated by partying and other leisure activities. Thus, when Meister explains that these young vacationers want to be able to say ‘they partied with *The Real Worlders*,’ the question arises, to what extent is ‘partying’ with these reality-celebrities comparable to being on the set of the show itself?

One way of understanding these promotional vacation appearances by former cast members is to consider the possibility that their presence works to create an imagined *mise en scène* similar to the set of a traditionally scripted television program. From this perspective, the presence of these young reality-actors does not accentuate the gulf between non-media space and mediated space but instead works to bridge it. By contrast with Baudrillard’s famous estimation of the enjoyment found in hyperreal spaces like Disneyland – environments which are presented as imaginary in order to make acceptable the reality that they are as real as it gets (1983: 25) – the potential pleasure in vacationing among these reality-celebrities is found in the promise of playing ‘yourself’ in an environment infused with a kind of mediated textuality. That is, instead of paying to see how celebrities ‘really’ act on vacation, or to see how they differ from you in some

exceptional way, these encounters with reality-actors are also about interacting with them in character – ‘being real.’ Reality-actors are, in Meister’s own words, ‘paid just to be nice to people and just lay on the beach.’ In this way, former cast members of *The Real World* and *Road Rules* are working in the same roles they inhabit on television. Here we can also see a realization of how television’s affinity for intimacy works to exchange ‘the exceptional’ with ‘the ordinary’ (Langer 1981: 364). In the case of these reality-celebrities, television’s depiction of intimacy has progressed to a point off-screen. It has evolved to a stage in which the ‘ordinariness’ inhabited by MTV’s reality-actors may be experienced firsthand by their fans. To draw a connection between Couldry and Baudrillard’s analysis, the spring break partiers who pay to vacation with MTV’s reality-talent appear to be engaged in the temporary enjoyment of dissimulating themselves among the realness embodied in reality-celebrity’s ‘unexceptional’ personas.

4.5 ‘THEY ARE INTO IT. IT IS A DIFFERENT BEAST NOW.’

To better understand the complexity of Meister’s celebrity, the evolution of MTV’s *Real World* programming has to be considered in the context of its viewers becoming cast members. To do this, I want to think about how being cast for either *The Real World* or *Road Rules* today is different from when these programs first aired in the early 1990s. For Meister, the main difference has to do with the way these shows are approached today by prospective participants:

Meister: But I was one of only one of two of three people from the older era. But everyone else was from the newer, like maybe the last two or

three seasons of each of the shows [*Road Rules* and *Real World*]. And it's a totally different world for these people now because it's more intense and because they live off it. Like they don't go back to school or anything when they are done. The show for them is like the prelude. It's not the event. But for me the show is the event and everything after was sort of incidental.

HC: That's really interesting.

Meister: But for them it's the beginning of...of crazyness. And, um, they couldn't believe I didn't love the aftermath. I think I am kind of an exception. So, I might ruin your whole thing because I think...

HC: No, don't worry about it.

Meister: Because they love it.

HC: Yeah...

Meister: They love the fame, they love the perks, they love not having to go back to school. It's it is bizarre. They are into it. It is a different beast now.

It is now common for first-time reality-participants cast on *The Real World* and *Road Rules* to be very aware of the continued employment opportunities afforded them as a result of their newly acquired fame. Between follow-up shows, and promotional appearances for vacation packages, MTV's reality-talent engages in a wide variety of public appearances on college campuses and at bars. It is not a coincidence that these same campuses are also the primary recruiting sites for new *Real World* talent. Shows like *The Real World* and *Road Rules* are presented to potential first-time reality-actors as

sites of personal incubation, places in which to cultivate one's identity as a celebrity. *The Real World* and *Road Rules* act as a bridge over which first-time reality participants may cross the non-media/media split. They do this by offering the notoriety necessary to garner future celebrity driven employment. *The Real World* and *Road Rules* act as points of entry into MTV's cadre of reality-talent; both programs function as feeder shows for MTV's *Real World* spin-offs.

Meister explained this dynamic by contrasting herself with the evolving reality-workforce in which she participated while shooting *The Real World/Road Rules Extreme Challenge*:

Meister: The whole fact that I am married and have a settled life and I am trying to, like, get a career and just go to the movies and see all the other stuff that everyone does, it was foreign to them and in some ways they seemed to be jealous of it. They be like, "wow that's really neat." And stuff like that. Mostly they couldn't even wrap their head around it. They're so enwrapped in this life now: of being single and globe trotting and having everyone know you and getting to be on commercials and endorse products and stuff. They all work for, um, companies where you speak at different colleges. Like they want you to speak on anti-tobacco or anti-...or for diversity. Like, companies will hire them to speak and they get a lot of money. Like, for this recent cast member, his name is Ace, he...

HC: Ace?

Meister: Yeah.

HC: Yeah, I think he's from Georgia or Alabama...

Meister: Yeah, he and Mallory were with me.

HC: Oh, really?

Meister: And he got 30 speaking engagements since January. And they get like a minimum of 2,000 dollars per speaking engagement.

HC: Right.

Meister: And he is like...it's incredible the life they lead.

HC: What does he speak about?

Meister: So he tries, he tries to go in, and he's like, "I used to have this really long speech about myself and diversity and how I lost my parents to cancer," or something like that – something important. But, you know, half way through someone would be like, "ah, is Leah really a bitch?"

Meister's description of the reality-celebrity lifestyle reveals the extent to which MTV's surrogate production house, Bunim-Murray blends management practices reminiscent of the early Hollywood star-system with reality TV's more contemporary, post-glamour desire for an illusion of intimacy. Not only did Meister have to sign a five-year contract stipulating that Bunim-Murray/MTV would be entitled to any income (in excess of \$750) that resulted from the celebrity she acquired while on *Road Rules*, her fame continued to be predicated on the private nature of her public-persona as it existed outside of a scripted role.

As a consequence, MTV's stable of reality-stars straddles two historically divergent characteristics of fame: they work within the exploitive confines of a contract structure that suits the growing number of niche cable channels reliant on low production

costs to make a profit (Magder 2004; Banks 2005), while also existing as texts reflecting a contemporary desire to engage celebrity firsthand at the level of its construction (Gamson 1994: 50-4; Andrejevic 2004: 66-7). Meister notes that from the working viewpoint of these often college-age participants, the promise of ‘being single and globe-trotting and having everyone know you’ is an enticing incentive exactly because it is predicated on an assurance of ‘effortless labor.’ From Meister’s perspective, her age and working class background never afforded her the opportunity to leave the United States. *Road Rules* guaranteed the thrill of international travel and the opportunity to attain the trappings associated with stardom. Thus, MTV’s spring break ethos can be seen to not only shape its reality narratives but also help to seduce its young participants into signing inequitable contracts. Here, Meister’s observations underscore the contradictory nature of her celebrity, as well as reality TV’s practice of manufacturing contrived environments in order to showcase participants ‘really’ being themselves. Hill identifies this as a central paradox in the reception of popular factual programming:

viewers of reality programming are attracted to various formats because they feature real people’s stories in an entertaining manner. However, they are also distrustful of the authenticity of various reality formats *precisely because* these real people’s stories are presented in an entertaining manner. (2005: 58)

This paradox can also be seen as the underlying manner in which reality TV situates its claim to realism *vis à vis* the divulgence of its own artificiality within the broader media landscape (Andrejevic 2004: 17). From this standpoint, MTV’s reality-actors are asked to function in two capacities: as talent whose job it is to publicly comport themselves as if

always off-camera, while simultaneously attending to the pre-scripted parts of which they are reflexively aware and which afford savvy viewers the pleasure of second-guessing a particular format's construction of the real.

4.6 'YOU'RE JUST YOURSELF, BUT YOU'RE STILL FAMOUS'

Although Meister's account favors the assertion that MTV's reality-actors inhabit a modified kind of celebrity, the influence of standard forms of talent management cannot be totally dismissed. MTV's reality-actors share a common endeavor with the larger spectrum of celebrity driven talent. Whether in relation to film or television, at some level stars must produce themselves as commodities. Meister notes this in her description of a typical workday as a reality-celebrity booked to appear at a spring-break resort in 2004:

HC: Did they workout and go to the gym and stay in shape?

Meister: Oh yes, saunas, weights, running. And they are all very thin.

HC: Do they do this even when they are partying? Do they always have time when they're not taping and doing workout-time? Take me through, a day on one of these things on spring break.

Meister: Okay. Well, I always get up at 7:15 every day of my life...then I bathe for three hours before anybody else got up. And then we'd have to meet at 11:00. And that was our meeting of the day and they'd just say, here's what we have to do. After 11:00, that's when everyone would sort

of break and that's when a lot of the weight lifting and/or tanning would occur.

We can see here how MTV's reality-talent fits Dyer's classic description of the star as 'congealed labor:' "they are both labor and the thing that labor produces" (2004: 5). According to Dyer, the work of fashioning stardom comes in two stages: an attention to the 'inherent qualities of the material' at hand – hair, makeup, diet, body-building, plastic surgery, personality – and the film, or vehicle, in which the star performs (ibid). Marx's theory of how one product of labor begets another is evident in the way MTV's pool of reality-talent depends on managers and other representatives to book subsidiary 'reality-gigs.' The daily routines of these reality-actors exemplifies the extent to which MTV's returning participants must pay attention to the inherent qualities of their fame in order to maintain their value as talent.

Buttressing much of these individuals' relationships with celebrity is the fact that, like many television personalities, aside from an attention to the inherent qualities of the material, they are perceived as possessing fewer skills than other on-camera talent. From this perspective, Meister's ability to work as a television personality is even more restricted than other television stars. Aside from being rebooked on MTV's upcoming shows, and continuing to participate on the public appearance circuit, the employment opportunities for MTV's reality-talent are extremely limited. In my second interview with Meister, she painted a grim picture of the situation in which some of these young reality-actors found themselves:

Meister: Ah, it was debauched and horrific and I don't understand. I went to church, the only Sunday [laughing], wearing a Sunday school, where

you talk about [mumble] and stuff, and was like, “I feel so bad for these kids.” I mean, it’s funny on one hand, but it kind of sad because their whole objective is – both the spring-breakers and the cast – is just like, get drunk, get beautiful, um, get money. And that’s really it.

HC: That’s it?

Meister: It’s sad.

HC: Yeah.

Meister: That’s it. And I felt so...when I left my feeling was of how lucky I am to have my family: my sisters and brothers and my husband and my stepdaughter. Like, I felt so fulfilled because they all seem so empty by comparison. I could be wrong, it just seemed that way.

HC: That’s how it appeared to you?

Meister: Yeah.

HC: And then, they were going to go do more of these events anyway?

Meister: Oh yeah, they hadn’t been home in...months. With Mallory, she was starting to feel real sad about how she was in all of this. And I was like, “when are you going home?” And she was like, “I don’t know.”

She’s booked up through April and May.

HC: Wow. And...do they want to go into acting and things like that? Or are they just happy to just do what they are doing?

Meister: Well, they were all involved in college, most of them. You know, they were all getting a degree in education, or something like that. And then now, most of them are sort of waiting for some opportunities to get

involved in modeling, or acting or hosting. They're really into hosting because you don't need any skills.

HC: Hosting...

Meister: Like, um, like Tim, who was on *Road Rules*, he hosts a show on the History Channel. Like, if you can host on VH1 or...

HC: Like on MTV, *MTV Spring Break*...

Meister: Yeah, any of that. You're just yourself but you're still famous. So, you don't have to have any acting skills.

Meister's observation, that 'you're just yourself but you're still famous,' not only points to the singular nature of these reality-actors' fame, but also indicates other working limitations experienced in her celebrity. Meister's reference to hosting as a career that her reality cohorts aspired to not only echoes the stigma often placed on television personalities being one-dimensional, it reiterates Ellis' assertion that "[t]he television performer exists very much more in the same space as the television audience, as a known and familiar person rather than a paradoxical figure, both ordinary and extraordinary" (1983: 106). From Meister's point of view, then, this formula is more pronounced with regard to MTV's stable of reality-actors. Ultimately, the premise of participating on *Real World* follow-up shows and public appearance tours is based on an acute experience with familiarity and shared space. And because MTV's reality-celebrities are often limited to capitalizing on the circumscribed parameters of their reality-personas, performers such as Meister (with the representational aid of agents and managers) must always construct personas with an eye to their commodification as uniquely 'ordinary' stars.

4.7 'YOU'RE JUST A FREAK'

I want to conclude this article with a brief discussion of some of the ways Meister's experience as a reality-celebrity may be placed within the larger discourse surrounding reality TV's prominence. As the reality genre has been argued to set up contrivances in order to be perceptively dismantled by savvy viewers (Andrejevic 2004; Hill 2005), MTV's reality-actors appear to cater to a similarly reflexive relationship with fame. They offer a private form of celebrity that, via their televised off-screen personas, highlight how reality TV is produced as a textual system that combines aesthetic feints with the realness of its participants' private selves. Thus, MTV's reality-celebrity shows an unwavering fondness for the ordinariness of its participants. In so doing, MTV's cultivation of reality-talent curtails traditional oppositions associated with stardom: private/public, sincere/insincere, physical/mental, subconscious/conscious, imaginary/symbolic, etc. (Dyer 2004: 10-11).

The negotiation of these overlapping binaries affords conventional stars the opportunity to portray a type of 'coherent continuousness' within their person from which they can manipulate and profit. Dyer's explanation for either a love of, or annoyance with, stars that appear 'one-dimensional' in the roles they choose is helpful:

[p]eople often say they do not rate such and such a star because he or she is always the same. In this view, the trouble with, say, Gary Cooper or Doris Day, is that they are always Gary Cooper or Doris Day. But if you like Cooper or Day, then precisely what you value about them is that they

are always ‘themselves’ – no matter how different their roles, they bear the continuousness of their own selves. (ibid: 9-10)

MTV’s reality-talent labors under a similar system of representation. Participants are asked to be ‘themselves’ in a variety of reality situations in order to fulfill the expectations garnered through the documentation of their ‘private lives.’ Although Meister continues to work as a reality-celebrity – she recently participated on the latest *Gauntlet* and was on the cover of Pittsburgh’s regional *Maniac Magazine* (figure 1) – on more than one occasion she identified the private quality of her fame as highly unappealing.

Meister couched this antagonism as the difference between being paid to publicly be ‘herself’ and the experience of being observed publicly conducting her private life. She explained this in the context of working MTV’s public appearance circuit:

Meister: If somebody is paying me to do something then I don’t feel exploited as much as if I’m just on my own time, with my own family, in my own boring life and people want to talk about it. That bothers me more. But this, I really, really went down [to the Bahamas] knowing people would want to talk about it and be interested and curious. And I am okay with it. But, like, only in small doses. I wouldn’t make a living doing this like other people. But, like, once a year, if the opportunity comes, plus it’s such easy money, then, you know, it’s different.

HC: Okay. So, just, it feels different?

Meister: It does.

HC: It feels more like a job then?

Meister: Yeah, yeah, I feel like it is almost like a service.

Bound up in Meister's 'service' is the fact that her presence at these public appearances, as 'Meister from *Road Rules*,' is relatively indistinguishable from her status as a private individual. Accordingly, the primary skill that Meister has from which to profit depends on the private quality of the access she affords her public. As much as this scenario can be seen as indicative of the wider field of television-generated fame, it also illustrates the value of approaching reality-celebrity as a specific subcategory within the medium's larger construction of stardom. In the case of Meister, her fame is always rooted in her ability to play the 'real' Meister, and thus her existence as a reality-actor restricts her from cultivating a public persona separate from what is already portrayed on-camera. We can see, here, how MTV's reality-celebrities' dependence on the personal quality of their fame connects them to, as much as it distinguishes them from, the larger field of television stardom. Meister explained this aspect of her celebrity as her worst experience with reality TV:

HC: What is the worst experience you had? Like, where you are just, like, "I wish I would not have gone on that show."

Meister: Well, really everyday.

HC: Everyday?

Meister: Yeah. Or um...if I try, if I put a resume in...

HC: Um hmm...

Meister: And I go for a job interview and they realize who I am, it's just weird. And you don't gain any skills so it's not like you're special. You're just a freak. I hate it. I hate it, Hugh.

HC: Yeah, no I...

Meister: I just feel...I am not private but I just, like, I don't deserve it.

I'm not much, I'm just a person and it's not that fun and people are...I think what it is, Hugh, is they think that once you're on these shows, you become deaf and you don't hear people talking and whispering about you everywhere. Like at restaurants, I have this radar now that when I was dating my husband I would realize, "could you move over" so like someone couldn't see me or whatever – I'd have him block. We didn't ever see it. And now, after about a year, he started to develop the same radar. And you realize, she's looking at me, not for some other reason, not just because she likes my outfit or something. And it's just violating. It's creepy, because people know who you are. And my voice, I tried dying my hair dark...

HC: Oh really?

Meister: And cut everything. But this squeaky voice that you're going to experience over and over again, it's, ah, unmistakable.

If Meister first approached her time on *Road Rules* as 'a fan crashing the party,' today her frustration can be seen as disavowal, the result of Meister's fame creating a deficiency in her sense of her own symbolic media value. Returning to Žižek's assertion that fantasy is the process by which I understand "...what the Other (fascinated by me) sees in me" (1997: 9-10), one could argue that MTV's reality-actors, after traversing the non-media/media divide, lack the star identity necessary to secure a stardom independent from, and thus desired outside of, reality TV. Because Meister's public persona is

entirely dependent on the intimate quality of her private mode of fame, she is never able to substantiate a celebrity persona beyond what she portrays on MTV.

4.8 CONCLUSION

In a moment when “...celebrity is seen as a marketing phenomenon, [and] the most interesting celebrities are the ones who make manipulation explicit” (Gamson 1994: 156), Meister’s experience exemplifies how reality TV’s inclusion of ‘real people’ has the potential to address a broader compulsion to participate with the media at the level of its manufacture. As reality TV continues to develop its casting practices, the function of its participants as both viewers and on-camera talent necessitates a continued reconsideration of the conceptual parameters informing television stardom. And although it is difficult to judge the extent to which the fame produced from these ‘unscripted’ performances maintains a *sui generis* status, the celebrity created in the wake of reality TV does represent a new class of on-camera talent specific to television. This, of course, varies between formats, as well as between the different types of participants who are cast to meet the plot requirements of particular narratives. In the case of Meister and her cohorts, the uniquely one-dimensional quality of their celebrity has become the narrative engine for MTV’s highly successful *Real World* franchise. Although Meister’s celebrity represents a specific brand of reality-celebrity, it does suggest one way in which reality-based fame both typifies and contradicts previous assertions made about the medium’s propensity to produce ‘personalities’ instead of stars. MTV’s reality-celebrity extends the medium’s partiality for the ‘familiar’ and ‘ordinary’ by reconfiguring participants into

talent who are confined to work within the off-camera narratives embodied in their reality-personas.

5.0 CHAPTER FOUR

‘I DID REALITY TV BEFORE IT WAS CALLED REALITY TV’: NAVIGATING GENERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS IN MTV’S REALITY-CELEBRITY

In this chapter, I will look at the experiences of reality-actor Tim Beggy. I do this in order to contrast Meister’s status as ‘a fan crashing the party’ with Beggy’s reflexive experience working in television. As illustrated in the previous chapter, Meister’s status as a one-time fan turned cast member underpins her experience of celebrity. She approaches her reality-based stardom from the standpoint of a viewer who just happens to be a television personality. Beggy’s relationship with his celebrity reverses this formula; He identifies himself as a television personality who got his start on reality TV before the dimensions of its turn-of-the-century format structures were established. This perspective is the result of Beggy having had moderate success working in television as on-camera talent for a variety of non-*Real World* related shows. Aside from being cast on *Road Rules* (1994), and three Challenges (2002-2005),⁵⁰ Beggy has appeared as himself on Mark Burnett’s *Eco Challenge Fiji Islands* (2003), hosted both FOX Sports Net’s *The Slant* (1997-2002) and The History’s Channel’s *Guts and Bolts* (2003), and appeared as a waiter on *The Drew Carey Show* (2003). Consequently, Beggy can be seen as inhabiting a modified version of MTV’s current construction of celebrity in two

⁵⁰Beggy has appeared on the following *Real World/Road Rules* spin-off programming: *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: Battle of The Seasons* (2002), *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno* (2004), *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Gauntlet 2* (2005) and *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge: Inferno 3* (2007).

significant respects: Beggy was not only unfamiliar with *Road Rules* when cast, he was, after leaving the show, not limited to working as reality-talent. In Beggy's case, the behind-the-scenes quality of his celebrity was mitigated by his early participation in second-wave reality TV. This further exemplifies how MTV's *Real World* franchise has evolved in accordance with the genre's (re)emergence in the 1990s. Because Beggy was able to sustain a career as a TV personality outside of his reality-persona – 'Tim Beggy' from *Road Rules* – his early fame functioned within the more conventional framework of television's 'personality system' (Langer 1981; Ellis 1982).

However, as the reality genre began to play a larger role in television's primetime lineup (Magder 2004), and Bunim-Murray/MTV turned to recycling its former participants' on-camera personas into spin-off shows, Beggy's ability to sustain work as a television personality was adversely affected by the growing stigma associated with reality TV's reputation for producing trashy programming (Raphael 2004). This shift is significant for current reality-celebrities because the prospect of sustaining a career in television separate from one's reality-persona is often remote. In fact, it is more accurate to assert that reality-actors who establish a career outside of reality TV do so in spite of their reality-celebrity. Beggy's identity as a first-generation participant in many ways exemplifies this larger institutional arrangement within the television industry. As a way to contextualize Beggy's movement through television as both a reality-actor and host, this case study will be structured around themes of labor, reflexivity and symbolic value in order to draw comparisons with the previous chapter's discussion of Meister's fame. In doing this, I will outline how Beggy's past experience working outside of *The Real World* franchise works as a kind of condition of possibility for his current reality-persona.

Before the parameters defining turn-of-the-century reality TV were solidified, Beggy was hired to host shows because of the celebrity he cultivated on *Road Rules*. Today this dynamic is reversed: the reality-persona enacted by Beggy, as a former *Road Ruler* and recurring cast member on *Challenges*, is that of a television personality who relies on his time working outside *The Real World* franchise as a means to differentiate himself from other reality-actors. This perspective is significant because it indicates a way in which Beggy's and Meister's ostensibly different reality-personas share a common function: both Beggy's and Meister's rejection of the quality of their fame works to authorize the personas they are cast to play.

5.1 METHODS

This chapter will use Beggy's own words to call attention to the effect reality TV has had on his life. The ethnographic material that will inform my analysis comprise: one in-depth interview with Beggy; brief correspondence via email and the telephone; secondary materials (previous television shows, pictures he has supplied and other interviews he has given). As with Meister, Beggy's interview does not indicate a universal relationship with reality-celebrity on the part of either its viewers or participants. In particular, we cannot assume Beggy's words indicate how other participants sharing same similar backgrounds and cultural identities experience reality-celebrity. Rather, the primary issues to be addressed in this case study are the specific and distinct ways in which Beggy's celebrity is shaped by his identity as a first-generation participant on MTV's *Road Rules*. Interviewing reality-talent like Beggy poses the same methodological

concerns already addressed in my analysis of Meister: because the work of being one of Bunim-Murray/MTV's reality-celebrities is comprised in large part of to-camera interviews and monologues, my time with Beggy can be seen as a continuation of his reality-persona. But unlike Meister, who has never had the opportunity to work in television outside of her role within *The Real World* franchise, Beggy's celebrity is informed by a broader presence in the medium. For this reason (and for the purposes of contrasting Beggy's first-generation status with Meister's second-generation status) I will approach our conversations as texts that represent the symbiotic nature of Beggy's reality-persona and his identity as a one-time television personality.

5.2 'IT'S A VACATION'

The extent to which reality-participants can be clearly identified as talent is often dependent on whether or not their time on-screen is associated with a clear form of above-the-line labor. As already noted, the fact that participants frequently see their time on reality TV as a mediated vacation complicates attempts to sketch the parameters of their profession (Couldry 2004; Holmes 2004). One of the most compelling aspects of Beggy's story is how he positions himself in relation to other reality-actors. Beggy conceives of himself as a kind of vanguard in MTV's now established field of reality-talent. In so doing, Beggy's early relationship with reality TV can be seen to not only inform his current reality-persona, but also to shape the disposition with which he attempts to participate in the larger television industry. Throughout our discussion of his

time working in television, Beggy continued to address the issue of whether or not reality TV's participants could be considered talent. And like the reality participants Holmes interviewed in her discussion of *Big Brother* (2004), Beggy pointed to the absence of labor as a distinguishing characteristic of MTV's *Real World* franchise.

Beggy: It's more of [an] adult summer camp is really how it is.

HC: Okay, so what's adult summer camp like?

Beggy: There's really no worries. It's a vacation. Of course, you know the drama that is going to ensue. You can't stay out of it. And if you stay out of it, you'll get pulled into it or they will make stories, or someone will pull you into a drama somehow, it just happens.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: But as far as, like, adult summer camp, it's a free-for-all. You're going there, you're not working. By no means is this even close to work. I mean, I went snorkeling everyday for five weeks in Tobago.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: I wasn't working. You are with friends. It's great. I was on the Veteran's team, in the guy's room, where all the guys stayed and it was like a gym locker. It was like summer camp. We told stories every night and you can do whatever you want to. (177-196)

In this light, Beggy's assertion that shooting *The Gauntlet 2* should not be classified as labor reiterates the ongoing debate over the extent to which reality TV's participants substitute the ordinariness of their reality-personas for a more merit based claim to fame

(Gamson 1994: 142; Holmes 2004: 120).⁵¹ Here, it is important to distinguish the varied characteristics of reality TV's many formats. As I have attempted to illustrate with an ethnographic consideration of *The Real World* and its spin-offs, the character of each show's participants varies depending on the production variables built into the format's structure.⁵² In the case of *Challenge* shows like *The Gauntlet 2*, Bunim-Murray/MTV depends on recasting the same sets of participants approximately every six months in order to insure narrative coherency between new installments of the franchise's gamedoc programming. Consequently, Beggy's claim that shooting *The Gauntlet 2* is similar to vacationing at an 'adult summer camp' needs to be rethought about in terms of both Beggy's status as first-generation talent and Bunim-Murray/MTV's unique practice of recycling reality-talent.

Beggy's assertion also echoes the important function that these leisure infused environments play in Bunim-Murray/MTV's continued development of successful reality programming. Not only does shooting in Tobago maintain a predictable *mise en scène* for even the most casual of viewers, it creates narrative continuity between seasons by guaranteeing further participation on the part of previous casts members. Of course, it would be a mistake to argue that Bunim-Murray/MTV's reality-talent does not continue

⁵¹ According to Holmes, "[t]he contestants in *Big Brother* emphasize how this is effectively represented by a more fervent negotiation of 'authenticity' in the celebrity persona – with a dual status as both 'ordinary' person and celebrity functioning to service this logic" (ibid).

⁵² For example, *American Idol*'s structure enables FOX to broadcast the program four times a week. Accordingly, FOX periodically reschedules *American Idol* in order to circumscribe its competitors' attempts to establish a primetime beachhead (NBC's 'must-see-TV' on Thursday nights, for example). Simultaneously, *American Idol*'s scheduling flexibility offers FOX yet another strategic advantage; because *American Idol*'s presence in primetime often promises a spillover effect, FOX schedules struggling programs after it airs (Carter 2006).

to go on *Challenges* because they offer exposure and the promise of launching a non-MTV related career. At some level, however, the *Challenges*' vacation atmosphere does justify past participants' desire to be recast. As a result, Bunim-Murray/MTV's second-generation programming is often able to seamlessly interchange cast members in order to nurture progressing storylines and reflexive plot developments. In this manner, the aesthetic underpinning *The Real World* franchise's premise of an on-camera holiday not only serves to maintain narrative cohesion, it makes it difficult to outline the capacity by which these participants are engaged in a clear form of labor. In order to better address this ambiguity, the logic by which MTV's reality-celebrities navigate their reality-personas in order to profit from the 'off-camera' quality of their stardom needs to be considered further.

In the case of Beggy, his early participation continues to shape his outlook on working in reality TV. He was first cast to go on the second season of *Road Rules* in 1994. As part of MTV's first-generation of reality programming, he was unaware of the influence *The Real World* and *Road Rules* would have on cable television. Beggy astutely pointed this out at the beginning of our interview: "[y]ou know, I did reality TV before it was called reality TV." By noting his early participation in this way, Beggy emphasized his own estrangement from reality TV. That is, Beggy sees his early participation on *Road Rules* as a principal characteristic distinguishing him from other reality participants. And unlike MTV's second-generation participants, Beggy did not have a pre-scripted role to guide his actions while on-camera. When asked about how returning participants conceptualize of their time on *Challenges*, Beggy noted a high level of reflexivity on the part of second-generation casts: "I would say at this point everyone knows the ropes.

You've already been on a reality show. Now this is like part two. And for some, this is part two, three, four, five, six [and] seven" (169-170). Beggy's words, again, suggest an evolutionary relationship between Bunim-Murray/MTV's casting practice and the reflexive element that is essential in order to produce an already established reality show.

In this description of how contemporary participants approach their performances, we can also see the extent to which Beggy's status as a first-generation participant shapes his understanding of what it means to 'work' on-camera. Because he continually references an identity grounded in his early participation on *Road Rules*, Beggy is able to approach his participation on *Challenge* shows as something other than labor. The ability to create this distance appears to be an essential feature of his continued work as a reality-actor: in addition to claiming that his time on-camera is a leisure activity, Beggy's identity as a pioneer in the field of reality TV also provides him with the reflexivity necessary to properly function within the *Challenges'* evolving plotlines. This reflexive element underpins the manner in which MTV's *Challenge* shows fabricate their narratives using already established characters and storylines. For example, the first *Challenge* show did this by pitting former cast members from *The Real World* and *Road Rules* against one another in MTV's first gamedoc, *Real World/Road Rules Challenge* (1998). Almost ten years later, Bunim-Murray continues to employ this recipe by focusing on the apparent tension between veteran cast members and their less seasoned reality counterparts. In the case of Beggy's most recent role, Bunim-Murray/MTV cast him on *The Gauntlet 2* because his status as first-generation talent helped to anchor that season's plotline around a perceived tension between the 'rookie' participants and their more seasoned counterparts, the 'veterans.'

5.3 ‘YOU CERTAINLY ARE THERE TO WIN MONEY, THAT’S WHY YOU GO.’

In Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of specialized fields of cultural production, agents inhabiting different occupations maintain certain homologies as a result of the value associated with that field’s specific capital (1984). Bourdieu explains it as, “[t]he functional and structural homology which guarantees objective orchestration between the logic of a field of production and the logic of the field of consumption...” (ibid: 323). Similarly, MTV’s reality-celebrities engage their fame in accordance with the logic governing reality TV’s use of participants as on-camera talent. In the case of MTV’s *Real World* franchise, the work of returning participants can be seen as functionally and structurally homologous to both the larger cultural field of star production and its localized variations. This not only includes broad considerations of the fame found in cinema (Dyer 1979) and television (Langer 1981; Ellis 1982), but more specifically, the native forms of capital fought for within the genre itself (Andrejevic 2004; Couldry 2004; Holmes 2004). As I have attempted to show with MTV’s reality-celebrity, participants like Beggy and Meister occupy a mode of fame predicated on already established notions of both film and television stardom. But within this dynamic, because it exists as a modified form of television’s long held affection for depicting the familiar, reality-celebrity expects its participants to trade in a field-specific form of capital. And in order for this currency to hold its value, reality-celebrity must attend to the routines and standards found in the larger field of media production of which reality TV is a part.

Thus, one obvious way to couch reality TV's structuring of fame, and its deployment within the broader media landscape, is to consider the various means by which MTV's reality-actors attempt to gain notoriety for being 'themselves' on-camera. Not unlike other kinds of television-based talent that is dependent on being recognized by a public to secure continued employment, MTV's reality-talent relies on their notoriety as a way to generate opportunities for employment. As a consequence, while it may appear that MTV's reality-participants approach their time shooting new programs as kind of paid vacation, their on-camera recreation also entails preparation indicative of other forms of above-the-line labor. When asked if casts approach their time on the *Challenge* as a form of work, Beggy noted the following:

Beggy: Everyone takes a different slant on it. Some people take it as business. Like, a lot of people will attempt to pimp products or gear or clothing lines. Eric Neece was trying to sell jump ropes.

HC: Yeah?

Beggy: So you recollect that everywhere he went he was wearing a jump rope?

HC: I don't remember that, but I remember Eric Neece.

Beggy: So the last *Challenge* he was on, he had a jump rope around his neck everywhere he went.

HC: Yeah?

Tim: Hey, you know, if you can capitalize on it the way that they are capitalizing on you, then go ahead, to each his own. Frankly, I think jump ropes is a little much.

HC: Okay, so aside from things like product placement that people bring in on their own, do any of the casts you find, or yourself included, is there any sort of preparation that goes into, you know, continuing to go on these shows as far as...

Beggy: Definitely, most people really get into shape.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Most people really train because it's multi-level. They want to perform well to win. You certainly are there to win money, that's why you go. And there's lots of egos being tossed around. You don't want to lose because you're going up against another team or one-on-one against someone. There's a lot of pride, there's a lot of pride on the line. And then on top of that, everyone knows damn well they are on national TV.

HC: Sure.

Beggy: And you never want to look like a punk on TV.

Beggy's description of how MTV's reality-actors promote goods and prepare physically for competitions underscores the reality that these participants are invested in competing as cast members and, more generally, as marketable talent. Reality-actors who are able to successfully compete are often recast with greater frequency for upcoming *Challenges*. Beggy's assertion that "you're certainly there to win the money," underscores an important division between MTV's reality-talent and other kinds television-based talent: distinct from the archetypal television personality that profits from 'being themselves' on-camera (Langer 1981), MTV's reality-actors must play themselves in the context of the game narratives surrounding their reality-personas. Consequently, because of this

competition the ordinariness of MTV's reality-celebrities is continually reestablished for viewers; with each new season, the lackluster quality of the returning cast members' celebrity is underscored by their eagerness to scramble for economic compensation in the form of cash prizes and promotional giveaways. *The Real World* franchise's use of the gamedoc format for its spin-off programming necessitates a 'multi-level' approach on the part of the reality-actor if MTV's on-camera talent is to be successful in maintaining the notoriety necessary to profit from their celebrity.

It is important to note that within this competitive atmosphere the symbolic appeal of the cash prize is often just as significant, if not more so, than its monetary value. As Couldry suggest about *Big Brother* (2004), gamedocs use their prize driven narratives as a means to further heighten and naturalize the already recognized wisdom that being on television is preferable to not being television. Therefore, being *eligible* to win the prize, as opposed to actually winning it, is in reality what is at stake when playing the game. In this light, the reward for winning weekly competitions designed to expel cast members and offer a systematic resolution to the plot's unfolding holds a value beyond the prize itself. Further the *Challenges*' cash prize exhibits a kind of illusory goal in the reality-actor's field of production: regular participants are invested in winning *Challenges* not because they want the money, even though they do, but because successful competition equates to more time on-camera and, as a consequence, a better chance to establish storylines tied to one's reality-persona. Beggy's explanation of former cast member Elton, the captain on *The Gauntlet 2*'s winning team, illustrates this dynamic:

HC: Would [Elton] be someone you could see going back on another one of these shows?

Beggy: Oh yeah, yeah, he'll be back. He's done three as well. Yeah, he'll definitely be back. He's a good story. He kisses all the girls and looks great and performs great. You know, he's a keeper. He'll be back.

Similar to the observations made by Meister, Beggy's account suggests a level of professional engagement that coincides with the production practices governing MTV's fabrication of new plotlines for subsequent *Challenges*. In this instance, we can see a kind of field-specific logic at work. Competing for camera time guarantees that reality-celebrities will have a vested interest in performing the tasks necessary to maintain their fame. Successful participants, like Elton, must be physically fit in order to 'look great' and compete. This in turn offers competitive participants an advantage. Because they are given more time on-camera, they are able to better forge and nurture storylines by 'kissing all the girls,' which then may be continued as part of a future season's narrative arc.

This both substantiates and complicates Dyer's chief assertion that stardom is both "labor and the thing that labor produces" (Dyer 2004: 5). According to Dyer, the work of fashioning a celebrity out of a person's 'raw materials' is achieved by the star with the aid of various forms of below-the-line talent (make-up artists and hairdressers, for example). But in the case of MTV's reality-talent, the labor produced as a byproduct of their stardom's manufacture is the show itself. Because there is no 'backstage' for these reality-actors to retreat to and be 'made-up' between scenes, they must not only 'be themselves' on-camera but in so doing tend to the 'the material at hand' as it comprises their reality-personas. This might account for the profound sense of 'pride and ego' that Beggy perceives to be informing much of the cast's motivation to 'get into shape' and

‘not look like a punk on TV.’ The behind-the-scenes quality of this reality-celebrity’s fame thus further distinguishes it from other types of television-based talent. But we can also see in this same relationship a continued attempt by MTV’s reality-celebrities to profit from their stardom through product placement and public appearances. The revenue generated from these auxiliary business arrangements points to business ventures in which MTV’s reality-talent can be viewed as simultaneously participating within a much larger discourse of twentieth-century fame production, a system predicated on configuring stars into commodities (Dyer 1986; Gamson 1992). In this way, MTV’s reality-celebrity, although structurally and functionally distinct, shares many of the goals and stakes that are common across the larger field of contemporary celebrity.

5.4 ‘IT’S MORE ABOUT THE ROCK-STAR APPEAL OF IT ALL AND MORE ABOUT CAMERA-TIME’

Keeping in mind Beggy’s account of how MTV’s reality-talent attempts to profit from their fame, I want to consider some of the more disparate ways in which these same individuals’ celebrity is intertextually manufactured and deployed in conjunction with the characteristics specific to its formation. If, as I have argued, one of the primary traits defining MTV’s reality-talent from other reality-participants is *The Real World’s* transition from early 1990s ‘nonfiction television’ to turn-of-the-century reality TV, then the difference between first-generation celebrity and second-generation celebrity holds the potential to further distinguish MTV’s reality-celebrity from other modes of

television-based stardom and, more narrowly, reality-based stardom. Beggy's description of the disparity between the cast when he first participated on *Road Rules*, and the participants he is cast with today on the *Challenges*, reveals something of this transition:

Beggy: I think, ah, every case is different. Some people just do the show to do the show. But I think, ah, if you're going to do the show, or did the show to begin with, you'll want to in some way shape or form, do it again, or do something similar.

HC: And, I mean, have you noticed, because you were on one of the first *Road Rules*, right?

Beggy: Yeah, second season.

HC: Second season. Do you notice a difference between the people you were with on that *Road Rules* and the *Road Rulers* and *Real Worlders* that you're seeing now on, like, *The Gauntlet*?

Tim: Yeah, largely. Largely. Honestly, you know, I don't know how could properly convey it and I only think it can be truthfully foreseen through my perspective. And I think anyone who has watched it long-term as well could possibly relate. But basically, ah, when I started out it was very much so all about the experience. Really was. And as years have gone by, and reality TV in general has sort of upped the ante on antics and stories, it's changed. The cast has changed. It's more about the rock-star appeal of it all and more about camera-time. I definitely see that. Where people aren't really going on these shows and forming life-long bonds. It's more of, 'hey I am famous.'

Beggy again sets himself apart from other cast members. In noting his status as part of MTV's first-generation of participants, Beggy not only points to different expectations on the part of recently cast talent but also indicates a general inclination by second-generation participants to want to return to shoot future seasons. This disposition is unique to MTV's second-generation of reality-talent and it sets *The Real World* franchise apart from other similarly structured formats. This is not to say that individuals who seek to be cast on reality TV do not share a desire for stardom akin to MTV's reality-participants.⁵³ But where MTV's reality-participants separate themselves is in the knowledge that their reality-personas, once established on *The Real World*, will potentially be siphoned into *Challenge* shows and lucrative public appearance circuits. Because no other reality franchise recuperates its former participants in the way MTV does its past *Real Worlders* and *Road Rulers*, second-generation participants usually approach their time on these shows with some wish to remain on-camera after the program is done shooting. To use Beggy's words, "if you're going to do the show, or did the show to begin with, you'll want to in some way shape or form, do it again, or do something similar." This scenario is further compounded by MTV's novel production of reality TV in the early 1990s. Because MTV's *Real World* programming has in many respects helped to usher in what is today commonly identify as the (re)emergence of the

⁵³ In fact, it is just the opposite: there is a general desire on the part of many reality participants to continue their time on-camera once having transitioned into what might be thought of as a preferred media version of oneself as celebrity. Aside from being discussed at some length in the context of *Big Brother* (Couldry 2004; Holmes 2004), scenarios in which past participants aspire to continue their time on-camera can be seen in shows like *American Idol* which hold as their prize the promise of a more permanent mode of fame.

reality genre,⁵⁴ returning *Real Worlders* and *Road Rulers* can be seen to occupy a very unique type of reality-celebrity. Beggy's comments not only provide a way of envisioning MTV's participants as wanting to be part of the larger media spectacle surrounding reality TV but, specific to the *Real World* franchise, offer an account whereby the act of going on either *The Real World* or *Road Rules* is tantamount to entering MTV's system of reality-talent.

Beggy's observation that newer cast members no longer approach their time on-camera as an 'adventure,' or a space in which to form 'life-long bonds,' not only exemplifies this shift in disposition but, more significantly, reveals how Beggy situates himself as first-generation talent in the context of his continued participation. That is, Beggy positions the contemporary cast member's desire for fame in opposition to the previous generation's investment in a discourse of adventure and community. In so doing, Beggy's commentary raises the issue of MTV's place within reality TV's larger transformation from the kind of expository realism which documentary television has historically operationalized in order to produce a 'discourse of sobriety,' to the light fare found in reality TV's 'popular ecology of the factual.'⁵⁵ Beggy's own lamentation

⁵⁴ As already discussed, the producers of *The Real World* franchise, Bunim/Murray, started as a fledgling production house hoping to blend the dramatic storylines found in soap operas with the realism afforded in the techniques of observational documentary (Andrejevic 2004). By giving Bunim/Murray an outlet for their reformulation of 'nonfiction' television (docudramas like PBS' *An American Family*, for example), MTV was able to shape and address in *The Real World*'s structure, and formulation of new spin-off programming, the various trends in turn-of-the-century television production working to solidify the parameters of the genre.

⁵⁵ Corner situates turn-of-the-century reality programming in the context of 'the popular's' affect on the contemporary experience of factuality: "It is very much to do with the changing character of the national and the international economy and the increasing emphasis on market systems, market values, and the dynamics of consumption. These have generated a version of 'the popular,' grounded in

resembles John Corner's explanation of the comprehensive effects of this shift in television viewers' audio-visual appetites:

[w]ithin this contemporary crisis around public values, broadcast documentary is, in fact, more vulnerable than news programming, since it is premised upon a deeper and a broader engagement with perceptions of social community – its varieties, rhythms, problems, and tensions, the interplay of the specific and the general. (2002: 266)

This sentiment was expressed to varying degrees throughout my conversation with Beggy and represents a primary theme in both his account of participating on MTV's *Real World* programming, as well as his involvement in other media as a reality-celebrity. Like Meister, Beggy disavows the nature of his fame while remaining agreeable to being cast for future *Challenge* installments. Both Meister's and Beggy's means of distancing themselves from their celebrity involves a renunciation of their cohorts' pursuit of fame. Interestingly, they do this by referencing their life biographies, which also double as the material support underpinning the narrative dimensions of their reality-personas. Where Meister attends to the 'small-town,' 'Christian,' attributes of her persona by distancing herself from MTV's spring-break ethos, Beggy's account of MTV's production of a mobile-home safari not only underscores how he sees himself in relation to newer cast members but also gives his larger critique of reality TV its purchase.

consumption, which is often in direct tension with notions of 'the public'" (2002: 265). Corner is, here, not arguing that all documentary television is reduced to following the whims of the market. Instead, he is suggesting that documentary television's adherence to an entertainment-based ethos has the larger effect of shaping what begins to be identified factual imagery.

For Beggy, early participation in MTV's *Real World* programming resembled something of a televised exploration of 'ordinary' people placed in 'exciting' environments. He saw it as a space where cast members were forced to adjust to their surroundings and 'open up' to one another on-camera. At the same time, Beggy was keenly aware of the professional avenues that could potentially arise as a result of his participation on *Road Rules*. Beggy explained this in the context of his first reaction to possibly being cast for *Road Rules*' second season:

HC: So, why did you, when you wanted to go on it, where were you at in life?

Tim: I just finished college at Duquesne. I was living out here on the South Side. And, it honestly, if I could have come up with something I would like to do in life, or my perfect scenario of a life experience I couldn't have written a better option for myself. I mean, it was, of course it was the second season so there had only been one *Road Rules*. And I had heard of it but I hadn't seen it. And I watched one episode and, um, at the commercial break they advertised: 'hey if you want to be on this show, apply here, send in a tape. And I was hooked. I was like, 'this show is great.' You know, because I am very, very much so, I've always enjoyed entertaining. I wanted to work in television or radio and, ah, I am all about adventure, life experience and adventure. And to wrap it all into one big present, it just had my name written all over it.

Here we can see how Beggy's account of his initial interest in *Road Rules*' works to distinguish him from the contemporary climate of reality-celebrity. According to Beggy,

he approached *Road Rules* as a unique opportunity for adventure and professional development. Although this perspective may be shared by many of MTV's reality-participants, Beggy sees himself as exceptional because of the unique way *Road Rules* 'had his name written all over it.' In this light, the extent to which Beggy's self-reported penchant for 'entertainment' and 'adventurous life-experiences' separates him from other first-generation reality-participants is less noteworthy than how he contemplates this difference in relation to his own identity as a reality-celebrity.

When asked if *Road Rules* met his expectations, he responded with the following praise:

HC: Did it turn out to be what you expected?

Tim: Yeah, loved it.

HC: So, you would do it again?

Tim: Yeah, absolutely. I would leave right now. I'd finish my coffee, I'd take my coffee with me.

HC: And do it all over again...

Tim: Do it all over again, yeah. It was just that much fun, yeah.

HC: Do you still have that kind of fun when you go on the Challenge shows? Or is it different?

Tim: Eh, it's a different kind. It's nothing like your first time. You know, with just about everything. So, it's different. The personalities are a little bit more boisterous. And, ah, there's more tension. And, ah, the whole feel of the show has changed. The 'hey this a great experience' has kind of been watered-down.

HC: If you could say, specifically, one thing that has changed the most from, like, it being this experience to something watered-down...

Tim: It's very much so. It's more sometimes you feel you're in a glam rock band.

Tim: You know, it's, ah, people making a really big to-do out of it. And ah, when you do these *Challenges* it's different. Like, I did *Road Rules* fifty-eight years ago and you got people who are fresh off the show. So it is completely different mentalities. You know, some people are waking up in the morning and getting dressed and putting a lot of make-up on and they're ready to be on TV.

As will be seen, Beggy's current relationship with his fame, as it manifests itself in a larger critique of reality TV's influence on contemporary television, is continually shaped by the cultural value he codes first in terms of 'adventure' and 'experience,' and later in terms of professionalism. Thus, the significance of Beggy's identity as a first-generation participant cannot be overstated. Because *Road Rules* pre-dated the genre's proliferation in the late 1990s, it places Beggy's original participation somewhere within the range of previous, often highly venerated, attempts by television to incorporate the documentary techniques of observational-liveness and expository realism into its programming (Corner 2000; Murray 2000). However, reality TV's solidification as a prime time programming staple in the late 1990s marked the end of whatever anthropological project Beggy associated with being on *Road Rules*.

With this in mind, we can read Beggy's criticism of MTV's second-generation programming as stemming from the kinds of liberal reformist critiques that have

historically denounced the medium as a technology employed to disseminate popular culture (Ouellette and Lewis 2004). The importance Beggy places on ‘adventure’ and ‘life-experience’ can be seen to combat this critique by appropriating a tone, if not rationale, similar to the defenses of early ‘non-fiction’ television that justified it as a vehicle for capturing something of the ‘human condition.’⁵⁶ Further buttressing Beggy’s critique of turn-of-the-century reality TV is the way he envisions the (re)emergence of the genre in the late 1990s degrading contemporary television. Beggy links the growth of reality TV to the degradation of contemporary television:

Tim: So it’s like hey you don’t even know me, and you’ve probably never even seen me on TV and you heard I was *Road Rules*, so now you don’t like me. And, also the opposite: you’ve heard I was on *Road Rules* so now you love me. So it’s really weird, it’s weird like that. And um, I think also with how reality TV has morphed, and has kind of taken over the airwaves, and it has cheapened television.

Although Beggy’s first-generation status can be seen to mitigate his continued participation in reality TV, he like Meister, appears to be frustrated with the general quality of his celebrity. In this light, Beggy’s celebrity suffers from a form of symbolic deficiency. That is, Beggy’s frustration with his celebrity results from an inability to maintain a career in television beyond ‘Tim from *Road Rules*.’ And unlike other

⁵⁶ One of the most interesting examples of this can be found in Anna McCarthy’s examination of the praise *Candid Camera*’s producer, Allen Funt, received from noted television scholar Charles Siepmann for his short documentary film, *Children of the U.N.*, which was featured in the 1954-1955 season of the Ford Foundation’s celebrated variety program *Omnibus* (McCarthy 2004: 19). McCarthy notes about Siepmann’s praise, “[f]unt’s ability to communicate this idea of a microcosm of international relations was what stirred Siepmann to state his preference for the aesthetics of actuality to those of drama on television.” (ibid:19-20).

television personalities, Beggy's celebrity is predicated on the behind-the-scenes character of celebrity. However there is an observable difference between Meister and Beggy: where Meister experiences her fame as traumatic and 'freakish,' Beggy, although frustrated with the stigma placed on reality-actors, appears satisfied with his decision to go on *Road Rules*.

5.5 'REALITY TV MAKES YOU THE MOST POPULAR PERSON AT BURGER KING'

Thus far, I have attempted to think about Beggy's fame from the standpoint of its duration within television's changing institutional structure. I now want to turn to a consideration of how this structuring of fame relies on the representational particularities necessitated by reality TV's textual configuration in such a way as to capitalize on Beggy's and Meister's different experiences with celebrity. As noted, unlike second-generation talent, much of the notoriety Beggy received from his early participation on *Road Rules* enabled him to take advantage of more traditional forms of television employment outside the confines *The Real World* franchise (hosting *Guts and Bolts*, for example). At the same time, when Beggy finished shooting *Road Rules* in 1994, the extramural employment opportunities that today subsidize MTV's reality-celebrities between *Challenges* also did not exist. Beggy pointed this out when speaking about the differences between his contract and Meister's:

Tim: Yeah, my contract wasn't like that. It just wasn't as popular of a show. Or wasn't, there weren't, you weren't being utilized outside the

show. You did *Road Rules*, *Real World* and that was it. No speaking gigs, no commercials.

HC: That didn't exist then is what you are saying?

Tim: Well no one really did the math.

HC: Yeah.

Tim: No one, you know, Gap or Old Navy didn't think, 'wow, use these people in an ad.'

HC: Yeah.

Tim: It just wasn't there.

HC: So, but now, I mean, does Bunim/Murray forward their information to these different agents?

Tim: No, the agents come and grab you for sure. Yeah, they definitely do. But, Bunim/Murray will also steer you to certain ones they work with as well.

HC: So they have ones they prefer to work with?

Tim: Yeah, for sure. So, yeah, it's definitely crossed the gap over the years from just being MTV to being utilized in different commercials, or what have you. It is, I mean, you're on TV and they repeat the hell out of it and basically reality TV makes you the most popular person at Burger King.

Beggy's words build on Meister's account of the effect turn-of-the-century reality TV has had on the lives of MTV's reality-actors. In this instance, Beggy conceptualizes the difference between first-generation and second-generation participants in terms of the novel kinds of celebrity-based employment generated in the wake of reality TV's

extensive second-wave deployment. Beggy's comments also indicate the extent to which former participants on *The Real World* and *Road Rules* have adapted into a far more durable talent build.

For Beggy, this durability is the result of second-generation participants' use value no longer expiring with each new installment in the franchise. Because current reality-participants often retain their profitability beyond the textual bounds of the season in which they are cast, the 'famous-for-being-famous' quality of their stardom is often classified as a type of fast-food, or 'Burger King,' version of television-based fame. Beggy supports this viewpoint even while continuing to accept work as 'Tim from *Road Rules*.' Thus, Beggy not only isolates his stardom from other kinds of reality-celebrity as a consequence of his 'doing reality TV before it was called reality TV,' he implies that his value as a celebrity results from something more than being on MTV. He put this in terms of what it means to be labeled a reality-actor:

Beggy: There is a price to pay when you associate with [reality TV]. Not that I am any actor, or I do anything ultimately overwhelmingly important in life, but you still get lumped in with a certain crowd of reality-folk that have a bad stigma. You know, the guy picking his nose and putting it in the peanut butter, you'll get lumped in with him.

Here, Beggy's frustration is the consequence of the same cultural hierarchy that he himself is guilty of implementing. Echoing Langer and Ellis (1981; 1983), Beggy identifies the television personality as a less meritorious configuration of talent than an actor, which necessarily places reality-actors in an even more disadvantageous space within the industry. This critique embodies Beggy's larger frustration with his celebrity.

Similar to Meister's assertion that she does not have the means to properly attend to her fame, Beggy's insistence that he is not an 'actor,' or 'anything overwhelmingly important in life,' but, instead, a television personality who runs the risk of being grouped with reality-actors, indicates a concern on his part that he too lacks the skills necessary to foster a career in television outside of reality TV. Beggy's discussion of his interaction with second-generation participants on *Challenges* further illustrates this point of view:

Tim: I specifically have had a lot of guys who were in the same shoes as me on shows after mine aired. And they really are, many of them from different seasons have called me up and been like, 'hey, I want to do what you've done.' You know, 'how did you do it?' Management, auditioning, what's your technique and what have you. And I think it was just more of timing with myself.

HC: So yeah, because you said you didn't think they would be able to do it now because there's this stigma attached to...

Tim: Yeah it's more of, 'hey you're a reality person you're a not a TV host.'

[...]

HC: Do you find the people who go on now maybe don't have that same sort of, I don't know if work ethic is the right thing, but don't expect to do what you've had to do?

Tim: I think definitely, it is a craft. I mean, from my angle it's hosting. I am not an actor; I am a TV host, big difference.

HC: Okay.

Tim: But it's a craft. You have to be able to interview. You have to be able to interact on-camera, not run around with a mouthful of earthworms.

You have got to be able to interview people, talk to people, deliver lines, look appropriate, the whole ball of wax. There's a talent to it.

Thus, Beggy's emphasis on talent, as it is typified in the skill required to be a host, not only provides a rationale for his critique of reality TV, it allows him to perceive of his fame as inherently more valuable than the majority of his cohorts.

Finally, I want to suggest that Beggy's appraisal of his fame is not without merit. After all, he did host *The Slant* and *Guts and Bolts*. Therefore, it is important to think about the way Beggy's status as a 'genuine' television personality is not only appropriately reflected in his account of what it is like to be a reality-celebrity but, more significantly, how it functions as an essential part of the material comprising his reality-persona. That is to say, because reality-actors are restricted to playing 'themselves,' their personas are based on the 'objective reality' embodied in their persons. This is not to suggest that MTV's reality-actors are not performing.⁵⁷ On the contrary, the way that both Beggy and Meister play themselves indicates a situation in which their performances are not entirely predicated on a fictional rendition of themselves 'in character.' Instead, the skill involved in being one of MTV's reality-actors, as opposed to the 'craft' Beggy sees in hosting, can be observed most clearly in instances when reality-celebrities reflexively fashion their specific identities as 'participants' in order to accommodate the narrative requirements of a particular show's storyline.

⁵⁷ See Corner's discussion of postdocumentary performance in reality TV (2002).

With this in mind, Beggy's first-generation persona can be seen reflected in his seemingly positive experience with reality-stardom. Thus, the particularity of Beggy's celebrity is not found in the artificiality of his persona but, instead, in the way his performance of that identity is coordinated by a system of representation that assures him: 'don't worry about being real, we cast you to play yourself.' It is here that Žižek's analysis of fantasy again proves useful. In an ideological environment of cynicism, Žižek inverts the classic Marxian formula, 'they do not know it, but they are doing it,' so that the elusive element underpinning ideology's functioning is not on the side of knowledge but in social activity, in the overlooking of the way illusion structures effective reality itself (1989: 232-3). Here Beggy's critique of reality TV can be understood as sincere exactly because it is part of his reality-persona. Once more, we can see a commonality between Beggy and Meister: because the work of being a reality-celebrity necessitates that you 'be yourself,' both Beggy's and Meister's personas enact an authenticity that evacuates the space needed to feel secure in the actuality that there is a realer version of themselves existent beyond what MTV depicts.

From a Lacanian perspective, this can be thought of along the lines of the symbolic order's function of naming. In structuring 'objective reality' through language, Lacan suggests that the symbolic order reduces the subject to a signifier (1981: 51). This in turn splits the subject from within by introducing a gap between effective reality and that (fantasy) which allows the subject to believe that its own being cannot be captured by representation (Copjec 1994: 37). Or, to use Žižek's paraphrasing of Lacan, the split incites the subject to second guess the symbolic by believing in "... 'that something in me more than myself' on account of which I perceive myself as 'worthy of the Other's

desire''' (1997: 8). Reality TV's transparent staging of the real accentuates this relationship between fantasy and representation. That is, the request that reality TV makes of its participants, to 'be themselves' when *performing*, adds a kind of excessive realness to their image, which has the effect of making it difficult for reality-actors like Beggy to distinguish how their off-camera selves hold a value beyond what is portrayed on television.

This scenario is best exemplified in the way Meister's and Beggy's frustration with reality TV follows rationales rooted in their individual identities as reality-celebrities. Where Meister's wholesome persona colors her experience of celebrity in shades of abnormality, Beggy's less antagonistic viewpoint reflects the 'innovator' identity on which his persona is based. Consequently, Beggy's frustration with fame is anchored in issues that befit his image as a onetime television host (e.g. reality TV's use of non-actors as on-camera talent has cheapened television, making his prospects of finding work as a television personality remote). Thus, the symbolic deficiency found in MTV's reality-celebrity directly corresponds with the way in which participation is predicated on depicting one's off-camera self. It is through this endeavor that we see MTV's reality-actors engaged in a kind of necessary cycle of self-misrecognition. By putting 'themselves' on display in order to meet the representational logic on which *The Real World* franchise is based, they rightly conceive of their participation as performative. This in turn compels them to incorrectly believe that the realities their personas enact are more illusory than the off-camera identities on which they are established. In the case of Beggy and Meister, this equates to two different experiences, one more positive than the other. But as much as their accounts differ, they each reflect a

similar anxiety about the way their celebrity confronts them with reality TV's representational inadequacy. Thus in Beggy's case, his critique of reality TV not only mirrors the limitations found in his celebrity, it functions as a kind of textual precondition for his continued participation in MTV's distinct fabrication of persona-based storylines.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Beggy's remarks provide a unique vantage point from which to appreciate how MTV's reality-actors attend to the specific labor requirements of *The Real World* franchise. Reality-actors must pay attention to how their identity as participants, as opposed to actors, positions them as a distinct kind of television personality. As a consequence, they can also be seen as adhering to the wider practices of the industry in which they function as a suspect form of talent. This is clearly seen in Beggy's discussion of the *Challenges*. From a labor standpoint, the primary monetary compensation for participating on *Challenges* comes in the form of an all-or-nothing cash prize. Although similar kinds of competition comprise the story arc of the gamedoc format in general, the actual value in successfully competing on MTV's *Challenges* is not only found in whatever financial remuneration the prize offers but, also, in the implicit promise it holds for future participation. To successfully compete, then, these reality-actors must cater to the unique way in which Bunim-Murray/MTV constructs its storylines in order to secure casting in upcoming seasons. This in turn creates a kind of persona-generated capital unique to MTV's field of cultural production. At the same time, continued participation also secures even more lucrative forms of extramural employment (e.g. public appearances at

clubs and colleges). Consequently, MTV's celebrity, like other modes of television stardom, depends on a virtual depiction to fuel an interest outside of the show itself.

Beggy's celebrity can also be seen as skewing this model. Because he is recast into a progressing serial narrative that is based on his ability to successfully play 'Tim Beggy from the second season of *Road Rules*,' Beggy's persona must incorporate an element of his off-camera identity. This not only modifies Langer's and Ellis' 'personality model' (1981; 1982), it indicates new ways in which ostensibly different kinds of 'participants' (other forms of television talent, for example) share a common institutional relationship with fame. In Beggy's case, his identity as a first-generation participant embodies the industrial production arrangements that foregrounded the genre's (re)emergence in the early to mid-1990s. Beggy's frequent references to 'doing reality TV before anyone knew what to call it,' as well as his critique of the genre being a inferior form of television, illustrates the extent to which he is invested in incorporating his history as a reality-pioneer into his persona. This serves to distinguish him from his reality-peers as much as it functions to unite him with second-generation participants like Susie. That is, both Meister's and Beggy's critique of their celebrity is derived from the identities that comprise their reality-personas. From this standpoint, Bunim-Murray/MTV's recuperation of preexisting participants takes advantage of reality TV's unique textual fabrication. Accordingly, the most striking aspect of Meister and Beggy's shared experience of reality-celebrity can be seen in how Bunim-Murray/MTV's practice of repurposing personas (as a means to connect and develop storylines) strains their relationship with stardom by making the 'realness' of their identities the textual condition of possibility on which the programming is based. Thus, Beggy's negotiation of his

celebrity, as it also comprises the parts for which he is cast, is influenced more by reality TV's devotion to the real than its transparent fabrication of authenticity.

6.0 CHAPTER FIVE

PEOPLE WHO ACT LIKE THEMSELVES: VIEWING AND PERFORMING REALITY TV

In a recent article likening MTV's recurring reality-participants to "television carnies," the *Los Angeles Times* quoted a cast member on the set of this season's *Road Rules* saying that they were "talentless talent" (Collins 2007). This statement is not surprising. It not only echoes Meister's and Beggy's account of their fame, it is also illustrative of much of the rhetoric surrounding reality TV (Raphael 2004). As Bunim-Murray/MTV begins selecting participants for its twentieth season of *The Real World*, however, its search for future cast members demonstrates the extent to which reality TV's participant-based programming has become indistinguishable from other kinds of commercial television. The most recent *Real World* casting call on The MM Agency (or, MTV *Real World* Cast Appearance Booking Agency) website, specifically solicits perspective participants who desire a career in the media industry:

For *The Real World*'s upcoming 20th season, we are searching for cast members with career and life goals that they want to pursue in a major metropolitan center. Aspiring actors, models, dancers, filmmakers, musicians, athletes, artists, journalists, stylists, and fashion designers are particularly encouraged to apply, as well as anyone interested in career goals and a passion to succeed.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ <http://www.mm-agency.com/blog/mtv-real-world/mtv-real-world-20-casting-call-may-be-the-last-season/3103/>

As seen in the previous two chapters, second-generation participants on *The Real World* and its spin-offs have since the mid-1990s been increasingly treated as talent. But the explicit way in which Bunim-Murray/MTV's recent advertisement calls this reality to the fore is worthy of special attention. With this casting call, *The Real World* comes to the end of its twenty-season contract with MTV. Thus Bunim-Murray's request for unpolished talent, instead of 'everyday' participants, embodies just how far *The Real World* has departed from its original charter of depicting ordinary people.

Seen from the perspective of reality TV's participants, the genre's transition from a cultural phenomenon to a now commonplace form of television programming, transforms the participant's function from purveyor of authenticity – a 'non-actor' – to a kind of highly interchangeable and expendable form of talent. Like much of *The Real World's* reality counterparts, the waning novelty of televising the day-to-day lives of ordinary people has led to participants approaching their time on-camera as an opportunity to become professional television personalities. The way that reality TV has thrived in network primetime, and served as the basis for entire cable channels designed to narrowcast to coveted 'hard-to-reach' demographics, has, however, done more than create new instances of television fame. What MTV's persona-based reality programming shows us is that the parameters defining what it means to work in television as on-camera talent have been redrawn (or at the very least blurred) to include performers that are, for the moment, laboring in roles that are reflective of reality TV's use of participants instead of actors.

Up until now, my discussion of MTV's reality-celebrity has focused primarily on Bunim-Murray/MTV's cultivation of *Real World* talent through a generational analysis of

the franchise's development and the history of two of its regular participants. In order to put MTV's reality-celebrity within the broader context of reality TV's (re)emergence and solidification in the last seven years, this chapter will examine the representational role of the reality-participant within television's changing landscape. This chapter will assert that the claim that reality-actors are a kind of 'talentless talent' overlooks the manner in which reality-participants are engaged in a type of performance that is specific to the way reality TV incorporates the realness of its participants within its representational structure. Of course, it is always important to keep in mind that reality TV is television. The reality-participant does, after all, call attention to the medium's defining traits of liveness, everydayness and familiarity.

Thus to conceptualize of reality TV's growing labor force without taking into account the way its performers enact their realities, is to overlook the authenticity involved in being real for a living. One of the key issues this chapter will seek to address is the question of how we are to think about reality TV's performances in an environment where 'ordinary people' are used to underwrite feeble depictions of authenticity. To do this, I will argue that the reality-participant functions as an element of realism within the small screen's *mise-en-scène* that signals to the viewer that reality TV's claim to the real is grounded in its ability to stage reality. This chapter will explore how reality TV depends on the realness of the participant's presence onscreen to call attention to the artificiality of its depictions so that its viewers may detect what has, and what has not, been constructed with an eye to their amusement. In the same way that the participant's image will be seen to structure this viewing practice, it will also be shown to shape the participant's performance. Consequently, reality TV's use of participants will be

considered from two corresponding perspectives: as the textual element necessary for enabling the process by which reality TV stages its presentation of the real and as a mode of on-camera talent that must enact their individual realities in order to fulfill the representational promise made by their amateur image.

6.1 AMBIVALENTLY ENCHANTED: THE REALITY-PARTICIPANT'S AUDIENCE

Karen Lury argues that in order to understand the experience of watching television it is essential to consider the way viewers are contextually ‘embedded’ in the characteristics of the medium as a text with distinct performances (1995). She explains that how viewers feel when they watch television is “...important for any assessment of television texts, but it is essential in the assessment and analysis of performance which is so strongly encoded by extra-textual elements” (ibid: 114). For Lury, one important extra-textual aspect of contemporary television viewing is the way turn-of-the-century programming has been influenced by an atmosphere of ambivalence on the part of young viewers. Similar to the cynicism that Andrejevic sees underpinning much of television’s current discourse with the real (2004), Lury’s analysis of the viewing practices of British youths in the 1990s, traces the emergence of an ambivalent attitude toward standard television fare. She warns that this ambivalence should not be thought of as a negative reaction, or simple rejection of contemporary media, but, instead, as a disposition that oscillates between “cynicism” and “enchantment” (ibid: 10).

Lury further argues that this disposition is the only viable form of subversion available to a generation of television viewers that lack a unified and identifiable ‘status quo’ to rebel against:

A tacit incorporation that is armed by ambivalence would, after all, have the benefit of allowing many young people the possibility of enchantment; to suspend cynicism and to invest in the pleasures of and practices available within the culture of commodities and virtual realities. It is an enchantment that will be necessarily contingent and perhaps temporary, and it offers experience that may no longer be ‘authentic’ in a sense that might be comprehended by older generations; nevertheless, it is an enchantment that fascinates and delights. (ibid: 11)

Although Lury’s analysis is directed at youth-centered television that caters to the Generation X demographic,⁵⁹ the abundance of television that is today produced for various types of ‘ambivalent’ viewers indicates a climate in which this disposition has anything but waned. From this perspective, the kind of participant-based programming that viewers were quick to embrace at the turn-of-the-century should not be thought of as television that returned ‘reality’ to the televisual landscape. Instead, it appears more accurate to assert that turn-of-the-century reality TV like *The Real World* and *Cops*⁶⁰ offered a televisual aesthetic of realism as an alternate mode of performance-based

⁵⁹ Lury looks at British television programs produced for the Def II strand on BBC as well as programs produced for MTV and Channel 4.

⁶⁰ I note the *The Real World* and *Cops* for two reasons: first, both programs have been cited as early examples of reality TV’s second-wave (Nichols 1992; Andrejevic 2004; Magder 2004; Raphael 2004) and, second, both programs originally aired on networks interested in appealing to a young audience.

television. From this standpoint, reality TV's ability to entertain viewers depends, at some level, on the deftness with which it repackages authenticity as a virtual experience.

John Ellis' discussion of the twentieth-century as a particular moment of witness aided by mechanical reproduction also speaks to this environment:

As we emerge from the [twentieth century], we can realize that a profound shift has taken place in the way that we perceive the world that exists beyond our immediate Experience...We live in an era of information, and photography, film and television have brought us visual evidence. Their quasi-physical documentation of specific moments in specific places has brought us face to face with the great events, the banal happenings, the horrors and the incidental cruelties of our times. Perhaps we have seen too much. (2000: 9)

Here, Ellis observes a condition similar to what David Harvey argues is a byproduct of the sensory overload, or 'bombardment of stimuli,' found in a post-industrial moment of time-space compression (1992: 285). Ellis' last suggestion, 'that we have seen too much,' is particularly relevant. This observation not only points to an overabundance of media generated imagery, it addresses the peculiar status of reality TV in the context of Ellis' culture of witness. To put it another way, Ellis situates reality TV in an environment in which viewers feel like everything has already been seen. Or, to put reality TV's (re)emergence in the context of the larger shifts seen in cultural production from the mid-1960s onward, Ellis echoes what Ernest Mandel (1975) and Fredric Jameson (1984) suggest is late capitalism's ever escalating cycle of commodity production whereby culture has been subsumed by the market. Harvey, following George Simmel

(1911), traces the effects of this acceleration to a moment of ephemerality and volatility in which an abundance of complex market-driven stimuli must be screened by a kind of modern ‘blasé attitude’ (1992: 26). If we identify this as the broader cultural atmosphere from which the reality-participant’s performance has sprung, this ambivalent (or blasé) attitude is the disposition fueling contemporary television’s formulation of what it means to be an on-camera talent.

This returns us to Andrejevic’s suggestion that reality TV is television for a post-ideological moment (2004). Andrejevic argues that reality TV’s connection to the skepticism seen in savvy viewers has to do with the way it packages itself with an ethos of unmasking: “[t]he appeal is a reflexively savvy one that offers up demystifying behind-the-scenes glimpse of the spectacle and the *latest spectacle*” (ibid: 16).

Andrejevic’s point, however, is not that reality TV deconstructs the workings of the culture industry for its viewers but, on the contrary, that it stages its deconstruction as the latest iteration of the media’s manufacture of spectacle. Following Zizek’s assertion that in the social symbolic reality, things ultimately are what they appear to be (1990), Andrejevic explains:

[i]f reality TV caters to our own skepticism by showing us how mediated appearances are constructed by the apparatus of the culture industry – if it enacts what it displays by simultaneously debunking celebrity and creating new stars – we can concede that the savvy attitude becomes a strategy for protecting artifice by exposing it. (ibid)

Similar to the disposition Lury outlines, then, Andrejevic’s savvy-viewers also take a kind of solace in their ability to detect the many ways the media constructs its

representations. If we follow Andrejevic's observation to its logical conclusion, the cynicism maintained by these viewers can be seen to shelter them from Žižek's more provocative suggestion – that in terms of the social symbolic, what you see is sometimes what you get. Consequently, the paradox that the participant's amateur image presents to viewers – that the realer television appears the more likely it is to be staged – not only caters to a post-ideological atmosphere of media cynicism, it can also be viewed as the extra-textual element coding reality TV's performances.

6.2 SUTURE AND THE REALITY-PARTICIPANT

As already discussed, the reality-participant works as the narrative hinge connecting reality TV's contrived storylines to its depiction of authenticity. Combined with this function, the participant's image exists within the text as an on-screen element that animates each program's specific presentation of the real. Not entirely different from what Roland Barthes identified as the photograph's '*punctum*,' the participant's image works to separate reality TV from the visual nature of scripted television by including within its frame a spot that has the potential to 'catch the viewer's eye' (1993: 40-1, 50). But unlike the *punctum*, which functions to 'prick' or traumatize the viewer with its eeriness,⁶¹ the image of the participant works to inscribe within the *mise-en-scène* a textual element that authorizes reality TV's inadequate representation of reality. That is to say, the participant is a point in the text that sticks out as something exceptionally

⁶¹ For a Lacanian analysis of the *punctum*, see Henry Krips, *Fetish: An Erotics of Culture* (1999).

‘authentic’ among television’s conventionalized codes of production. Different from other genres of television that feature personalities instead of actors, the participant’s presence before the camera accentuates the actuality that reality TV’s contrived narratives and funhouse environments are constructed. Thus, the image of the participant as a ‘non-actor’ (like the photograph’s *punctum*) adds a kind of representational wildcard to the televisual chain of signification. Here, reality TV’s framing of the participant can be seen as a reflexive gesture towards its own inability to furnish reality. And it is through this acquiescence that the participant’s potential for ‘liveness’ and ‘unpredictability’ distinguishes reality TV’s representations of the real from other forms of popular factual television.

From this perspective, the reality participant’s status as reflexive element within the text plays a similar role to the practice of suture in cinema. In film studies, suture is defined as the act of situating the exterior within the interior thereby creating a self-sustaining enclosure that appears natural as opposed to constructed.⁶² For example, the shot/reverse-shot (or counter-shot) works to inscribe exteriority within the interiority of a film’s diegetic space by showing the protagonist from where they are looking. This process begins with a subjective point-of-view shot of the protagonist that is then followed by an objective counter-shot. By positioning the protagonist in this way – seeing her from where she is looking after you yourself shared her point-of-view – the film’s diegetic space is totalized. Television’s representations, however, function in terms of flow not diegesis (Williams 1974). Where film has traditionally attempted to maintain a diegetic relationship with the viewer, television’s fragmented programming

⁶² For an excellent discussion of suture, see Jean-Pierre Oudart’s seminal essay, “La Suture,” I and II, in *Cashiers du Cinéma* nos 211 and 212, April and May 1969.

and ubiquitous deployment (both domestically and publicly) have served to position its representations as a series of ambient images in the background of daily life. Of course, this does mean that the relationship between interior and exterior is evacuated with regard to television. On the contrary, television's dependence on the everyday in the form of its 'unscripted' programming and use of personalities emphasizes this divide but to very different ends. This is most notable in reality TV's use of the participant. Here, television is acknowledging its own inability to deliver exteriority by making the focal point of its pseudo-realistic environments an extra-televisual element that accentuates this very inadequacy. This is how reality TV inverts the standard formula for suture.

Zizek uses Lacanian terminology to discuss this inversion in the context of classical Hollywood cinema (2001). He explains that we can also think of suture as a movement from objective to subjective: instead of beginning with a point-of-view shot, the viewer is first confronted with the objective shot of the protagonist which is, then, in a complementary shot, transformed into the vision of the protagonist seeing from where they have just seen (ibid: 33). This is important for Zizek because the gaze, as Lacan outlines it in *Seminar XI* (1998), calls for the inversion of the subject/object relationship.⁶³ In order to address the Lacanian 'barred-subject,' Zizek substitutes the

⁶³ Lacan explains this relationship in terms of the scopic register by configuring a diagram with two superimposed triangles (1998: 106). The triangle situated on left represents the geometrical perspective. The triangle intersecting from the right represents the semiotic perspective, or the graphing of light by the symbolic order. According to Copjec (1994: 33), these interpenetrating triangles essentially 'redesign' the scopic field into a dialectic relationship where the geometric plain is screened by the signifier. This, then, produces a symbolic experience of the visual. Consequently, the experience of exteriority always approaches the subject from the outside, from the position of the object, the place of the gaze. Or, as Lacan observes, "[i]t is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze

subjective signifier for an objective signifier. From a Lacanian perspective, then, suture is not an instance in which a *subjective* element upholds the text's claim to the real but is a practice through which an *objective* element makes reality appear inaccessible. For Lacan, this is an essential part of the subject's constitution. It compels the subject to (mis)recognize its own interiority as being independent from the exterior world.

The reality-participant is, thus, the perfect inversion of the standard practice of suture. That is to say, the participant's image exists within the televisual frame as something realer than the text itself. Its excess of realism functions as an internal signifier signifying the text's own representational constraints. Or as Žižek describes it, "... 'suture' means the *external* difference is always an *internal* one, that the external limitation of a field of phenomena always reflects itself within the field, as an inherent impossibility to fully become itself" (2001: 57). Put another way, reality TV's use of participants instead of actors both authorizes its representational mission as well as highlights the reality that it will never achieve it. Unlike Baudrillard's observation that Disneyland's hyperreal interior verifies the authenticity of the outside world in which it is situated (Anaheim, California), the realness of the reality-participant's image essentially secures the subjectivity of the viewer by making objective reality seem forever at odds with representation. And because the reality-participant is not included within the text to trick the viewer into accepting reality TV's premise, the verisimilitude embodied by its presence in the frame effectively protects the viewer's sense of its own subjectivity within the larger social symbolic universe. Therefore if we read the participant's image as the objective (or exterior) element added to television's system of subjective

is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which...I am *photographed*" (1998: 106).

representation, then reality TV's framing of the amateur performer essentially screens viewers from the reality that the participant is no more or less 'authentic' than the contrived (or interior) environments in which they are filmed.

6.3 THE REALITY-PARTICIPANT AND THE GAZE

From the standpoint of suture, then, the duality of excess and lack that is tied to the image of the reality-participant is potentially what makes reality TV so intriguing for viewers who are generally skeptical of the media. As has already been alluded to, reality TV's use of suture follows a similar rationale to what Lacan outlines as the gaze (1998). In order to explore this connection, it is necessary to consider some of the ways reality TV mediates what Lacan identifies as the object-cause of desire, the *objet petit a*. He explains the subject's relationship with the *objet petit a* as follows:

[i]n the scopic relation, the object on which depends the phantasy from which the subject is suspended in an essential vacillation is the gaze. Its privilege – and also that by which the subject for so long has been misunderstood as being in its dependence – derives from its very structure...Furthermore, of all the objects in which the subject may recognize his dependence in the register of desire, the gaze is specified as unapprehensible. (1998: 83)

For Lacan, then, the gaze is always characterized by obfuscation.⁶⁴ And it is exactly this trait that enables it to sustain the subject in the visual. Put another way, the subject depends on the *objet petit a* as a point of scopic impossibility in order to facilitate the (mis)conception that its status in the visual defies signification and thus houses within it something worthy of the Other's desire.⁶⁵

According to Žižek, this is how desire and the scopic drive are mediated by fantasy (1994). That is to say, the subject's conceptualization of who they are to their other(s) is ultimately underwritten by instances in which the eye fails. It is for this reason that Lacan unequivocally states:

[i]ndeed, there is something whose absence can always be observed in a picture – which is not the case in perception...In every picture, this central field cannot be but absent and replaced by a hole – a gaze. Consequently, and in as much as the picture enters into a relation of desire, the place of a central screen is always marked, which is precisely that by which, in front of the picture, I am elided as a subject of the geometrical plane...This is why the picture does not come into play in the field of representation. Its ends and effects are elsewhere. (1998: 108)

In other words, the gaze (as it relates the pleasure found in a painting or photograph, for example) is tied to the picture only in so far as its representations interject an interface in the spectator's field of vision that colors objective reality in shades of duplicity.

⁶⁴ See Antonio Quinet's discussion of how the drive manifests itself in the scopic order in "The Gaze as an Object" (1995).

⁶⁵ See Bruce Fink's discussion of the Other as desire (*objet a*) in *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (1995: 13).

This brings us back to Lacan's central thesis regarding representation and the gaze: the pleasure found in the scopic is "...not the philosophical problem of representation...not [a] dialectic between the surface and that which is beyond that things are suspended" but, instead, "...a splitting of the being to which the being accommodates itself, even in the natural world" (ibid: 106). Pictures, for example, 'accommodate' the spectator by affording it the sense that some realer version of reality is being kept from it. This is why Lacan observes, "[w]hen I am presented with a representation I assure myself that I know quite a lot about it, I assure myself as a consciousness that knows that it is only a representation, and that there is, beyond, the thing, the thing itself" (1998: 106). Lacan's account of the gaze is, here, especially useful. Because we cannot position reality TV's as a simple deception, we need some other way to understand the enjoyment found in television that, to paraphrase Andrejevic (2004), pretends that it is real so viewers may cleverly decipher how it is phony.

In order to parse this out – to better understand reality TV's relationship to the gaze – two important distinctions need to be made: the reality-participant is not a produced absence in the visual from which viewers experience the traumatic Real nor is it a site of trickery holding the gaze through a (mis)recognition of 'authenticity.' In the case of reality TV, it is more advantageous to think about it in terms of Lacan's discussion of *tromp-l'oeil*. Unlike the traumatizing gaze of Lacan's story of the sardine can,⁶⁶ *tromp-l'oeil* does not compel the spectator to experience subjectivity at its limits

⁶⁶ Lacan tells a story from his youth about a time in which he needed to engage in something 'practical,' something 'physical,' and thus took up working as a fisherman in Breton. Upon being confronted with a glittering sardine can floating on the horizon in the mockery of his fellow boatman, Petit-Jean, Lacan experienced a moment of trauma. Lacan, as a result of the distortion of light produced by the can, and his status as an

but, instead, assuages the subject. Lacan identifies this as the “pacifying, Apollonian effect of painting” in which “[something] is given not so much to the gaze as to the eye, something that involves the abandonment, the laying down, of the gaze” (1998: 101). Thus, Lacan likens *tromp-l’oeil* to *dompte-regard* because it serves to ‘tame the gaze’ (ibid: 111). He illustrates *trompe-l’oeil*’s elicitation of the gaze by explaining why the grapes’ of Zeuxis cannot call to the viewer as the veil of Parrhasios does to man. We have in this anecdote a painted image of grapes that birds are content to endlessly pick at it. While in the case of the painted veil, the extraordinary verisimilitude of the image so intrigues Zeuxis that he is drawn to question, “well, now tell us what you have painted behind it” (Lacan 103). For Lacan, the veil’s ability to lure the Zeuxis is not found in its capacity to trick the spectator into thinking it’s real, as the grapes deceive the birds. On the contrary, Parrhasios’ painting attracts Zeuxis because it exists as a seamless *representation* of that which conceals – a veil.

In the context of representation, then, the subject derives pleasure from the identification of simulacra and the guarantee of what exists behind it – as it is in this way lured to it – and in so doing is found contemplating a gaze outside the field of representation, beyond the confines of the subject’s construction by the symbolic order.⁶⁷ For Lacan, this is how *Tromp-l’oeil* acts as a point in the visual where the subject’s desire

interloper among these “fellows who were earning their livings with great difficulty,” saw himself from the vantage point of the floating can, from where he was constructed within the symbolic’s semiotic graphing of light (1973: 91).

⁶⁷ In this context, Copjec’s likening of representation to mimicry is a particularly useful way to distinguish how representation lures the subject as Zeuxis’ grapes lure the birds: “[t]he effect of representation...is not a subject who will harmonize with, or adapt to, its environment...[t]he effect of representation is, instead, the suspicion that some reality is being camouflaged, that we are being deceived as to the exact nature of some thing-in-itself that lies behind representation” (1994: 37).

may be aroused by the (mis)recognition that there is always something that escapes representation. And it is in the location of this something – of the thing-in-itself – that the Other finds satisfaction in the subject's image. This is why Lacan observes that when in love, the look one solicits is always unsatisfying because "...[y]ou never look at me from the place from which I see you" (ibid: 103). In other words, the subject is ultimately not captivated by what it sees (the object of its affection or, in the case of *tromp-l'oeil*, the painted illusion) but, instead, desires what remains out of sight. Here we can see the closest of correlations between Parrhasios' veil and reality TV. Like *tromp-l'oeil*, reality TV's goal is not to construct imagery that provokes its viewers to confuse it with reality. Instead, reality TV's use of participants relegates it to giving the appearance that it is staging reality when it is not. In the case of Susie Meister and Tim Beggy, whom I discussed in detail in the previous two chapters, the actuality of their identities as private individuals acts as the foundation for their performances.

Lacan observes the same representational dynamic in the subject's fascination with *trompe-l'oeil*: "[t]he point is not that painting gives us an illusory equivalence to the object...[t]he point is that the *trompe-l'oeil* of painting pretends to be something other than what it is" (1998: 112). Consequently, the reality-participant's image promises the viewer that there is, in fact, the thing-in-itself somewhere outside the purview of the camera in the same way that its presence onscreen sutures reality TV's system of signification. This means (from the standpoint of the scopic drive) that the participant's status within the *mise-en-scène* adds another aesthetic dimension to reality TV's *tromp-l'oeil* effect. The participant has the dual function of filling in reality TV's narratives with its excessive realness and, at the same time (and for exactly the same reason),

signaling that it is too real to be reduced to a televisual signifier and subsequently does not quite belong in the frame.

Lacan's description of Hans Holbein's 1533 painting, *The Ambassadors*, can help clarify how reality TV's practice of suture (*vis-à-vis* the participant's image) works in conjunction with this *trompe-l'oeil* effect. Holbein sutures *The Ambassadors*' by including within the painting's façade a foreign signifier that unites the text around the ideological outlook of the enlightenment. What makes *The Ambassadors* such a compelling painting is its inclusion of this extra signifier, a signifier that distorts the spectator's field of vision. For Lacan, this element of distortion, which takes the form of an anamorphically projected skull, functions as a type of pseudo-object drawing attention to the painting's effects and, as a consequence, to that which beyond there is the gaze. Just as significant within *The Ambassadors*' façade is the way in which the picture depicts two French aristocrats in an aesthetic of 'realism' that 'verges upon the excessive' (Krips 1999: 108). Lacan explains this excess as the 'secret' of Holbein's painting: the portrayal of "...two splendidly dressed and immobile figures" in which "...the perspective of the period, the vanity of the arts and sciences" is juxtaposed, at "...the moment when, moving slightly away, little by little...the magical floating object signifies...our own nothingness in the figure of the death's head" (1998: 92). The function of *The Ambassadors* is, thus, double: the verisimilitude with which the vanity of the time is depicted speaks to the ideological situation of the viewer; and as it does this, it offers excessive realism and the illusory death's head as conflicting elements from which the viewer may misconstrue their own complicity with the objective-reality of the period.

This is how, in the illusory figure of the death's head, *The Ambassadors* incorporates the practice of suture. The skull's anamorphic structure serves to occupy the eye so that the spectator, the subject of the enlightenment, can imagine itself safely outside of the picture's narrative – even though it is very much a part of it. In the case of the reality-participant, however, its image is not presented to the television viewer as a structural distortion in the same way that the floating skull shows itself to the sixteenth-century spectator. It does not function as an optical illusion. But it does exist within the text as a point of nonconformity. The participant's excessive realness, like the floating skull, stands in stark contrast to the background in which it is placed. From a Lacanian perspective, then, reality TV's contrived storylines and exaggerated sets are made palatable only when the participant's image is subsumed within them and we are subsequently left wondering, what has been sacrificed in the reality program's process of manufacture? What about the thing-in-itself has been left out? This is how reality TV's *trompe-l'oeil* effect – its staging of its own fraudulent depiction of the real – is ultimately enabled by the realness of the participant. And it is also how reality TV can be seen to serve the visual appetites of Lury's ambivalent television viewers (1994). If we are to characterize these viewers as people who derive pleasure from the practice of uncovering artifice in the media, reality TV succeeds most when its halfhearted attempt to capture the realities of its participants fails. The aesthetic function of the participant, as it exists in an ambiguously real spot in the frame, thus, speaks to the contemporary viewer's own ideological viewpoint in the same way that *The Ambassadors* spoke to the sixteenth-century spectator.

6.4 BRITNEY SPEARS: A LIVING DEATH'S HEAD

The key question to be asked, then, is how does one perform their reality when they are so invested in their own ability to dismantle reality TV's artificiality? The answer to this question may be more obvious than it first appears. At its most basic, reality TV is television that asks people to *play* themselves on-camera. And it is exactly because we understand this – understand that being on reality TV is at some level always a performance – that we are ultimately able to 'be real' for the camera. That is, in order for the participant to perform its textual function, to attract the eye of the skeptical viewer eye via something like suture, it too must believe that the media is unable to properly depict its reality. Thus, reality TV, when considered in terms of its employment of suture, expects the participant, like the viewer, to know that it is staged.

The participant's complicity with this actuality is a crucial part of reality TV's system of representation. More so than any aspect of production, the belief that reality TV is never really real is responsible for blurring the line that separates viewer and participant. It is this belief that ultimately allows the viewer to become the performer. Consequently, a general distrust of reality TV's depictions is also what unites different kinds of reality-participants under a common performative logic. Whether the participant is a professional reality-actor, like Meister and Beggy, or a police officer on *Cops*, it is safe to assume that the participant is less concerned with the prospect of their objective-reality being faithfully represented and more worried that their words and actions will inevitably be mischaracterized.

If the scope that I am crediting to this performative disposition seems too broad, consider Britney Spears's much criticized reality program, *Britney and Kevin: Chaotic*. Aired in the spring of 2005, *Chaotic* chronicled the meeting, courtship and wedding of Spears' and her husband, Kevin Federline. To do this, Kevin Federline (who also served with Spears as one of *Chaotic's* executive producers) spliced together home videos with to-camera interviews of Spears and himself. The audio from these post-production videos was then used for voice-over narration. *Chaotic* was originally produced for first-run syndication on MTV. And although the program was nominated for two Teen Choice Awards (Best Reality Show and Best Male Reality/Variety Star), it received poor reviews and garnered mediocre ratings.⁶⁸ As a consequence, the series was quickly repurposed by MTV and licensed to UPN halfway through its five-episode run. But *Chaotic's* failure to be a successful reality program does not detract from the groundbreaking manner in which it presented Spears (arguably one of the most recognized pop-stars at the time) in a first-person dialogue with the media events surrounding her private life.

For example, on the season premier of *Chaotic*, Spears is seen in the suite of a hotel being photographed by the paparazzi stationed on the street outside her window. By shooting her reflection in a mirror, Spears turns the camera on herself and responds to this purportedly unwanted attention: "people can take everything away from you, but they can never take away your truth." This footage became the tagline for the series and was included in the promotional spots run before *Chaotic's* airing. Because

⁶⁸ A review in *Variety* called *Chaotic* "[a] self-indulgent, mindless piece of drivel, [that] is a visual assault of nauseating camera angles, likely to upset even the most desensitized TV viewer (Fries 2005).

Spears inhabits a very different mode of stardom than the typical reality-participant,⁶⁹ her reference to the illusive nature of her ‘truth’ exemplifies the way all reality TV depends on the participant’s belief that their objective-reality defies representation. Thus Spears’s assurance to herself and her viewers that the media is unable portray who she really is – even when the paparazzi captures her in the most candid of moments – affords her a position from which to show us something that for all intensive purposes is no more or less authentic than how she is already depicted in the tabloids. As the title suggests, *Chaotic* promises to give its viewers a look into the day-to-day chaos that surrounds a twenty-three-year-old pop icon as she promotes her new album, tours with her band and gets married. Consequently, *Chaotic* emphasizes the way in which *all* participants (‘legitimate’ stars like Spears included), when framed by reality TV, depend on some conception of their ‘truth.’

Thus Spears’s insistence that her truth cannot be taken away by the paparazzi’s continued pursuit, can be seen as the impetus for her wanting to produce a first-person account of what the real ‘Brittany’ is really like. That is to say, her declaration that no matter how much the media attempts to spotlight the goings on of her offstage life, it always falls short of its goal, was both the rationale Spears used to stage her own uncovering and the means by which she and Federline promoted the show. Ironically, *Chaotic* accomplished exactly the opposite of what it set out to do. Spears’s pursuit of her

⁶⁹ It is, however, becoming much more common to see a variety of celebrities participate on their own reality TV shows. The most notable these programs include: *The Anna Nicole Show* (2002-2004), *Being Bobby Brown* (2005), *Breaking Bonaduce* (2005-), *Kathy Griffin: My Life on the D-List* (2005-) and *Tommy Lee Goes to College* (2005). Similar shows that are in post-production include: *Hey, Paula* starring Paula Abdul, *The Carters* starring pop singers Aaron and Nick Carter and *The Big Give Away* starring daytime television’s reigning talk show host, Oprah Winfrey.

‘truth’ in *Chaotic* served to exploit and perpetuate her already established identity as a misunderstood pop idol. *Chaotic*’s backstage access was as much about giving viewers a taste of the Spears that smokes and talks candidly about her favorite sexual positions as it was a means to capitalize off of her much publicized union with then tour-dancer Federline. Consequently, *Chaotic* functioned to substantiate the truthfulness of the media’s already unflattering portrayal of Spears, not dismantle it. But it is also, here, too easy to argue that Spears and Federline did this on purpose. After all, it does appear that they consciously chose what to show their public in order to profit from the same sorts of stories and images that the tabloid media had been after for years. But even if this is true, does *Chaotic*, then, not provide further evidence of how reality TV provokes its viewers to speculate about what is and what is not manufactured?

This is precisely Andrejevic’s point when he observes, “[in] this respect reality TV echoes the logic of deception traced by Lacan in his seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’ a logic that Žižek describes as deception by means of truth” (2004: 16). From this perspective, then, the important thing to take away from Spears’ foray into reality TV is not that she and Federline manipulated their home videos to show all the ways in which the media had unfairly depicted them but, instead, to expose more fully all the ways the media’s portrayal of Spears was in many respects quite accurate. Therefore, Spears’ assertion about the media’s ineffectiveness was necessary in order to accomplish *Chaotic*’s actual deception – convincing herself and the viewer that the show’s candid first-person account also falls short of providing a faithful account of her reality. Consequently, *Chaotic*’s deception is not that it depicts Spears in an unrealistic light but just the opposite: its presentation of her self-authored offstage persona appears so realistic that

both the participant and viewer are compelled to believe that what they are seeing has to be staged.

6.5 BUSTING CHOPS AND CRYING ON CUE: PICKING PEOPLE WHO ACT LIKE THEMSELVES

The ambivalent viewing perspective outlined by Lury (2001) and Andrejevic (2004), when looked at from the standpoint of the participant's performance, then, translates into something more than a behind-the-scenes appreciation of how reality TV manufactures its depictions of reality. It requires that the participant have some understanding of the way their individuality will be misconstrued in order to facilitate the production of a television show. This is especially the case with MTV's *Real World* franchise. As noted in chapter two, the participants who work as recurring participants in MTV's system of reality-talent are always cognizant of the manner in which they must play themselves for MTV's cameras. And like Spears, these participants rely on their off-camera selves so that they may to conceive of themselves in character. Beggy's description of his fellow *Real World/Road Rules* tendency to perform for the cameras nicely illustrates this dynamic:

Beggy: So [the producers] are definitely choosing these people who will have the mindset of, 'get me famous and I want to cause a lot of drama no matter what.'

HC: So you think they go on sort of having an understanding that if they act a certain way, they might be more famous?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Or be more successful?

Beggy: Yeah, definitely. It's, you know, to the point where it's all about face-time, camera-time. And I, you know, have first-hand experience, will watch girls cry on cue when the camera walks in the room.

HC: Really?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: And so they are conscious of this and everyone else knows it is going on too? You can be sitting there with somebody and you're like, 'that person is going to cry now because the camera just walked in?'

Beggy: Oh, yeah. Yeah, it's crazy.

HC: Do the people that film it, the interviewers, the producers, the directors do they...

Beggy: No, they know it's coming.

HC: They do?

Tim: Yeah, they pick these people on purpose. They certainly do.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: I, on the other hand, will do the same thing for humor purposes. I will wait to bust someone's chops until a camera comes around so I can bust someone's chops on-camera.

Can we not see in Beggy's account a homology between the way reality TV is received by its viewers and how its participants go about performing themselves on-camera?

According to Beggy, MTV's *Real World* participants are keenly aware of how they must

act in front of the camera. They know that the adeptness with which they enact their personas is the deciding factor in whether or not they will be cast for another season. Thus to varying degrees, their objective while on-camera is to play themselves in such a way as to develop narratives and storylines associated with their reality-personas. The crucial point to take away from Beggy's description, then, is not the revelation that his fellow participants know when to cry for the cameras, it is that the 'producers pick these people on purpose.' They cast Beggy, for example, because they know he will wait until he is on-camera to 'bust someone's chops.'

Meister made a similar observation about being cast to go on *Road Rules*:

HC: Knowing what you know now, what do you think is, like, why they picked you? I mean, you sort of put yourself into a charactertype but was there anything else, you think?

Miester: Well...not only do you have to be a type, which I clearly was, but you have to willing to admit that you are a type, in a sense because some people that you know are not comfortable discussing their sex life, or the lack thereof, or their family. A lot of people have private parts about themselves that they don't want to share. Which I am now like that, but at the time I thought, "I didn't have anything to hide." And I wasn't ashamed about anything and so I was willing to share everything. And I think that's crucial.

In other words, Bunim-Murray casts individuals like Meister and Beggy because they want them to *act* like themselves. Thus, they select participants who are savvy enough to understand the process by which they are being typecast so that they may use their

realities as private individuals to code their performances with factual material. This is why a general willingness to ‘share everything’ about one’s private life is identified by Meister as being such an important attribute when playing oneself on television. And it is also why casting a reality show is arguably the most critical phase of production. Producers must ‘pick people on purpose’ so that participants will be able to perform themselves in a manner that best serves the show. This further highlights the fact that participants need to not only be aware of how they fit into a preexisting storyline or character-template but they must also have some sense of how their performances are based on something realer than the ‘unscripted’ roles they are playing. Consequently, the viewing experience that this chapter has worked to outline *vis-à-vis* a theoretical framework like suture, can be seen as a kind of performative condition of possibility for the reality-participant. With this in mind, I want to turn to a brief discussion of how this relationship between viewer and participant has manifest itself in MTV’s creation and maintenance of reality-talent.

6.6 THE REVENGE OF THE VIEWER: SITUATING THE REALITY-CELEBRITY’S LABOR IN PERFORMANCE

The characteristic that most unites Meister (a second-generation participant) and Beggy (a first-generation participant) is the way they each depend on their ‘off-camera’ identities for their continued participation in MTV’s *Real World* programming. In Meister’s case, her early participation on *Road Rules* was rooted in her background as a

sheltered working class evangelical Christian from Western Pennsylvania. Today, on shows like *Road Rules: Viewers Revenge* (2007) and *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno III* (2007), Meister's performances reflect her status as one of the few participants who is married and a mother. Meister is still cast in accordance with her persona from *Road Rules Australia* but she is, today, often depicted in a much stronger light. Aside from being a more formidable competitor on *The Challenges* and *Road Rules: Viewer's Revenge*, she is regularly seen nurturing and protecting the younger female participants. In a similar fashion, Beggy continues to incorporate into his performance the persona he cultivated when first cast to participate on the second season of *Road Rules*. Beggy's self-described love for adventure and new experiences, for example, accurately reflects his identity as a first-generation participant. Consequently, Beggy is often portrayed as a competitor, but rarely one that partakes in the same sorts of emotional outbursts and on-camera vitriol that comprises the majority of *The Challenge's* subject matter.

Consequently, we can see in both Meister's and Beggy's continued engagement with reality TV a correlation between their realities as private individuals and the roles they play for MTV. That is to say, they each attend to their reality-personas through an incorporation of who they recognize themselves to be off-camera. Beggy demonstrates this when he points out that he often functions as the comedic relief by 'busting someone's chops.' Although Beggy is in this example performing for the camera, he is at the same time acting in a way that is compatible with his own appraisal of himself when not on-camera. Beggy's reality-persona, as we see it here, corresponds with the way he approaches *The Challenges* as a kind of 'summer camp for adults.' Meister does

something similar when she observes that participants need to be able to talk about their private lives even when they are not used to it. Because Meister identifies herself as a private person, her admonition to be open with the cameras simultaneously reflects her early discomfort as a participant on *Road Rules* and the reality-persona she was originally cast to fulfill. In these two instances, then, both Meister's and Beggy's reality-personas do enact the actuality of their off-camera identities.

With regard to the way MTV's reality-celebrities construct their critiques of reality TV, however, this dynamic is reversed. For example, Meister and Beggy each criticized reality TV's production, and the fame it generates, in order to distinguish their continued participation on *Real World* programming from the rest of MTV's reality-celebrities. Here, both of their critiques reproduce the perspective of the personas they enact on-camera. Meister's description of her background, because it codes her as an individual that values family and hard work, reflects a belief that reality TV exploits its participants after it seduces them with the promise of fame and effortless labor. In Beggy's case, his self-proclaimed status as a reality-pioneer informs his highly critical assessment of MTV's production of celebrity and reality TV's long-term effect on contemporary culture. Consequently, the extent to which reality TV's participants do in fact play themselves is most apparent when they are seen mobilizing their reality-personas in order to criticize the same system of representation that is responsible for constructing their televised image. In instances like these, we not only see Meister and Beggy separating themselves from the rest of MTV's *Real World* participants, we see them fashioning a critique of their celebrity that calls into question the fidelity with which they are represented by reality TV.

In this context, MTV's reality-actors appear to work in the same capacity as other reality-based performers. They labor under the assumption that MTV cannot accurately depict their realities as individuals. But MTV's *Real World* programming, because it repurposes so many of its participants into reality-talent, reflects this in way that is unique to Bunim-Murray's practice of recycling talent. If we accept that at some level all participants must believe that they will inevitably be mischaracterized by reality TV, then the frustration that Meister and Beggy experience with regard to their celebrity can be understood as the effect of that conviction being rebutted by the singular quality of their fame. In this respect, the one-dimensionality of their celebrity serves as a constant reminder to MTV's recurring *Real World* participants that the off-camera identities on which they base their reality-personas are realer than they would like to believe. For proof of this, we need only consider the way their inability to market themselves within the broader entertainment industry has come to serve as a theme in recent *Real World* programming.

According to both Meister and Beggy, the reason that MTV's reality-celebrities find it difficult to function outside of reality TV has to do with the specificity of their performances. In this light, reality-celebrities' dissatisfaction with their fame does not stem from misrepresentation but, instead, results from the reality that they must depend on their off-camera identities for the parts they play. And because reality TV depends on these performances for its subject matter, recent *Real World* programming has made its participants' struggle with fame the primary theme of its recent iterations of *The Challenge* and *Road Rules*. In the last two years, *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: Fresh Meat* (2006) and *Road Rules: Viewers Revenge* each pitted novice participants

against the most well known of MTV's reality-celebrities. As a consequence, the storylines that ran through both programs called attention to the reality that even veterans like Meister and Beggy could be easily exchanged for first-time participants. And while this notion was more than implied in both *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge*, it was made explicit when a handful of those first-time participants were cast to participate on the current season of *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno III*.

We can, here, draw a final connection between Bunim-Murray/MTV's development of *Real World* programming and the way reality TV asks its participants to perform themselves on-camera. That is to say, reality TV's substitution of actors for participants is fully realized when Bunim-Murray/MTV makes the exchanging of veteran participants for first-time participants the premise of its programming. By publicizing that its *Real World* franchise has developed a process for manufacturing reality-talent, MTV reveals to its viewers the actuality that its participants are no longer amateur performers but are, instead, a highly advantageous form of labor. In doing so, *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge* highlight the reality that their participants' use-value is dependent on the ease with which they may be exchanged or replaced. Thus, *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge* not only offer further evidence of the extent to which these reality-participants' off-camera identities are integrated into their performances, both shows underscore how MTV's dependence on the realness of its participants places reality-celebrities in the paradoxical position of using their status as 'talentless talent' for the parts they play. In other words, MTV's *Real World* participants must now enact the unenviable reality of their position within the entertainment industry in order to properly attend the performative requirements of their craft.

If the participant's image, as I have argued, functions as a modification of the classic formula of suture, then programs like *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge* can be seen to emulate that same practice but on a much larger scale. Because Bunim-Murray/MTV's *Real World* franchise recasts the same participants in all of its programming, it can be seen as a single text that is comprised of regular installments of *The Real World*, *Road Rules*, *Real World/Road Rules Challenge* and their corresponding reunion shows. Each of these separate programs are shot and aired in concordance with one another to allow for greater continuity between seasons. This practice, for example, fosters overlapping participant-based storylines because the casts are kept in regular contact. Thus as a season of *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: Inferno* ends, a new installment of *Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Gauntlet* will begin with a mix of the same first-generation and second-generation participants that comprised the previous season. But *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge*, however much a part of this cycle of production, are exceptional in the way they situate themselves within the broader textual structure of this franchise. Similar to the participant's excessive realness in reality TV's *mise-en-scène*, both *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge* introduce an element of exteriority – the factuality of the participant's status as labor – within the interior of *The Real World* franchise's cycle of production.

By using novice participants in order to call attention to the way MTV's *Real World* celebrities now function as talent, *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge* exist as a kind of intertextual transgression. Because they divulge the reality of their casts' celebrity – in this case, the extent to which many participants have transitioned into a form of exploited talent – *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge* enable the franchise as

whole to continue presenting these reality-actors as amateur participants that just happened to be playing themselves with the hopes of winning cash prizes and being recast in future installments. But as we learned from both Meister's and Beggy's accounts of their celebrity, MTV's reality-celebrities do in fact participate to win cash prizes and, more importantly, secure spots in upcoming shows. Thus, we can see in Bunim-Murray's production of *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge* another deception by means of truth: MTV foregrounds the reality of its participants' celebrity so that viewers may (mis)recognize the rest of its fleet of *Real World* programming as being performative when it too faithfully depicts the reality of these participants' employment. In this way, MTV fulfills the logic under which reality TV ultimately functions. Because Bunim-Murray/MTV relies on the realness of the participant for the narrative content of its *Real World* programming, it has no choice but to include the actuality of their status as talent. And in so doing, Bunim-Murray's concession provides yet another textual interface through which the viewer may cleverly debunk MTV's staging of the real.

6.7 CONCLUSION

Reality TV depends on the participant to give its viewers visual evidence of real life even though everyone knows it is first and foremost produced for our amusement. From this perspective, reality TV's performances do not attract viewers because they show us the authenticity of its participants everyday lives but, instead, because they promise a reality yet to be seen. Thus as reality TV continues to progress, its growing dependence on

participants who regularly play themselves on-camera further corroborates the axiom that its depictions are performative rather than genuine. This is, of course, made possible exactly because the participant's image is realer than the textual environments in which it is filmed. Consequently, reality TV relies on the participant's status as something extra-textual in order to situate the participant's image as the central element of the text itself.

This is why I have argued that it is reality TV's inscription of the exterior within the interior *vis-à-vis* the participant pleases contemporary television viewers and enables participants to perform their realities on-camera. In so doing, I have likened reality TV's use of the participant to suture and Lacan's theorization of the gaze as it corresponds to that filmic practice. Although both of these perspectives offer a very specific conceptualization of the participant's role, they each provide a way of thinking through how reality TV asks its viewers and participants to engage the real. Because watching reality TV and performing on reality TV are reflexively constituted by a guarantee of the text's inherent artificiality, the enjoyment found in the realness of the participant's image follows the same representational logic that supplies the participant with a referent for its performance. In the case of reality programming like MTV's *Real World* franchise, we see this representational logic redoubled in its production of new shows that highlight its participants' status as talent.

On a final note, I want to return to *The Real World* casting call that was referenced at the beginning of this chapter. This advertisement specifically solicits prospective participants that have desire to work in the entertainment industry. Consequently, Bunim-Murray's attempt to cast its flagship reality show with aspiring media professionals might give us some indication as to the manner in which future *Real*

World programming will situate the participant as reality-based talent. If Bunim-Murray is making explicit what has been insinuated for many years – that it has abandoned *The Real World's* stated mission of showcasing the heterogeneous realities of seven strangers picked to live communally in an urban setting – then this recalibration of the ideal participant is a continuation of the rationale used to produce *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge*. But unlike *Fresh Meat* and *Viewer's Revenge*, such a recalibration does not accentuate the abnormality of the participant's celebrity – it presents it as the norm.

Consequently, Bunim-Murray/MTV appears to be in the process of making the quest for a career in the media the premise of their *Real World* programming exactly because it accurately reflects the actuality that its participants are, today, an identifiable form of television-based talent. Thus the issue with which this chapter began – reality TV's progression from a cultural phenomenon that spotlights ordinary people to a conventional form of television in search of talent – is ultimately realized in the figure of this new participant. That is to say, if we accept the argument that reality TV uses the realness of the participant to generate the subject matter for its programming, then the movement to cast participants that are already committed to a pursuing a career in the media, that already envision themselves as forms of talent, clearly indicates the extent to which reality TV has become an enduring part of the televisual landscape.

APPENDIX A

SUSIE MEISTER INTERVIEW PART ONE

HC: What made you want to go on a reality TV show?

Meister: how it all worked, and experience the adventure, because it always looked like they were having so much fun and even though there was a lot of fighting, especially on *Road Rules*. It just seemed like this giant adventure. It had just seemed bigger than life. I wanted to be a part of it. You know?

HC: So which *Road Rules* were you on?

Meister: I was on the *Road Rules* Australia, which was the sixth season in 1998. And I was eighteen.

HC: And had you watched all the *Road Rules* up until that point?

Meister: Oh yeah, and I still do [laugh].

HC: And you do? And did you tape them?

Meister: Um, no I didn't. I have mine but I don't have the ones from before. But I was into it, at the time.

HC: Did you have any favorite, like um, seasons?

Meister: Yeah, I liked the second one with Tim, mainly because I had met him and then the season came on and I was like, "I know him and he's from Pittsburgh." And you know, it was a big thing. And I liked, um, the fourth season when they did islands. I liked when it was more sunshine and sun. Which is what mine was like too. Rather than...anything cold and tense.

HC: Right.

Meister: And it didn't seem like work [laugh].

HC: So, more like a vacation?

Meister: Yeah yeah...

HC: Right, ok...

MEISTER: sure!

HC: Did you watch any other reality programs, um, besides *Real World* and *Road Rules*?

MEISTER: At the time that was all that was on.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And then after I got back from my trip...that was when I had heard they were casting this show that was all about going to an island and then getting voted off and that was the beginning of it – it was right after I got back.

HC: Ok. So, you were like one of the contestants on *Survivor*?

MEISTER: Yeah yeah, at the time we were the only ones out there and people didn't think you were anything when you get back. You know, people weren't impressed or anything. But now, it's like this huge huge thing – so I think it's different for the people who go on.

HC: Uh huh. Ok. So, do you think that you were at that turning point?

MEISTER: Yeah. Like right after mine, and one other season, then *Survivor* and all the other stuff came out.

HC: What about, like, did you ever watch shows like *Cops*?

MEISTER: [Giggling] I didn't...

HC: Or things like that?

HC: More documentary...

MEISTER: I think I like the younger kids...you know, that I can relate to.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: You know, I've seen *Cops* stuff, but I wasn't into it like *The Real World*...

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: Because it was like people that I...that looked like me and did things like me, so I felt like a part of it.

HC: Who did you relate to? I mean you said you like Tim a lot...

MEISTER: Yes.

HC: Was there like, ah, any other character that you related to?

MEISTER: Hmm, let me think?

HC: Or even now that you relate to? I mean...

MEISTER: Well now that I have done it I always relate to the people who have become my character. Which seem to be fewer. So, I was like the virginal, all naïve, religious person...

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: and they're not on as much anymore.

HC: Right...

MEISTER: You know? But I relate to the young people. I was 18 and the rest of my cast were 24, 23 and so I relate with when I see people that are young that are just out of high school and they are on this...and it's like a different world. You know...

HC: Ok, so you had like that character type...

MEISTER: Uh huh...

HC: Tell me more about that character type.

MEISTER: Well I didn't realize, when I was auditioning or casting for it, that I was a type.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: But it became apparent once I got there and everyone was discussing the fact that I was a virgin and I was eighteen and that I am religious and blond.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: and right out of high school. Um, during the casting process they kept focusing on specific parts of my personality.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: you know, rather than...like I always enjoyed comedy, I was really into being funny and they didn't want to explore that at all. They wanted to explore, like, naïveté and things about my youth and...

HC: Ok...

MEISTER: So, that is what they focused on.

HC: So then, with the casting process, just take me through it...

MEISTER: Ok.

HC: from the beginning to the end. Like, how did you hear about?

MEISTER: Yep...

HC: Somewhere?

MEISTER: I got it out of a book about the cast.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: so I got all these books and I studied them. And on the back it, like, if you want to apply. But you have to be 18 to 24. So, when I turned 18, two months after that, I sent in a 10-minute tape just talking about myself, where I was at in my life. Just like sitting on my bed in my room.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: You know? And within five days they called and said we're going to send you this application. It's 10 pages, and fill it out. I still have it. But it's like all the questions, they want to get into your mind, I guess. So that was the first step. Filled it out, sent it in and then it was like, "ok, now you've made the semi-finals now we're having it in D.C." And then I did an interview. And then they said we want to follow you in your real life for a few days. So, then they came to Pittsburgh with a crew and I was going to community college and working two jobs and they went with me everywhere. And I guess to see if you were willing to be yourself in front of a camera.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: And while I was being filmed at my work they called and I told me I made the finals. And then I went to finals in L.A. and then they called and said I had made the show. So it was, like, two months long process.

HC: Oh wow...

And you were interviewed by different people and there be a camera on you and they say, "look into the camera." You know, for like for the whole interview even though, like, if you're right here [making motions with her hands showing the position of the camera] and the camera is here and I have to look into the camera. And I didn't realize there was

a whole room of people watching me answer this. But there was a whole bunch of people involved in the process but I only dealt with a handful.

HC: So you just dealt with a couple of interviewers and then you found out there was a whole, like, production group...

MEISTER: Yeah!

HC: behind the scenes, watching?

MEISTER: Yeah, I formed close relationships with a few people. But there was a lot of people watching, determining the right combination of people to cast.

HC: Where did they put you up when you were in L.A.? I mean, was it something sort of nice?

MEISTER: It was Englewood, California, which I...

HC: Yeah, I know Englewood, California [chuckling]...

MEISTER: [giggling]...I soon found out that it was a less than desirable location but they had, they had...I think 35 people in the final and they had to put them in hotels all over L.A. so they don't want any possibility that you meet the other people. So [chuckle], I got Englewood.

HC: At anytime in the process, did you start to think maybe I don't want to do this?

MEISTER: Never.

HC: Never?

MEISTER: No.

HC: So everything was good?

MEISTER: Oh my gosh, I felt like...ah, it was a dream.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: And as far as looking back I can't believe that I got chosen. But at the time it was just like this was the course that I decided I wanted to go and I am just...I'm going. It was sort of like I picked them but in reality there's like 36,000 people that they get tapes from and have cattle calls, auditions, and looking back I can't believe it but at the time it seemed like the natural course of things.

HC: Knowing what you know now, what do you think is, like, why they picked you? I mean, you sort of put yourself into a character type but...

MEISTER: Yeah...

HC: was there anything else, you think? I mean just...

MEISTER: Well...not only do you have to be a type, which I clearly was, but you have to willing to admit that you are a type, in a sense because some people that you know are not comfortable discussing their sex life, or the lack thereof, or their family. A lot of people have private parts about themselves that they don't want to share. Which I am now like that, but at the time I thought, "I didn't have anything to hide." And I wasn't ashamed about anything and so I was willing to share everything. And I think that's crucial.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: Because if they think for a second that you're not going to tell everything, then you're not going to be a good cast member...for them, as far as a story. You know?

HC: Um hmm. So would they ask any sorts of questions, in the casting, that would elicit that?

MEISTER: Yeah. Hmm...

HC: Do you remember any?

MEISTER: I remember at...a few times feeling like, "I don't want to give you the answer." Because they would ask, hmm...because one time they specifically asked, like, "do you want to have a marriage like your parents' marriage?" And I didn't want that, I didn't want a marriage like my parents, but I felt like my parents could see this and I don't want to hurt them. So, it wasn't like just bring in myself, I felt uncomfortable bringing in other people. But, I answered and I was always scared that they would show it. And, um, the virginity thing for me, I didn't feel ashamed about it but I didn't feel like it was something...I didn't go screaming about it in my real life...

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: so I didn't understand why it was such a big issue in the casting, but that was all part of the character. So, it was very important to them.

HC: So, did they ask you about that a lot?

MEISTER: Um hmm. It was a big focus, yeah.

HC: Ok. Did they ask you anything else that was along the same lines? Like aside from, "are you like...

MEISTER: Yeah, they would say, that was another one, they would say, "how far have you gone?"

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And I am being interviewed. They did a phone interview too between the, huh, written application and the semi final, there was a phone interview. And my mom was in my house, she's listening through the furnace. I knew she was. And I was like...totally uncomfortable, but I knew that if I didn't answer that they, ah, a red flag

would go up and they would say, “well she’s guarded and she’s hiding something.” But that was so...I mean who wants to talk about that in front of their parents.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: I still wouldn’t [giggle].

HC: But did you answer them honestly?

MEISTER: Um hmm, no I didn’t [laughing] actually...

H Ok. Ok...so what, uh...

MEISTER: No, I didn’t because that’s because I knew my mom was listening.

HC: Do you remember exactly what you said?

MEISTER: I said, “just kissing.”

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: That’s what I said. I was 18, you know what I mean [chuckling]...

HC: Yeah, no, uh I...

MEISTER: That’s just like...I did tell somebody at the end. I mean they may have known that I was not telling the truth but probably not because they really thought I was hip to be square, you know?

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: [giggle]...

HC: So that’s what they were looking for anyway?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: So...

HC: Did you find yourself doing that at all while you were on the show?

MEISTER: No, I didn't.

HC: So you were pretty...honest?

MEISTER: Yeah. Yeah, cause that was...my mom wasn't in the room my mom wasn't in the area and you know the camera becomes such a part of your life you that you sort of feel like this isn't real, no one is really going to see it. You know?

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: So the walls would go down, you know.

HC: Did you feel different, in the interview process, once you left your house and you are in L.A...

MEISTER: Yeah...

HC: Did you feel different as far as the way you were talking with them?

MEISTER: Yeah I would say, the further away from my real life that I got, the more open I thought I could be and I am really glad that I was open, and everything, because there are a lot of people that watch and I felt like I was a good role model. So, I am glad that I could share because I think it's nice when people in the public find a person on TV that they can relate to. So, I am glad that I was able to sort of let off some of that. But it is weird when you are around people that know you in real life...

HC: No, totally – totally...

MEISTER: Yeah [giggle].

HC: Have you ever been outside of Pittsburgh, really?

MEISTER: Not really.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And that was apparent in the, um, they taped...they made a show before they aired our season and it was about the casting process...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: And they showed me in L.A., um, and I was like, look at all the beautiful people everywhere and it's sunny and it was apparent that I was hadn't been out very much. But that was real, my whole life I've pretty much been a Pittsburgher forever and haven't been around.

HC: Do you still feel like a Pittsburgher?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: I mean, unfortunately but I would prefer to be a little more metropolitan but...

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: but you know since I have been married and I, like, established homestead...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: I am sort of back in the "Burgh."

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: I enjoyed the time away, and experiencing everything.

HC: Did you live anywhere else after this or did you just come back to Pittsburgh?

MEISTER: Yeah I did, back to the "Burgh."

HC: Did it feel really metropolitan to see...

MEISTER: [giggle]

HC: Yeah, because I mean...

MEISTER: Yeah, because I also did a challenge. It was called the *Extreme Challenge*, and it is *Real World* and *Road Rules*. And that was in the United States, England, Germany, Czech Republic and that was, you know, great too – different experience altogether but still great...to experience other cultures like that for free.

HC: Ok, so um lets see, so tell me about a typical day on *Road Rules*?

MEISTER: Ok. Like ah...

HC: Ok, like you wake up, what goes on?

MEISTER: [giggling]

HC: I mean is there a line for something?

MEISTER: This is my favorite part of the topic because whenever people see you on the street and they're like, "are you Karen," or whatever, and you want to talk about it, no one ever really wants to hear about the truth. They're like, was it fun?

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: They just want you to be like, "yeah!" And I love talking about what goes on behind the scenes because it's just a different show. And the people that talk about the lying between the cast and the crew, are just fooling the world [chuckle]. Because there is, on some level, it's restricted but it's very loose. Or, it was for my season, at least. A typical day would be: to wake up and be strapped with a microphone right around here [gesturing toward stomach and back], and have it pinned on your shirt, and at that moment on, um, you are being taped and there is a crew in the room. And depending on the day, if it is a mission day – *Road Rules* has missions, *Real World* doesn't – then that is for me where the documentary part ends because you have to go to a specific place at a specific time and you're going to do a specific job that they assigned and your money,

and *Road Rules*, is depending on whether or not you complete these missions. So, it is contrived [giggle]. But, um, you would just have to go wherever they said, and do whatever they said. And then, just focus upon the interaction of the cast. And if there's a fight, there's more cameras and there's more people. And if they are in fight mode, there's more cameras and more people. And if you're boring, which they're very against, and will tell you when you're being boring and not to be boring then they will leave you alone and they...it's sort of an insult because all day long you are told that when you tie your shoes it's important and they are taping you and when the cameras leave, you almost feel insulted [chuckle]...because you wonder who's being more interesting and why aren't you. It's very competitive, actually, really, between the cast members. And, um, I think our cast was the least like that out of all of them from what I understand but we're still there you know. And they would have a meeting with you every so often and would be like, "you guys, you need to have more fun." And sometimes they would give you money to go out and pay for cabs and pay for your alcohol. And I think it is even more like that now. From what I understand, the challenges they have now are just stocked with alcohol...

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: It is their show, you know. And, uh, actually our show is the highest rated to date. But nobody hooked up...we didn't party, we just had fun. And I think that...I don't know why they aren't focusing on that anymore, but they are not.

HC: Did you, but did they try and get you to uh...because it sounds like they...

MEISTER: Yeah. Oh yeah, absolutely.

HC: Did they want people to hook up?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: I guess they try to get people to...

MEISTER: I remember when I, we, started in Hawaii. Our first mission was in Hawaii and then we went to Australia. And I remember a couple of producers came to my hotel room and I hadn't met any of the cast members and, um, they said you're going to have to take that necklace off because the camera it, it um, it could create a glare. And I am like, "oh bummer, you know, my boyfriend gave it to me." They were like, "well he'll be gone in no time." And I am like, "why?" And they're like, "no relationship can survive, ah, a reality television show." And there were a lot of good-looking guys on the cast, and it was extremely encouraged. And whenever you go into interviews and you're looking into the camera, you know?

HC: Um hmm.

MEISTER: It was just always sort of like, "oh, Shane thinks you are cute, do you think Shane is cute?" You know? They would really try to foster these...

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: relationships and I understand. Supposed to be entertaining but it's contrived.

HC: Did Shane think you were cute?

MEISTER: [laughing] Do you know Shane?

HC: No, but I just mean, um, you know, was it true?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Or, was it made up?

MEISTER: I don't know I think if they could see any sort of, um, an interest.

HC: Uh huh.

MEISTER: If they could see that you guys were flirting, or if you guys spent a lot of time together, they zoom in on it. Do you know what I mean?

HC: Uh huh.

MEISTER: I don't think they would just make it up about people who hate each other.

HC: Uh huh.

MEISTER: But they wanted you to feel like he [Shane] had been talking about you. You know?

HC: Yeah. Ok, so was there any part of the day when they would leave you alone?

MEISTER: [sigh] Well...yeah. There were sometimes. It would be like if there were a change in the crew. Like three different crews, they would change – there might be a few hours when you were free but they could still hear you. So, if there was something big, then they would dive in and catch it. Um, and, um, the challenge that I went on, which is far less about the relationships, and far more about the competition, there would be days when they wouldn't do that and you could go off and do whatever.

HC: Ok. And you lived in a Winnebago right?

MEISTER: [giggling] Yeah we did. Sense we went to Australia, for some reason we spent a lot of time in hostels too. But that wasn't our home and we know our clothes and stuff were in the Winnebago.

HC: In the Winnebago? So how did that effect you?

MEISTER: Well, you know, it's just, um, sort of more intense in everyway. You grow closer. I think there were stronger bonds when you're trapped in this little thing. But you fight more. And, um, you're in such a weird bubble that...there would be interviews days over, like, a weekend when a few of the cast members would be gone – like one or two –

for the interview and the rest of you are there and so when that person would come back, from the interview, everyone would be like, “oh, you’re back!” Because you’d missed their presence, so, cause you’re around each other constantly that during those interview days the person that was gone, it would be so excited for them to come back. So, I guess the bond would be closer because of the Winnie.

HC: Um hmm.

MEISTER: Um, but it was gross.

HC: It was gross? Like, what was gross about it?

MEISTER: What? There’s too many people in it! I mean there’s too many people if it was just the six of us but there’s a crew and it’s hot.

HC: So they live with you in the Winnebago?

MEISTER: Well no, but they are there all the time. So, you know, they would have chairs rigged up just for them. Like that would be their chair where they could film properly. And so there would be more bodies in this small space than there really should be.

HC: What, so, where you were living before you went on the show, what was your living situation setup like?

MEISTER: Um, I was living at home. I am the youngest of five and I think I was the only one left in the house. But, I mean, we were poor so there was seven people living in my house at one time, together, so I didn’t mind living in such a small space. I think that was another thing about them casting me, they were sort of obsessed that I came from a poor family for some reason. And, and, worked all the time. Ah, but yeah, I didn’t mind the living space at all, it was just sort of hot in there and sweaty. And that pack, I can’t express enough how...

HC: [cough]

MEISTER: uncomfortable it was!

HC: It was bad and you had to where it all the time?

MEISTER: Yeah. And it's just gross and it stinks.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: It's like wearing a cast.

HC: Yeah...

MEISTER: And it's gross. I can't tell you that enough [giggle].

HC: Ok, so we know that's gross.

MEISTER: Yeah, make a note of that. It's disgusting.

HC: Ok. I'll make a note of that right now [chuckling].

MEISTER: [laughing] Thanks, Hugh, I appreciate that.

HC: Ok, so then if you had to juxtapose yourself with the other people on the show...

MEISTER: Yeah...

HC: You already said you were the younger one who's religious. So, maybe more conservative...

MEISTER: I was at the time.

HC: You were at the time?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Um, what else, and also like the virgin? So did you, so what about the other people on the show? Were other identities created around other people that you thought were unfair?

MEISTER: Yeah. Uh, unfair? Um...no. They were all fair. And I think it was fair for them to put me in that category too. It's just one-dimensional. That's the only thing I don't like. That's what strikes me as how, when people talk to me, they say things that are offensive and they don't realize they are being offensive now. Like, since the show they're like, "wow you're not fat or you're not stupid or you're not dull." You know, they...they get an idea even if it is inaccurate of who you are and it's based on just this characterization. So, I mean all the things we say are real, I mean, we really do say them and we really do feel that way, it's just not always in the right context and it just not always the only sentiment.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: You know?

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: People are more three-dimensional.

HC: So, what was it like, then, when, you know, you're just being yourself and you got all these cameras watching you?

MEISTER: Great!

HC: Did you like that?

MEISTER: Yeah, I mean it made you feel important. And I don't like admitting it because it's such a gross part of human ego and not attractive. But it's true. And you feel really important. And that's why 90 percent of people who do these shows live in L.A. and have, ah, a headshot and they enjoyed it. It makes you feel like you're really special and that you're really interesting and it's hard not to like that a little bit. You know?

HC: Right.

MEISTER: But it is gross to admit it.

HC: Well, I don't know...

MEISTER: But I am using a pseudonym...so who cares [giggling].

HC: Yeah, be as honest as you want.

HC: So, then tell me about the interviews. You said they take you away for a day.

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: So, what's...how do they do that?

MEISTER: They schedule you and they post it up and they say, "Karen you interview at noon on Saturday." And you'll be gone literally the entire day. And you go and you go far away to these weird locations. They scout locations for the way they look. So, um, you might go to a mansion, an empty barn, if there is a scenic outlook on the ocean – it's different every time. And sometimes more than one of you will go to the same location but usually you're just completely isolated and there's no cast members around and they just ask you questions and you have to speak in the present tense, you can say, "when we were doing this" you have to say, "and we're doing this and I am feeling upset or whatever." And it, it, actually doesn't sound like hard work but it's draining! It's draining to be that analytical about something, some stupid thin you said about something that you don't even remember saying. You know?

HC: Um hmm.

MEISTER: And it's...they'll say, "you said..." I remember one time specifically they said they got out like a transcript and they're like, "you said, 'oh my lord I am saying bad words something something something.' Why did you say that?" And I was like, "I don't even remember saying that at all." And they would be frustrated because they wanted you

to comment on it but you didn't even remember. And they would bring up stupid things that you wouldn't even think about, and critique them for hours. It's weird.

HC: So would they make you shoot it over again like if you didn't use the past tense or something?

MEISTER: Yeah, yeah yeah yeah, they would say, "you have to say..." And they would be so mad because it's grueling for them too. And there was a few times when they would have to ask things a few times. Like there was this time when we were all getting tattoos...and I...and there's only a few places on a female body that you can get tattoos. Like generally women don't get tattoos on their arms...

HC: Sure.

MEISTER: It's different. So I was debating between getting one here [gesturing toward lower stomach] and getting one here. And they were like, "why do you want one on your lower stomach? That is sexual, tell us about that." And I was like, um, you know there really wasn't as much of, ah, there wasn't as much of, ah, it wasn't what they were thinking it was. I was just trying to think of my options.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: They asked me it five times because they wanted me to say, "well I am just a sexual person now, I've changed." That was frustrating.

HC: So this was toward the end of the...

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: I think I remember this.

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: I am not positive. I did watch. I didn't watch a lot of *Road Rules*, I was more *Real World*, but I do remember one where people get a lot of tattoos.

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: So, tell me about getting a tattoo. What did...you got one?

MEISTER: Yeah, yeah I did. And before I left I was thinking about getting one. I like them and but it was this whole episode about my metamorphosis and...

HC: Uh hmm...

MEISTER: it was a butterfly that I got. So then it was symbolic for them [giggle]. Um, but I am glad I did and it was to get it on TV. It's a fun part of your life that's interesting to document.

HC: Um hmm.

MEISTER: But it was this huge deal and I didn't mean for it to be. You know?

HC: Yeah. What, so they had an influence on what tattoo you chose?

MEISTER: [giggling] They didn't.

HC: They didn't? So you just did it...

MEISTER: Yeah, I just wanted that. I mean, lots of girls get butterflies done. It's a thing. So, I just like it and it became this, "why do you think you're getting butterflies?" I like them.

HC: Do you think you did change?

MEISTER: I probably did. And I've said it before, it's probably just an accelerated growth period that everybody that is eighteen and just out of high school and experiencing college and meeting new people is going to change. But, I think I would have to some degree anyway.

HC: Uh hmm.

MEISTER: But it was probably just intensified.

HC: What do you think...how do you think it was different than college is now? I mean obviously there are cameras...

MEISTER: I think just because your every move is scrutinized. So you have to become aware of why you did something and you start to really become introspective and think about everything you say.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: Maybe that's how it's different.

HC: Did you start to think when you were doing things, "how am I going to explain this in the interview?"

MEISTER: Yeah, yeah. And you couldn't do that too much because you would literally drive yourself crazy. Especially when they would just talk about little things that you did. So, if you were going to do some big, giant thing, you just knew you were going to have to deal with it and so you just did it anyway.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: You know?

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: Because if you were going to change your reactions for them, it would be endless. And I think people do sometimes. I watch it now with a critical eye. And I think people are more aware of what the show wants – if you want airtime. You know?

HC: Were you aware what the show wanted? Because you had watched six seasons, right?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: So, were you sort of aware?

MEISTER: I was aware that they would like it if we fought and they would find it fun and juicy. But I had made a vow that I was not going to fight because I was trying to be, like, a role model.

HC: So, what were some of the vows you made?

MEISTER: That was a big one.

HC: So no fighting...

MEISTER: Yeah, I didn't want, because I felt, I knew I was going to be a type. I knew I was going to be portrayed as the religious person and I felt I had to live up to that because that was part of the belief system I had at the time.

HC: Ok, so tell me about the belief system.

MEISTER: I went to an evangelical church.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: And...it was that whole thing that you, I'm sure you know people or have heard of people that, it's very no drinking, no drugs, no swearing, no...sex, anything carnal.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: It was just even little things, um...I even went to my pastor before I went. I was like, "can you give me advice on how to, like, live up to this?" And he was even saying, "be careful what you nod your head to even." Or if somebody walks away and says, "can you hold my beer?" Stuff like that no one would even care about I was aware

of because I didn't want there to be any, um, anybody doubting in whether I was insincere in the my beliefs because I really was.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: I mean I didn't always live up to it but...I tried.

HC: So, no, um, no fighting, no instances of drinking?

MEISTER: Right [giggle].

HC: Ah, what else?

MEISTER: Just the basics, other than that. But fighting was one because I knew I would be tempted. I am not a peacemaker by nature. And there was one specific episode, actually, where there was a girl on our show named Piggy, and she was a fighter.

HC: Ok, I remember that...

MEISTER: Yeah, she's very distinct. Everybody remembers this girl. And she's a fighter. And she was trying to pick a fight and I would not let it happen. And looking back, I wish that I had...because she needed to be put in her place and it's ok to standup for yourself.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: But, it was like, "I am not doing going to do this. I am not going to give into her." You know?

HC: Did you fight with Piggy specifically? Or was it, um, just in general? Did people find people were sort of their advisories?

MEISTER: Um hmm.

HC: And then that was the one they would always go to?

MEISTER: There was two in particular: it was Piggy and Chadwick. And was, uh, a storyline throughout the season of their drama, of them, from the very episode. They both loved it, and they still do.

HC: Didn't Piggy smoke? Wasn't that part of one of the problems he had [Chadwick]?

MEISTER: Yeah, it is [laugh], because he hated it. And, um, he would make fun of her for it. Then, he did a back-flip and, um, he was very into showboating. A lot of fights were out of context. Like, I would have had to be, been, there to but they would show them anyway and I would think, "I bet the viewers are confused." Because if you show the whole thing it would go on forever but you have to cut it and paste it.

HC: So, were the fights like, uh, [mumbling]...edited in the sense that when you saw them you were like, "that's not how it was done?"

MEISTER: Yes, because the back-flip thing was a big big deal. Like, people remember it. And she had said [Piggy], because they were fighting, "why don't you do an f---ing back flip." Because, a few days before I was doing handstands and he [Chadwick] goes, "I can do a back-flip." And everybody was like, "oh, ok." But they didn't show that pretext of it. And so, I wonder what people think when she said, "why don't you do a back-flip." Like...I wonder why they thought she said that? And then he did do a back flip, in this hostile way. So...stuff like that, where I would think you'd have to be there to get it...you know?

HC: Yeah. Ok, so no fighting. And, then, did you drink at all?

MEISTER: No.

HC: So you were good about that?

MEISTER: Yeah, I had never drank before ever in my life. Until way after too. So...it wasn't like, I didn't make a vow because I knew it wouldn't be an issue. You know?

Um hmm. Did you break any of the vows?

MEISTER: I did, two. I did say the 'f' world – accident...

HC: [cough] On accident?

MEISTER: [laugh]

HC: Was that the beginning or the end of the show?

MEISTER: The end, in my post-metamorphosis [laugh]. And, um, I was trying to say, "I'm so 'freaking' 20" while I doing a video of myself but just said the 'f' word and it was just...the worst timing. And literally, there was a camera two inches from my face. And when you watch the video, they put it in. And it was funny because everyone was like, "that's better than any 'f' I could've ever said." You know?

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: But it was an accident, it really was. I wasn't like mad or anything.

HC: So um...

MEISTER: [Giggle]...I am being so stupid...

HC: No, no you're not...

MEISTER: I know, looking back I'm like, I cannot believe that this stuff made it because who cares? But whatever...

HC: But, so, how long was the shooting? Six months?

MEISTER: No. Um, three.

HC: Three?

MEISTER: Yeah. *The Real World* is six.

HC: Oh, ok. And so did you ever get homesick?

MEISTER: Yeah. I hated it. About halfway through I was like, I don't want to do this anymore. It's stupid and you get sick of seeing the same people. You're literally with the same people constantly. And you know...that gets old even with people you love, let alone people you didn't even know two months ago. Right?

HC: Sure, yeah...

MEISTER: Come on Hugh [giggle]? [mumble]?

HC: Well yeah [laugh], but I am also on tape. No, I know what you mean but that's why I was asking the question. I was wondering what happens when you've been with so many people for the three months. And you never left, right?

MEISTER: No.

HC: So did it ever...so what if you wanted to leave the show? How did they handle that?

MEISTER: Well, during the challenge, which was really unpleasant, there was a point where one of the people wanted to go. She had had it, and it wasn't because she was fighting with anybody. She had just literally had it. She took one of the producers aside and said, "I want to go home. I want you to book me a flight home."

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: And they would have done it. They would do it because they can't make you stay. But they strongly encouraged her to stay. They were like, "this won't make sense story wise, you don't have to do any of the missions if you don't want to do it." They want to make sense, they have their story.

HC: Ok, so they want to have their story. Do you ever sign anything at any point that says, you know, "this is what I agree to do while I am here?"

MEISTER: There's a big contract you have to sign but it's not really about what you do there...

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: it's about money and, uh, how you're going to get nothing [laugh].

HC: Ok...

MEISTER: And, um, for many years you're going to get nothing. Like if I got a Levi's commercial afterwards, they would get the money and I would get 750 dollars.

HC: Really?

MEISTER: If I got a national \$30,000 commercial, they would just take everything and I would get to keep \$750.

HC: What, um...

MEISTER: For like five years.

HC: So then what did you get paid while you were doing this?

MEISTER: Well literally...[vacuuming starts in background]

HC: So lets go in here, this is going to screw it up [laughing]...

Tape is turned off for about five minutes

Tape is started again in adjacent room

HC: So why, ah, did you despise Julie from *The Real World*?

MEISTER: [chuckle] I despise her because she was on my challenge and she was on the opposing team obviously because she was on *Real World*. And she is...the most competitive vindictive, manipulative faker I've ever met in my entire life. And I am not a mean person. I would not say it unless it was true. And what makes me mad about her is that she telecasts her religion and yet it's, ah, opposite of what the Jesus she believes in

would do. I mean, she is obsessed with winning and obsessed with airtime and obsessed with fame – her own fame. It is disgusting. And I am telling you, a lot of the people on these shows are hateable, but she is by far the most hateable. You know?

HC: So, she was the one you hated the most?

MEISTER: I hated her. I am not kidding you. I...and I would try so hard to like her because she's had a tough life and got kicked out of B.Y.U because of *The Real World*, and everything, but I just can't stand her.

HC: So, what, um...but like ok, so when you go on these...tell me about the challenge shows.

MEISTER: Ok. Well, it's really unpleasant. Like we get paid nothing, ok? Like, literally, I could make more waitressing at T.G.I. Friday's. And, so, they offer you all these prizes and a lot of money for a person, a normal person and then say, "here's what you have to do." I had to, ah, lie in this clear coffin [laugh]. Like, a clear box...

HC: Yeah?

MEISTER: And then they dumped ells in...

HC: Uh huh?

MEISTER: and I had to put on these goblets up on a platter. And then I lost. I didn't do it fast enough because I was horrified that I was lying in a tub of ells. And, yet, the group of people in your team thinks you're such a loser because you're not good at...I think that you should lose points if you're good at that. Who has these skills? Who is good at this stuff?

HC: Right...

MEISTER: I feel like reality television, especially the game show ones...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: is the biggest example of group-think syndrome that ever happened because you really think you're really mad at yourself that you're not good at laying in a bed of
ells and butting goblets on a platter. Because everyone is telling you, you should be good
at this...

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: and, you know, you cry because you lose the money and the people that
win...because when you come back home, you have to go back to school and work
crappy jobs but, yet, everyone knows you. You have all the worse parts of fame and
none of the good parts, like money...to live. I, and, I am not even talking about richness,
I am just talking about basic necessities.

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: And, um, and so, you feel like you have to do these challenges to make
money and if you lose you did it for nothing and you're on TV, again, and they're gonna
play it a million times and it's horrible.

HC: Ok, yeah, so that is good. You go on it because...

MEISTER: The challenges?

HC: Uh huh.

MEISTER: Because you feel like you have to, because you get the chance at making a lot
of money. Otherwise, you have to work in a bar or, you know, be where people can see
you. Like I worked in a bar for three years after I got out of the show. It's like torture
everyday. And everybody knows who you are. And they would drink and they would

want to talk about it and then they'd ask for extra ketchup. You know what I mean? It is horrible.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: But then you think, "ok I'll just go on the *Challenge* I'll make a lot of money then I'll finish school then I'll be done with that."

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: And then you lose, which is what I did. And then you're stuck again and there's more footage of you being an idiot and they're going to play it forever. And they're going to sell it to UPN when they are done with it. Then it's...it's bad.

HC: So, then, how does it feel when you watch yourself on television, over and over again?

MEISTER: I don't...I like it. I like having it. I think it's fun and should be treated like that. But then when you have people on the street being like, "boy you really wussed out on that tightrope, um, tightrope walking mission." And you're like, I was a hundred feet off the ground and why are people judging me when I did all this horrible stuff and critical and mean. And it seems like the mean people are the most vocal. Like, I worked as a waitress and this one woman was like, "Oh, you're Karen from *Road Rules*, you didn't make much of yourself, huh?" You know?

HC: Really?

MEISTER: Yeah. But I just, like, paying for school. To go to Pitt, you know?

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: I mean I was just feeling like I was doing what you were supposed to do. You're supposed to work hard and go to school and...

HC: Sure.

MEISTER: I was just thinking about school when I did it. What was I supposed to do? So I said to her, ya know, “hey if you have a movie deal for me or if you know where I can capitalize on this show me the way.” What was I supposed to do, you know?

HC: Yeah. Where were you waiting tables?

MEISTER: I lived in the North Hills and I waited tables at Lone Star, at Fox and Hound, at Chili’s, wherever. You know? And I don’t mind serving. I don’t feel like I am too good to for it or something. But it was just hard to feel like you had to do that but yet people treated you like you were a celebrity. You know? It’s weird.

HC: No, yeah, that does seem strange. What year was the *Challenge*?

MEISTER: 2000.

HC: 2000...

MEISTER: And um, I took another semester off of school and I thought I am going to make a lot of money and it will be really fun and I’ll travel for free. And then, it didn’t workout. It was horrible I didn’t make any money and...and then when I got back they called me to do another one. And I said, “I can’t do it. I just can’t do it. I feel drained and I don’t think I am good at it.” And they have never called me again to do one. They were mad that I wasn’t at their beck and call. The challenge that I did, I replaced someone who got kicked off. They just called me and were like, “pack your bags if you want to go it’s in two days.” And so, I just went. And...I felt like I just dropped everything, including school, for them and then if you don’t help them out when they want you then you get written off. It’s sad.

HC: What? Ok, so...what do you do you think...I mean did they like some people better than others?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Why do they like some better than others?

MEISTER: Not personally.

HC: No, I just mean for the shows.

MEISTER: Um, I know that this one girl, Veronica, has been on the last six challenges.

HC: Ok...

MEISTER: and, um, Veronica is known to stick around and, um, it makes good TV – she's entertaining and she's beautiful. You know? She doesn't have a lot, so she's very available.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: And you know, she makes good TV: she's a fighter, she's a hook-upper. And that's what they wanted. And they admit it. It's not, like, a secret. It's not like they would deny it and be, like, "oh no we just want good people."

HC: Right.

MEISTER: They want drama.

HC: So what was the production difference between *Road Rules* in 98...

MEISTER: Um hmm.

HC: And *The Challenge* in two thousand? Like, did they have night cameras or something like that?

MEISTER: No. You know actually I felt like it was less intense because they didn't care about you evolving as a person...it was just about your interaction with other teams in a competitive way.

HC: So, um, do you still watch reality shows?

MEISTER: I love it.

HC: You still do?

MEISTER: Yeah, it's a problem. My husband hates it and doesn't understand why anyone would want to watch any of these shows. But I just separate myself and I just watch it like a regular person. Because it's fun and it's an escape, and entertaining, and I like to get to watch the people and, I don't know...I still like feel like a fan.

HC: So which, um...the same shows are still your favorites?

MEISTER: Yeah, I also enjoy *The Mole*, *Celebrity Mole*.

HC: Ok, *Celebrity Mole*...

MEISTER: And, um, what I am not [mumble] what *Survivor* does is where they always have to wear dirty clothes and I don't appreciate how *Survivor* is always on a beach. And I don't know why. It just looks the same every year.

HC: Yeah, well I don't watch it that much but...

MEISTER: I can always get into it at first, but then it just looks like the same old island.

HC: So, it doesn't seem like the same thing when you watch *Real World* or *Road Rules*?

MEISTER: [Laughing]

HC: No, it's just that...

MEISTER: Well *Real World* changes locations. Like sometimes it's just like an urban-Boston setting. Sometimes it's in San Diego or Hawaii. And the houses [laugh] are...I don't know why but I think they look different.

HC: Would you go on *The Real World*?

MEISTER: Yeah! Yeah I would.

HC: So why would you go on the *Real World*?

MEISTER: Because it's not competitive. It's just sit in a room and talk, that's easy. That's why *Real World* doesn't do as good on the challenges. They're not used to, "well you're going to have to light yourself on fire" and, ah, you know, they are not used to that. Yeah, *Real World* looks fun, you just sit there.

HC: So, um, how does cast...did you notice a difference between *The Real World* people and *The Road Rules* people?

MEISTER: Yeah. There was one specific, I wasn't on this *Challenge* but I was a viewer, there was this one episode of *The Real World Challenge* from, ah, '91, and the mission was to go in this padded room in an insane asylum and take a black ball and they had to keep the ball moving for, like, 48 hours. Somebody could sleep but it was always the ball that kept moving. And *Real World* tried to stay awake and, like, keep the ball moving around. And *Road Rules*, like, through a rope over a thing by the heater and just blew the ball. And I felt like that was symbolic.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: Like, *Road Rules* is used to having to make their money trying to beat others while *Real Worlders* are used to sitting around and, like...looking funny. That was my favorite episode ever...it was great.

HC: Did you watch the Paris season of *The Real World*?

MEISTER: Yes I did.

HC: What did you think about that?

MEISTER: I thought it was boring. I didn't appreciate it.

HC: Why did you think it was boring?

MEISTER: Um...I don't know. I just didn't relate to the personalities. I didn't like it at all. I like this new one. Did you see it? San Diego?

HC: I haven't been able to. See I am from San Diego and...

MEISTER: Yeah...

HC: and every time I start to watch it, there's something weird about it. I just can't watch it.

MEISTER: [Laughing] That's so funny. I'm into it. I didn't like Paris or Las Vegas – that was weird. Did you watch that?

HC: Yeah I did. What did you think was weird about it?

MEISTER: I didn't appreciate the fact that these people don't have parents. Like, how could they feel comfortable? I mean, I'm fine if they were comfortable in front of the camera and were willing to do whatever but...who does that?

HC: Like what, specifically?

MEISTER: Total promiscuity and, um, they just partied and slept with each other. And that's it. I just really appreciated more, like, the early seasons, like Los Angeles, when they just interacted and it wasn't, like, who's sleeping with who and who is doing drugs.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: I don't know.

HC: Sure, I know what you mean. There is a big change.

MEISTER: I just like...maybe I just liked it when it was more just, like, about people and not about, like, the soap opera. But then, you know, Mary Ann Bunnim and John Murray created it, they are the creators, and he did documentaries and she did soap operas.

HC: I didn't know that...

MEISTER: Yeah, and so, when they came together they got *The Real World*.

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: And that's pretty much what that is.

HC: So, what was it like the first time you saw yourself on *Road Rules*?

MEISTER: It wasn't as weird as it should have been.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: Maybe because I was really young. But...I just thought it was normal. Like that was my life and there it is and, what um...it became weird when I realized other people were taping this, it wasn't just my home movies. You know?

HC: Uh hmm.

MEISTER: And the weirdest was, actually, the first time I saw a commercial before the show ever aired. That was weird. Because I was the V.M.A.'s and I was just watching and there I was and that was weird. I for sure, I just thought those were my home movies and then other people knew about them and knew what I said and did and that was weird.

HC: So um [cough], what did they, how did you find out about other people? Were people following you?

MEISTER: No, but they...I mean strangers. And I hate it. I hate it to this day. And that's why I am excited to use a pseudonym because...

HC: Yeah?

MEISTER: I even make my husband and my stepdaughter call me Karen in public.

HC: Oh, really?

MEISTER: I do [laughing].

HC: Do you want to use Karen as your pseudonym?

MEISTER: Karen Furgeson.

HC: Karen Furgeson.

MEISTER: I am so excited. I do, I make them call me Karen. My stepdaughter calls me 'k.' Because...I hate that, I hate it. And everyone else loves it.

HC: So, do you consider yourself a private person?

MEISTER: I just don't appreciate it...the comments, the critique. Like, I don't want to hear your opinion about what I said. I mean if you liked it, and you just want to say hi, that's fine. But...people just disrespect you. You know, like, you'll be at the movies with your family and you'll hear your name screamed across the parking lot and it makes you feel, like, violated...

HC: Yeah...

MEISTER: I don't mind when people are polite and just say hi.

HC: Uh huh.

MEISTER: That's nice, but most people aren't like that.

HC: What is the worst experience you had? Like, where you are just, like, "I wish I would not have gone on that show."

MEISTER: Well, really everyday.

HC: Everyday?

MEISTER: Yeah. Or um...if I try, if I put a resume in...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: And I go for a job interview and they realize who I am, it's just weird. And you don't gain any skills so it's not like you're special. You're just a freak. I hate it. I hate it, Hugh.

HC: Yeah, no I...

MEISTER: I just feel...I am not private but I just, like, I don't deserve it. I'm not much, I'm just a person and it's not that fun and people are...I think what it is, Hugh, is they think that once you're on these shows, you become deaf and you don't hear people talking and whispering about you everywhere. Like at restaurants, I have this radar now that when I was dating my husband I would realize, "could you move over" so like someone couldn't see me or whatever – I'd have him block. We didn't ever see it. And now, after about a year, he started to develop the same radar. And you realize, she's looking at me, not for some other reason, not just because she likes my outfit or something. And it's just violating. It's creepy, because people know who you are. And my voice, I tried dying my hair dark...

HC: Oh really?

MEISTER: And cut everything. But this squeaky voice that you're going to experience over and over again, it's, ah, unmistakable.

HC: So, have you ever researched any websites or anything? Fan websites dedicated to you, you know?

MEISTER: Yeah. And the day I quit doing that was shortly after my show aired and there was, like, ratings of breasts, of the cast members' breasts, on some chat-room...

HC: Uh huh.

MEISTER: You know, A-, C+, whatever. But I was just like, “that is really weird and unnecessary.”

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: And that was the last day I have ever done that.

HC: So you don’t look now?

MEISTER: No.

HC: Was there anything else on any web-pages?

MEISTER: There were at the time. I think there were different ones devoted to me, or someone on my cast. Just fan pages. I don’t know if there still in existence, there are so many of us now, but I don’t know.

HC: So, if you don’t mind me asking, what was you grade?

MEISTER: My what? Oh, oh um...[laughing]...

HC: If you remember, I don’t know, I am just curious.

MEISTER: Well, there were three girls and I remember I was in the middle. But I don’t remember the actual letter grade. But, you know...

HC: Well, how did that make you feel that was what it was about?

MEISTER: I just felt shocked that anyone would care enough to waste their time doing that. Because I really do feel that we are just people that are put into this strange situation that everyone is watching. So, that was shocking...to me.

HC: Ok. Yeah, I understand.

MEISTER: [Laughing]

HC: Well, it’s five forty now...

MEISTER: Ok.

HC: And that's when you wanted to go right?

MEISTER: Well what are your thoughts?

HC: Um, maybe I'll just ask you one more question and then we could meet up another time?

MEISTER: Yeah, good, sure.

HC: Right, so how did you feel when you saw this webpage and it's about rating boob sizes?

MEISTER: I felt like people missed the point.

HC: Missed the point...how does that work into your idea of a role model?

MEISTER: I just felt like people weren't watching for the reason I did it and they missed the spirit of why I was there. And no girls that I know of appreciate that.

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: So, I didn't understand...I just, I don't know, it was just stupid. And I know it's a stupid example of why I quit looking at the web-pages, but it was too personal.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: So, if you could make a webpage that would be positive and put the spin on it that you would want, on your show, what would you want?

HC: Ok, here is what it would be: when I went back from the show, and we had our final interview, actually, in L.A. We went to Bunim Murray, the company that makes the show, and we went around the offices and there was this wall of quotes. And it was like, Karen quotes and it was, like, all the things from the transcripts, from all the tapes, that they thought were funny. And it was, like, so wonderful because they saw who I was at

the time and they recognized that I do have a sense of humor and that I am not always naïve, and an idiot and wide eyed. You know? And that would be great, if I could have a page where people could see behind the scenes. My favorite photos that I have are ones where you can see the crew and all the madness. Like you'll see a scene of people and all around you'll see all the cameras, and microphones and stuff. I find that to be the best part of it because you realize these are just people that are being followed. You know? That's what I like about it.

HC: Ok, right, I know what you mean.

MEISTER: [Giggle]

HC: Alright, so let me just ask you some really quick demographic questions and then...

MEISTER: It's ok, whatever.

HC: What is your age?

MEISTER: I am 24.

HC: What is your ethnic background?

MEISTER: You mean ethnicity, German or white?

HC: Well yeah...

MEISTER: German ancestry.

HC: And you said you were religious? What kind?

MEISTER: Currently or then?

HC: Both.

MEISTER: Then I was an evangelical Christian. I went an Assembly of God church, which was charismatic and crazy. And now I go to an American Baptist church. Which is more about giving to the poor and things like that.

HC: Is your husband also...

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Were you guys both the same sort of religious backgrounds when you met?

MEISTER: No, well I have drifted away from the Assembly of God because when I got back they were appalled that I was on MTV. And, so, I wasn't really going anywhere but I still had a relationship with God and Dylan [mumble] and that's where he went so I joined him.

HC: Ok, so what income level do would you put yourself in?

MEISTER: Like a number?

HC: Middleclass? Upper-class?

MEISTER: Upper-middle. At the time I was lower-middle.

HC: Ok. Um, we talked about where you lived, right?

MEISTER: Um...I lived in the North Hills of Pittsburgh and now I live in Wexford.

HC: Ok. Aside from that you haven't live anywhere else...

MEISTER: No.

HC: So, where are all the different places you've been on reality TV shows?

MEISTER: Uh well, I went to Hawaii. We started in Sydney, Australia. Worked up the coast to Caan, down to Melbourne and then back home. And then we were in New England and then to London and then, um, Northern England, um, Berlin, somewhere else in Germany, and then Prague and then back home.

HC: So that was *The Challenge*?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Um, how do you watch television? How do you like to watch television?

MEISTER: Well the TV stations I watch are MTV, VH1 and E! And I briefly had an obsession with the History Channel but I am sick of *Modern Marvels*. Those are three main channels for me. You know, how you can pick your favorites?

HC: Oh yeah.

MEISTER: Those are mine.

HC: I just got On Demand.

MEISTER: Isn't it great?

HC: It's great.

HC: How do you watch it? Like...I know this sounds like a weird question, but do you watch it in sweats and a T-shirt, or do you watch it when you eat...

MEISTER: It's usually in the evening, and it's usually in my jammies.

HC: And you're married?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: How long have you been married?

MEISTER: Two years.

HC: Two years?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: And you said you had how many siblings?

MEISTER: Four siblings.

HC: And your parents are divorced?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: And they're the same religious...

MEISTER: They're Assembly of God.

APPENDIX B

SUSIE MEISTER INTERVEIW PART TWO

MEISTER: I just want to say, I just want to talk about how after I left we had talked a lot about the virginity and the whole like thing like there's that character. I think what makes me different from the other of that had...

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: Was, like, when I was a senior they had those senior moments and I was, um, the most flirtatious.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And I think they would talk a lot about how I was the most flirtatious and had that side of that side of my personality. And yet it didn't mean anything. You know, not a ho? [laugh].

HC: Right.

MEISTER: So I think a lot of time when they cast people, or at least in my case,...

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: they cast you as one thing but hope that you change into something else.

Like, they hope for a metamorphosis.

HC: Ok, so...

MEISTER: I just wanted to add that.

HC: No, totally.

MEISTER: Yeah, this is good [looking over transcript memo].

HC: Yeah, I just went chronologically through the interview, pretty much...

MEISTER: Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Looks good.

HC: So most of it seems pretty accurate?

MEISTER: Yes.

HC: So, I just wanted to do a follow up interview and basically talk about celebrity a little bit.

MEISTER: Ok.

HC: So, tell me a about Jamaica, no you went to the Bahamas first, right?

MEISTER: Yeah, well I wish you had seen it because I was there with a group. I was hired by a spring break company that hires people that have been on these shows to come down and basically mingle with the people who come through their company so they can say, "they partied with *The Real Worlders*, or whatever."

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: So, we were basically paid just to be nice to people and just lay on the beach and say hello and take pictures, or whatever. So, it's a great gig and that's the reason I did it because I usually say no to all this crap. But, I mean, you get paid to lay on the beach so I did it.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: But I was one of only one of two of three people from the older era. But everyone else was from the newer, like maybe the last two or three seasons of each of the shows [*Road Rules* and *Real World*]. And it's a totally different world for these people now because it's more intense and because they live off it. Like they don't go back to school or anything when they are done.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: The show for them is like the prelude. It's not the event. But for me the show is the event and everything after was sort of incidental.

HC: That's really interesting.

MEISTER: But for them it's the beginning of...of crazyness. And, um, they couldn't believe I didn't love the aftermath. I think I am kind of an exception. So, I might ruin your whole thing because I think [giggle]...

HC: No, don't worry about it.

MEISTER: Because they love it.

HC: Yeah...

MEISTER: They love the fame, they love the perks, they love not having to go back to school. It's it is bizarre. They are into it. It is a different beast now.

HC: How did they react to the fact that you were married? And like, you know, sort of have kids now?

MEISTER: The whole fact that I am married and have a settled life and I am trying to, like, get a career and just go to the movies and see all the other stuff that everyone does, it was foreign to them and in some ways they seemed to be jealous of it. They be like, "wow that's really neat." And stuff like that. Mostly they couldn't even wrap their head around it. They're so enwrapped in this life now: of being single and globe trotting and having everyone know you and getting to be on commercials and endorse products and stuff. They all work for, um, companies where you speak at different colleges. Like they want you to speak on anti-tobacco or anti-...or for diversity. Like, companies will hire

them to speak and they get a lot of money. Like, for this recent cast member, his name is Ace, he...

HC: Ace?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Yeah, I think he's from Georgia or Alabama...

MEISTER: Yeah, he and Mallory were with me.

HC: Oh, really?

MEISTER: And he got 30 speaking engagements since January. And they get like a minimum of 2,000 dollars per speaking engagement.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: And he is like...it's incredible the life they lead.

HC: What does he speak about?

MEISTER: So he tries, he tries to go in, and he's like, "I used to have this really long speech about myself and diversity and how I lost my parents to cancer," or something like that – something important. But, you know, half way through someone would be like, "ah, is Leah really a bitch?"

HC: Um hmm.

MEISTER: And you know, they don't really want to hear about. So, you know, he really just ends up speaking about the show.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And he claims that he is going to quit, he's going to retire from it in September.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: But, I mean, he's making his living off of his character. It is bizarre, Hugh.

HC: So, he was a small businessman, right?

MEISTER: I think so.

HC: Didn't he own a couple of bars or something?

MEISTER: And I don't know if he still owns them or what but he's never at home.

HC: And then Mallory is a little bit younger right?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: And they're dating too?

MEISTER: No, they broke up.

HC: They broke up?

MEISTER: You got to keep up, Hugh [giggle].

HC: Yeah, no, um. So, what happened?

MEISTER: But, unfortunately, well...they lived in separate cities and she wanted a commitment and he couldn't give it to her. But, um, what's weird is that people think they are together so they are asked to do all these events together. And so, she has to still travel with him and be with him. And people still think they're together and treat them like they are together but they are not.

HC: They are still like sort of couple?

MEISTER: They are. It's weird.

HC: So, did she talk to you about that?

MEISTER: Well, we totally bonded because she, we were parallel lives because she went on. She was 18 when she was cast...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: She was the virgin, and young, and sweet, and all that; and now she has to deal with it. She's the only one I met that is struggling with her fame.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: You know? Most of them are really comfortable with it but she's tortured by it.

HC: Ok. So, you get hired by these companies...just in your case, when you went down to the Bahamas?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: And it's not part of MTV's spring break?

MEISTER: No.

HC: It's just a separate thing where basically, people can go and buy like a spring break package? And you are part of the package?

MEISTER: [giggling] Well, yeah.

HC: "You get to stay at this hotel...

MEISTER: Yes.

HC: you get to be on this beach and dinner is included, da, da, da and you get to hangout with *Road Rulers*: x, y and z"

MEISTER: You got it. It's true [laughing].

HC: Well, you know...I'm just, I've never heard if that before.

MEISTER: I know. It's really weird.

HC: It's, like, rent a celebrity.

MEISTER: It really is. And we are rentable, clearly.

HC: Right...

MEISTER: Because, I think it had been four year since I had done anything...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: and even I was like, "come on." A week of doing nothing, and getting more money than I would make in, like, a month.

HC: If you wouldn't mind me asking, how much did they pay you? You can give me a round figure...

MEISTER: All told, it was 2,000 but for doing nothing though...

HC: Right. And you get to be in the Bahamas.

MEISTER: And that's ridiculous.

HC: And most of the speaking engagements are one day for 2,000 dollars. But you have to, like work for that [giggle].

HC: What were the people like? Who um...

MEISTER: The spring breakers?

HC: The spring breakers.

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Who decides to take that package? Whatever that is?

MEISTER: [Laughing] what are these people...

HC: Yeah, are they, like, older people are they like younger people?

MEISTER: They're all like, 18, 19, 20. And they are all rich because most spring breakers don't have any money. They are like college age, obviously. I don't know how much they make. It has to be a lot. I don't know what type of person these people are but they are into it. So...[laughing].

HC: Do you, um, do you hangout with them the whole time?

MEISTER: I didn't. But, um, everybody else did. Like, I did my job.

HC: What is your job, specifically?

MEISTER: They'll just say, "be here at 11 and, um, you know if anybody wants anything, just take pictures." You know, "meet at three." You knew you were working when you had to be somewhere at a certain time. It could be, like, you know, "go to the beach, at this time and lay there." [Laughing] And if anyone wants to talk to you, you talk to them.

HC: How many people are there?

MEISTER: From the casts?

HC: Um, both from the casts and the people who do the package?

MEISTER: It was probably about 15 cast members but we would, like, come in and out through the months. So, all told, it was probably, like, 25 people.

HC: Uh huh.

MEISTER: And, um, there was just thousands of coeds.

HC: So, basically, it's not like groups of six or seven people?

MEISTER: That would be horrible!

HC: Right.

MEISTER: [Laughing]

HC: So, you're not hanging out with a group of six or seven people. Basically, they just guarantee that someone will be on the beach from one these shows?

MEISTER: Yeah. Or at the parties, or at the, you know, events.

HC: So when you went to the parties, what were the parties like?

MEISTER: Um, well there would be a stage. So, they were always separated from them.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And you could get down and just dance with everybody, or whatever. But you were always with security and be on stage and they could take pictures and stuff.

HC: uh huh...

MEISTER: And there were all these contests. We would judge contests and stuff. It was sort of like spring break on MTV but not.

HC: Ok, so you didn't have to party with these people in the sense of...

MEISTER: No [laughing].

HC: like, you're with them hanging out with them in restaurants and things.

MEISTER: no.

HC: But some people did?

MEISTER: Yeah. And they enjoyed it. They think it's fun.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: I think Ace bought, probably, 2,000 shots when he was there for everybody.

HC: Really?

MEISTER: Yeah, they enjoy it.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: But me.

HC: Do any of them, like, hook up with any of the people?

MEISTER: Yes. They do.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: But I don't know, like, who and what the statistics are, but I just know, I just heard mumblings.

HC: Mumbblings...ok.

MEISTER: Yeah, I mean, I just think it is implied.

HC: So it is implied that that may happen?

MEISTER: Yeah. Like even the email I got inviting me to come was like, “you can hangout with thousands of coeds – eager and willing.” You know?

HC: Oh, really?

MEISTER: I think that’s part of the deal for the guys.

HC: The mumbblings that you heard?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Was it mostly guys?

MEISTER: Yeah. Yeah, yeah all guys.

HC: So, you girls weren’t really...

MEISTER: No.

HC: It was, like, another seller...

MEISTER: Yeah, it was all guys.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: Yeah. I am glad it was.

HC: I would assume, yeah. So, what, because before when we talked...

MEISTER: Um hmm...

HC: You had talked about celebrity getting to the point where it actually bothered you.

MEISTER: Oh yeah.

HC: Right. So, how did it feel when you got into this environment [Bahamas spring break]?

MEISTER: Well, I felt comfortable because it was very organized and controlled. And, um, also, I was being paid. If somebody is paying me, to do something then I don't feel like...exploited as much as if I'm just on my own time, with my own family, in my own boring life and people want to talk about it. That bothers me more. But this, I...really, really went down knowing people would want to talk about it and be interested and curious. And I am ok with it. But, like, only in small doses. I wouldn't make a living doing this like other people. But, like, once a year, if the opportunity comes, plus it's such easy money, then, you know, it's different.

HC: Ok. So, just, it feels different?

MEISTER: It does.

HC: It feels more like a job then?

MEISTER: Yeah! Yeah, I feel like it is almost like a service.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And especially sense I knew I was one of the only women cast members. And people don't care about the older cast members. I knew that as long as it was only Mallory and me I wouldn't have to do anything because they're like superstars. And people would be like, "can you take a picture of me and Mallory?" You know what I mean?

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: And that's great! I was all for that.

HC: Ok. Ok...

MEISTER: You know what I mean?

HC: So, because of your, um, the fact that you hadn't been any shows recently...

MEISTER: um hmm...

HC: the work is actually easier for you...

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: because no one knows you that well?

MEISTER: No one cares.

HC: Yeah?

MEISTER: Some people care.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: So, what about, remember when you said you had that, like, celebrity radar, or that sort of...

MEISTER: Yeah?

HC: Was that going off when you were in these situations?

MEISTER: You know what's great?

HC: What?

MEISTER: The travel there was a disaster because I missed a flight and stuff. And I ended up in this room, trying to get on this cruise liner...

HC: Uh hmm...

MEISTER: And its filled with thousands of college students...

HC: Yeah...

MEISTER: and, you know, literally that would be my hell...

HC: Yeah...

MEISTER: and I don't know if I had, like, my game face on or people knew that I was in no mood, or something, but not one person said anything to me. And these are people who are paying to be with me. They know who I am.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: And, um, so I don't know why...it was great the radar was low.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: But normally...

HC: So, you didn't sense anything?

MEISTER: Not at that time.

HC: People stare at you or...

MEISTER: And if they were, maybe I just didn't care because I knew that they were supposed to be. You know what I mean?

HC: So, what, I mean...

MEISTER: It is worse here.

HC: It is worse here?

MEISTER: It is worse here.

HC: Is it partially because they are not suppose to be looking at you here you sort of feel like?

MEISTER: Yeah. And probably because those kids knew that if they wanted to they could come up and talk to me. But, here they think they have to whisper and be all weird about it.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And they do.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: [laughing] So, whereas, if someone were to talk to me that be like, “hey I loved your show” or whatever. Which is what I like. In Pittsburgh, it more like, whisper-whisper-stare-stare. I hate that.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: Hugh, I hate it.

HC: No, I know. That’s what you said before...

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: which is why I was a little surprised you went again instead of saying like...

MEISTER: I know.

HC: Um...

MEISTER: But I don’t normally though. I mean...I know this has been going on for years, where they have these. And I’ve never been to the point where I was, like, ready to do this until this year.

HC: So, what made you, kinda, come to that point?

MEISTER: Um, I just felt like I was far enough away from the whole experience that I could just enjoy it. I brought a friend down and she and I really had fun. And I thought that I ready to just have fun with this instead of being weird about it.

HC: So, you got to bring a friend?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Ok. Well, that was nice.

MEISTER: Um hmm. That helped a lot.

HC: And then you were there...

MEISTER: And, wait, my favorite part is that these people are such idiots that...just because she was with all of us, they thought she was famous too.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: And she'd be like, "yeah, I was on *Road Rules* semester at sea." And they would totally believe it. So it just, you just need to be a part of this name or this, of these, shows, *Real World* or *Road Rules*, and people care.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: You know, it's really nothing about me or anybody else.

HC: How many people had seen you?

MEISTER: What do you mean?

HC: Had actually seen your *Road Rules*. Like, came up to you?

MEISTER: From the group? Oh, um...

HC: From the [mumble]...the spring breakers?

MEISTER: There were tons of them. But it had to be in reruns. Because, when it was on they were like 12.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: You know what I mean?

HC: Right.

MEISTER: So, it had to be on the WB or whatever the heck it is on now. You know?

HC: Would they come up to you and be, "hey, remember that time when..."

MEISTER: Yeah!

HC: And...

MEISTER: But it didn't bother me because I was being paid to be there and to answer questions and stuff.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: You know what I mean?

HC: Yeah. Were you also, like, given food and housing...

MEISTER: Um hmm.

HC: You were taken care of?

MEISTER: Yeah. Travel expenses all that, yeah.

HC: Did they call you, um, last minute?

MEISTER: Yeah, just last minute.

HC: So, they did that again?

MEISTER: Yeah. They do that. I hate it. About two, two, two and half weeks before hand. And I knew I was going to be in Portland so it just worked out perfectly. I am glad that I went. But, you know, I did feel, when I got back, like, I am so glad I went because now I know that I don't think I would want to do another *Challenge*, or anything like that, because it was just great. Because I got this tiny little dose and I was like, "ok, I don't want to do the *Challenge* or anything like that." But sometimes, when I am watching *Challenges*, I love to watch them so much that I feel like I should do that again. That it would be so fun. But it is really not.

HC: Really?

MEISTER: So, I am glad I did it. So, I am ready to reject any offers.

HC: So, it made you feel secure?

MEISTER: It made me feel like, I don't want to be a part of it again. I didn't want to start all over again. Soon there will be another one and you're in the race again where people care about you. You know?

HC: So, but, you would consider doing this again? Do this again, what you said...

MEISTER: Yeah, but not the *Challenges*.

HC: Not the *Challenges*. Would you consider going and speaking to people?

MEISTER: Um hmm. Yes, that's fun because that's a lot of money and controlled and organized and, "here's when I'll be here and I will talk at this time and this time." I love that.

HC: So, do you have an agent that kinda, like, deals with this stuff? Or, do they just remember...

MEISTER: I used to. Um...oh yeah, I do. I forgot. There's a company, but it's in North Carolina, that does all the speaking engagements.

HC: Um hmm..,

MEISTER: And we all go through the same one.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: There's one in Pittsburgh that's called, Uga productions. And that's the one Ace and Mallory when to the Bahamas through. But it's in Pittsburgh. They do a lot of that stuff.

HC: Have you done a speaking engagement?

MEISTER: Um hmm. Yeah. I've done a lot of them.

HC: Where have you done them?

MEISTER: Um...Virginia Tech., I think, one in Iowa, Philadelphia, East Strausburg.

HC: Are these all at schools?

MEISTER: Yeah, all at colleges or universities. And they are easy. They are fun. I did one at Boston College, I think. They all blend together [chuckle].

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: They are all exactly the same [laughing].

HC: Right. What, so what, um, what do you talk about?

MEISTER: Um, well, you don't really know until you get there and they'll say, "here's what we are going to do. Can you talk about," um, because we were all trained at The University of New Hampshire to do speaking engagements.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: So, we were trained to speak on diversity or, um, alcoholism. Stuff like that. But then nobody cares and they just want to talk about the show anyway.

HC: Right. So, so, because I remember, um, at Georgetown they had one of these speaking engagements...

MEISTER: Yeah? Um hmm...

HC: and, I think I told you, Julie was there...

MEISTER: Yeah. Yeah, Yeah.

HC: and so she gave a talk about abstaining from...

MEISTER: Sex. Ok.

HC: Yeah, that was her talk. Also drugs...

MEISTER: [Laughing]

HC: but mostly sex. And the same thing happened, people basically...

MEISTER: Right.

HC: weren't really interested in the that, they wanted to...

MEISTER: I can't blame them either. Who are we to tell them about any of it? You
Know? We're kids too.

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: But, it doesn't seem valid I guess.

HC: So, do they give you those, like, do they say, like, based on your character on the
show, "we would like you to talk about...

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: like, it is important to stay sober and to, um, I don't know, not mess around...

MEISTER: Yeah. Um hmm.

HC: with other people?

MEISTER: Yeah, the one I did in Virginia, there were, like, seven of us and it was
supposed to be about not drinking.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: But they try to put a spin on it that allows them to use there student funding,
or whatever it is, to have us talk about the show.

HC: Do a lot the students, like, come up to you afterwards and ask for you autograph or
anything?

MEISTER: A lot of pictures.

HC: A lot of pictures?

MEISTER: The autographs are rare, but hey happen. But mostly it's just pictures.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And that's how, when I met the cast members before I was on, that's how I was. I wanted documentation. You know? So, I understand.

HC: So, if you're on the streets, in Pittsburgh, and someone come up to you and says, "oh my god, you're, um, you know, 'Karen,'" or whatever,

MEISTER: [Laughing]

HC: "from *Road Rules Australia*,

MEISTER: Yes.

HC: can I please get a photograph?" Is that ok?

MEISTER: Yeah. I prefer it when they just say what they want and have something to say. But it is usually this: it is usually like, "oh my god, who are you? Were you on *The Real World*?" And then you're like, "yeah, I was a few years ago." You know. And then they're like, "was that's fun" And you can't say no. And then, so you say, "Oh yeah." And then they just stare at you like you are supposed to perform...

HC: Right.

MEISTER: I prefer it when they are like, "I love your show. You did great. What are you doing now?" That's fine.

HC: So, so, do you think they would come up and ask that same sort of question of like, ah, you know, "hey, what was it like?" Or, "What are you doing now?" Do you think they'd do something like that to, say, an actor?

MEISTER: Well, it's just different because they know us. Like, the know what were doing next.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: People will often come up to you and just be like, “did you go to my school?

Where do I know you from?” They really feel like they know me.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: So, it is more intimate and it’s more personal and it is more like, um, “I knew you then now what are you doing?”

HC: Now what are you doing?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Ok. So, so maybe...because before you said something about it having to do with, um, like you don’t have the same sort of financial stability of a regular celebrity...

MEISTER: Oh, that’s the worst thing!

HC: Right...

MEISTER: Like, it’s all of the hassle and none of the gain. You know?

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: And I, I, suppose I am starting more to count my blessings because I am on the job market and it makes you feel, people will trust you more because they know you and they feel more comfortable with you. And it’s an interesting resume and you, I had a lot of experience because of it and I should count my blessings about it. But that’s really all it does for you. And sometimes, it backfires because it’s sort of cheesy...

HC: Um hmm. Well, I guess it depends. Like, what kinds of jobs? Lets say you’re on the job market, do you mean sort of reality stuff?

MEISTER: No, no, no. I mean, like, I love the entertainment business. I love media. I am trying to get a job right now. I am interviewing for a job in, um, radio.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: Um, but behind the scenes. You know?

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: And so, I've worked with a lot of radio stations because of it. I've done like commercials and stuff. So, I know a lot of people. And maybe, like, they know me. And they're like, "oh, yeah you did this with us." And so it helps, it does. But it doesn't give you the financial gain of, like, being a movie star or a regular TV star.

HC: What commercials did you do?

MEISTER: Oh...I did, um, plexi-glass plus, Brueger's Begals, a hair salon, um, a college, things for a college. Which...I did about 10, or 15, commercials. I loved it. It's fun.

HC: Was it on radio commercials?

MEISTER: Um hmm. Yeah, I did, the Brueger's was TV and I did a print ad for IT. But other than that, it was all radio.

HC: Do they reference, like, your past *Road Rules* experience?

MEISTER: Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. I like it better when they don't. Just because it makes me feel like I am not good at it.

HC: Right. Well, you're not always attached and...

MEISTER: Yeah! Yeah.

HC: Sure.

MEISTER: But, um, especially when I don't use the products.

HC: Really?

MEISTER: Like, I don't go to the salon but it's still running. I and didn't know any better then and I got a one time fee of 250 dollars and it has been running for six years and that would never happen to a normal actor.

HC: No, yeah.

MEISTER: You know what I mean?

HC: So, before you said that, um, *Road Rules* makes you sign a contract for how many years was it?

MEISTER: Five years.

HC: Yeah, five years that they got to keep everything but 750 dollars.

MEISTER: Yeah, um hmm.

HC: Did they take the money from these commercials then?

MEISTER: No, because none of them were above that amount.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And I don't know if they would have anyway if they didn't know about them. But, um, if Levi's calls Bunnim-Murray, which is the company that makes it, and says they want to do a commercial with the cast, then even if they make 30,000 per cast member, you get the 750 dollars.

HC: What about speaking engagements?

MEISTER: Um well, they tried to represent us with that, um, and then we would go through that guy all the time, this guy with them. And then they decided to let us do our own thing. I don't know if it was out of the goodness of their own heart or just because they couldn't keep up with how many everybody did.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: But, they don't do that anymore.

HC: Right. So, does everybody do these things, these extra speaking engagements?

MEISTER: You know, that's what's weird, you'd think there would be more people. I mean, I even I did some and I probably the furthest away from the whole thing than anybody and there's nobody else like that. Everybody does it, everybody. And um, it's just, like, what you do.

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: I don't know whether it's just because they think they can't go back to school. Like, that's what Mallory is saying. She's like, "I can't go to school." Because she's, like, bombarded by people wherever she goes. So, I feel like, some people feel like they have nowhere else to go. And some people just really, really enjoy it.

HC: Ok. So, when she said, she was being bombarded by people in school, is it just because everyone wants to talk with her about it?

MEISTER: Yeah. Yeah, it's not like bad. It's just that she can't...when we were trying to leave an event, where the spring-breakers were, I said, "Mallory I am giving you 30 more seconds or I am leaving." Because if you don't cut her off, she'll go on all night because she's so darn nice to people, and because people want to talk with her.

HC: So, would there be, like, these lines of spring breakers just waiting to talk to her?

MEISTER: Yeah, just, like, a mass. Yeah, it wasn't like a line. But yeah, she's really popular. And like, do you remember the very first *Real World*?

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: With, uh, Eric Nice who did *The Grind* then?

HC: Sure.

MEISTER: He was there. He was in the Bahamas with me. And I was super excited because of the cheese factor. Like, oh my god Eric Nice is gonna be here, because I had never met him.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: And, um, I was like...he was, like, sad. And I was like, "Eric what's your problem? Why are you sad?" And he was like, "I did this show a long time ago and I am not into this. I am...an accomplished television personality." And I was like, "then why are you here?" And he's like, "I am just doing Jaime a favor." Who was the guy on New Orleans cast who sort of organized the whole thing.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: As if anyone was dying to see Eric Nice [laugh]. Like he feels like he's doing him a favor. I mean just admit it, you're here for the 2,000 dollars and, um, just say it. It turns out, he later admitted, that he's [Eric Nice] jealous of Ace and all of his popularity.

HC: Really?

MEISTER: How said [laugh] is that? When, like, the pinnacle of your life was over 12 years ago...

HC: and you're jealous of the new people.

MEISTER: Come on. I mean, move on. Do something else. Like, don't peak at 20.

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: That's always my thing. I am not going to peak at 18 because that's just wrong.

HC: Yeah, what you're are saying sort of reminds me of that thing that people say, ah, about the really popular crowd in high school, that's it is the best year of their lives...

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: and they constantly relive it over and over again.

MEISTER: Yes. And I was so excited to meet Eric Nice because it is just so funny to meet Eric Nice. And ruined the whole thing. I couldn't get over what an ass he was. And he never came to any the events they would ask us to come to. You know, he just wouldn't come.

HC: And he's like too cool for that?

MEISTER: Yeah! I mean, if they are going to give you some money at least do the grunt work. And it's not even really work.

HC: How is Ace in comparison?

MEISTER: Well, he...for example, there was a guy who had arranged from us to come to his hotel suite to have drinks and food for free, for dinner.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: And, um, it was private party and, like, all the spring breakers couldn't come, obviously.

HC: So, who was this guy? Was he a spring-breaker too?

MEISTER: He was related to...no, he was an old man, like 60. He was just related to Spring Break Travel and he was there and wanted to be nice. And so, when are group of cast members started walking – I took a picture of it. You would not believe the line of spring-breakers across the street I couldn't even see the end of the line of people that were following us. And, obviously they couldn't come in. So, we all go in and Ace says, "I'll buy you guys all shots, come on, I'll come with you." And he wouldn't go up to the

party. And he was just nice and felt bad for all these kids who couldn't come in. And that's just how I would describe how he is about it.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: He's not so much into, like, the fame as he's just, like...he loves all the people and just wants to have fun.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: That was always nice.

HC: Could you get me a copy of the picture?

MEISTER: Oh, yes.

HC: Did you take a lot of pictures?

MEISTER: Yeah. You can any ones you want.

HC: If you make doubles I will reimburse you for whatever...

MEISTER: Sure. Yeah.

HC: and that would be great.

MEISTER: It will be unbridled hilarity, when you see them.

HC: Yeah, I'd love to see the pictures.

MEISTER: It's ridiculous.

HC: Yeah. That's great.

MEISTER: [giggling]

HC: And so...were there any other members from the New York cast? The first one?

Who were the oldest cast members?

MEISTER: He was the oldest one and then, um, I think there was only one from the season right before me.

HC: Um hmm.

MEISTER: Um, who I had met before and she's great. And then me and then, pretty much, every other single person was either from the last two or three casts. All new people. Um, I am trying to think...Rick Field from Chicago...

HC: Ok...

MEISTER: um, Dave and Kara that are dating from *Road Rules* recently. There's just so many new people. I can't even keep them straight. Sara, who was, like, the loser on *The Gauntlet* all the time. She's actually coming here tomorrow. There's an event tomorrow called, Declaring Yourself internet company. It's like rock the vote.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: It's normally through this company called, Declaring Yourself. And it tries to get students to, um, register to vote. And there, ah, me and Sara and Chadwick, from my class, or from my cast, are going to be over in the Pitt Union all day tomorrow. And, then, um, Ace and Rachel are going to be a Pitt Greensburg. So, that's just this random event that is happening.

HC: It's sort of like, *Rock the Vote*? Sort of...

MEISTER: But we are not getting paid or anything like that.

HC: Sort of like, get kids to register?

MEISTER: And we're supposed to be...

HC: Right, I got it.

MEISTER: I am just into the cause though. I am just into doing. I am not going to get paid or anything.

HC: So, um, are there going to be any signs, or anything, that will be saying, you are the cast? And that...

MEISTER: I don't know. You mean tomorrow?

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: I don't know.

HC: You're just going to show up?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: How do they tell you to dress?

MEISTER: They don't.

HC: They just say, "hey, show up."

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: So, that just means jeans and casual...

MEISTER: I guess so. Yes. Yeah, I guess they want you to look like you normally look.

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: I didn't even ask. See, I should.

HC: Well, I am just curious how they get you guys to, ah, you know...

MEISTER: [Laughing]

HC: Do they say, "look formal?"

MEISTER: No. No, none of that.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: So, who knows.

HC: So, I never asked you, would you consider yourself, like, political? Are you more like, if you had to...who are you going to vote for?

MEISTER: Oh, Kerry.

HC: You're gonna vote for Kerry?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: But I campaigned for Bush last time. Don't tell anybody.

HC: Well, only...

MEISTER: [laughing] I am sorry, Hugh...

HC: It's ok. If you don't want me to put that in, I won't put it in.

MEISTER: I just mean, like, what I mean is, don't hold it against me.

HC: No...

MEISTER: But, no, I did love him [Bush] and now I don't. I think my husband is converting me. HC: Your husband is converting you?

MEISTER: He's a liberal so...

HC: He's a liberal?

MEISTER: I am starting to get it but...

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: You know.

HC: Alright.

MEISTER: I used to be die-hard. I was in The Young Republicans.

HC: You were?

MEISTER: I was the public relations strategist [laughing].

HC: You were a public relations strat...you mean in high school?

MEISTER: No, here. Like um, Allegany County.

HC: Oh, Allegany County.

MEISTER: Yeah, I know. I am a little nervous. I think I am blushing. Yeah, it's true.

HC: I won't, I won't mention any of this if you don't want me to.

MEISTER: [laughing] No.

HC: Because some people, you know, it's private. Um. You know, I did lots of political stuff too when I was younger but I probably wouldn't do that.

MEISTER: [laughing] Nerd alert. I mean, if you're into it. Even when I was a conservative, I was always just glad when somebody had an opinion of any kind – as long as someone cared. And that's why these organizations are cool: it's not, like, about what you are, it's just, like, do something about it.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: You know, the usual.

HC: So, what...like, as far as political leaning go, for most of the people on the show...

MEISTER: They don't have any.

HC: They just don't...

MEISTER: They don't care. They care about anything important, ever!

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: I am not kidding, Hugh, this was the time, I was there this week, I was like, "what can I talk about?" Most of the people, you speak with five minutes and then you're done. Because, they only talk about hooking up, or drinking, or, like, partying or tanning. They're really into talking about the tanning.

HC: Who was?

MEISTER: The girls.

HC: The cast members?

MEISTER: Yes!

HC: They were really interesting in talking about tanning?

MEISTER: Tanning.

HC: And hooking up?

MEISTER: And hooking up.

HC: And partying?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: With who?

MEISTER: Marijuana.

HC: Marijuana? Now they're talking about marijuana...

MEISTER: [laughing]

HC: Ok, lets just start with the tanning. Um, so they into tanning...

MEISTER: This girl, who was on *Road Rules* a few years ago. She was super tan. Like, a bronze goddess. She's been at all the spring breaks. Like, all of over...

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: the world. Like, Acoploco. They all just go from one to the other.

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: And then she said, "do you guys have any, um, sun tanning lotion?" And come on, I am almost albino. I have, like, SPF 30. You know?

HC: Um hmm.

MEISTER: And, uh...but my friend had some. She gave it to her and she was like, "this is tanning lotion but it has SPF 10 in it. Is that high?" And like, "it's not it's fine just put

it on.” And, like, she couldn’t quit talking about it, or thinking about it, how she put had put on 10 SPF.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: Somebody else had tanning lotion with like four SPF in it. And she put it on and was like, “now I have 15 on.”

HC: Oh. I didn’t even know they made four anymore.

MEISTER: [laughing] Really?

HC: Really.

MEISTER: But see, that’s for me why I went. Because, that’s is funny for days.

HC: Yeah. Ok, so what do they guys talk about? Do they talk about tanning too?

MEISTER: [laughing] That would be really great. No, they don’t. They hardly went to any of the events. Like, they just got paid for nothing. Um, and, drinking and bikinis.

HC: They talk about girls in bikinis?

MEISTER: Um hmm.

HC: Did they talk about the spring-breakers or the fellow cast members?

MEISTER: Um...both. Yep. It was really stimulating [chuckle].

HC: So, have you give me an example?

MEISTER: Um, well, they would talk about how many bathing suits this one girl, Kara, had. Because she has, like, a million. I never saw her in more than one, ah...more than one. And they would talk about, like, girls that would pass. Just, you know, who was cute, who wasn’t and who was crazy and drunk.

HC: Did they try to pick up on people within the, um...

MEISTER: They must have. I think this all happened before I went to bed though.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: Because, I would hear about it the next day. Like, "Oh yeah, we with such and such people and went to such and such bar." These random girls would be like, they'd have the hotel...Mallory's hotel key but they were some random spring-breakers. It was just weird behavior that all happened after I was...

HC: Did Mallory go out with these people?

MEISTER: No. But the, her, the boys...gave, accidently meant to give her their own key...

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: But accidently gave them Mallory's key.

HC: Uh huh.

MEISTER: So, there was just these random girls in her room when she got back.

HC: Oh my god.

MEISTER: I know.

HC: That's really weird.

MEISTER: That's what people talk about.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: Isn't it sad?

HC: Well, it sounds like...

MEISTER: But that's there life.

HC: Yeah...

MEISTER: Just all they do and all they care about.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Well...but it was fun you enjoyed it?

MEISTER: It was. Because, what is funny than watching people fight about SPF?

HC: Um hmm. And then, how long were you there for?

MEISTER: I was there for...Sunday night until Saturday morning.

HC: So, it was a full week?

MEISTER: It was, yeah.

HC: Have you done that stuff when you were in college? Did you go to any spring break thing?

MEISTER: No. No, never in my life. This is my first spring break.

HC: What was your reaction to it?

MEISTER: Ah, it was debauched and horrific and I don't understand. I went to church, the only Sunday [laughing], wearing a Sunday school, where you talk about [mumble] and stuff, and was like, "I feel so bad for these kids." I mean, it's funny on one hand, but it kind of sad because their whole objective is – both the spring-breakers and the cast – is just like, get drunk, get beautiful, um, get money. And that's really it.

HC: That's it?

MEISTER: It's sad.

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: That's it. And I felt so...when I left my feeling was of how lucky I am to have my family: my sisters and brothers and my husband and my stepdaughter. Like, I felt so fulfilled because they all seem so empty by comparison. I could be wrong, it just seemed that way.

HC: That's how it appeared to you?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: And then, they were going to go do more of these events anyway?

MEISTER: Oh yeah, they hadn't been home in...months. With Mallory, she was starting to feel real sad about how she was in all of this. And I was like, "when are you going home?" And she was like, "I don't know." She's booked up through April and May.

HC: Wow. And...do they want to go into acting and things like that? Or are they just happy to just do what they are doing?

MEISTER: Well, they were all involved in college, most of them. You know, they were all getting a degree in education, or something like that. And then now, most of them are sort of waiting for some opportunities to get involved in modeling, or acting or hosting. They're really into hosting because you don't need any skills.

HC: Hosting...

MEISTER: Like, um, like Tim, who was on *Road Rules*, he hosts a show on the History Channel. Like, if you can host on VH1 or...

HC: Like on MTV, *MTV Spring Break*...

MEISTER: Yeah, any of that. You're just yourself but your still famous. So, you don't have to have any acting skills.

HC: Uh huh. Did they work out and go to the gym and stay in shape?

MEISTER: Oh yes, saunas, weights, running. And they are all very thin.

HC: Do they do this, um...do they do this even when they are partying? Like, is that like, do they always have time when they're not taping and doing work out time?

MEISTER: Yes. How do you know all of this?

HC: Just guessing.

MEISTER: You're so good. I forgot they do. And, uh...

HC: So where is...

MEISTER: And they all have incredible bodies.

HC: Take me through, like, a day on one of these things on spring break.

MEISTER: Ok. Well, I always get up at 7:15 every day of my life...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: then I bath for three hours before anybody else got up. And then we'd have to meet at 11. And that was our meeting of the day and they'd just say, here's what we have to do. After...at 11 that's when everyone would sort of break and that's when a lot of the weight lifting and, or, tanning would occur.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: Because, we didn't have to meet again until three. There was a lot of beach slash exercise [laugh]. Then at three we'd move and have to go on stage and there'd be, like, games for the spring-breakers to play.

HC: What kind of games?

MEISTER: [laughing]

HC: I mean, I have an idea but, like, what...

MEISTER: Yeah, they were mostly exploiting woman. They had a 'boob-o-meter.'

HC: A boob-o-meter?

MEISTER: [laughing]

HC: I can only imagine what a boob-o-meter...so what's a boob-o-meter?

MEISTER: Which I also took a picture of for your enjoyment...

HC: Yeah...

MEISTER: Which is just like this plexiglass item with six hole of varying sizes.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: And I saw the boob-o-meter, and I thought the girls would just come up and just stick there boobs in the whole and, like, measure them...

HC: Sure.

MEISTER: and that's how many shots they would get, based on their breast size.

HC: Shots?

MEISTER: Shots of alcohol.

HC: Oh, I didn't know alcohol was involved.

MEISTER: You didn't [giggle]?

HC: I thought this was a contest, I didn't know there was still...ok, finish.

MEISTER: They were like, "Karen, can you, um, hold up the boob-o-meter for this?"

And I was like, "um, no. You know, there's nothing more than I love than exploiting women but I think I'd rather do something else." So, the girls come up and I thought they were just going to put their boobs in.

HC: Wearing, like, bikinis?

MEISTER: Yeah. I am not kidding you, they just took their shirts off and, like, didn't even think about it. I was like, "oh no, I am so embarrassed." It was like...

HC: So they were just topless?

MEISTER: They were just topless. And nobody made a big deal about it except for me. I was like...I couldn't believe it was happening.

HC: And these are just like college kids?

MEISTER: Yeah. And then, they'd get the shots based on their boob size. That was like one game. But most of them are about women and lesbian activity.

HC: So, were those shots...so the smaller the boob the less shots?

MEISTER: Yeah, which you'd think would be opposite.

HC: I guess that depends.

MEISTER: [Laughing].

HC: Um...

MEISTER: Yeah it was one shot for the smallest...

HC: and then up?

MEISTER: And then up.

HC: Ok, so there was that game and there was other sorts of 'spring-breaky' games?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: And then how did the cast members react to this? The former cast members?

MEISTER: They were desensitized. I think they have seen so much of this that they didn't even notice.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: I was appalled. But if these women were willing to do it, then I blame them just as much. Because, there shouldn't be any willing participants. You know what I mean?

HC: Yeah. Were you the only person out of that group that wasn't going from spring break occasion to spring break occasion?

MEISTER: Yes I was, yeah.

HC: This is really a unique situation then because you said they were desensitized.

MEISTER: Yeah, they didn't really react to any of it. I mean, I don't know, I guess they are just used to it.

HC: Do they, do they like, um...

MEISTER: My favorite is telling you though. It's great.

HC: I assume you've been telling everyone about this.

MEISTER: I can honestly say I have not.

HC: You haven't told people about this?

MEISTER: Well, like who would I tell?

HC: I don't know, just your friends and stuff?

MEISTER: No [laughing].

HC: No?

MEISTER: Because I am not proud of it. I feel, like... I don't know, embarrassed.

HC: Do you talk about your experience?

MEISTER: No, I do not. This is a special occasion.

HC: What if, what if you go to ah...

MEISTER: I feel like it's therapy here.

HC: Ok. Well, what if you go to a cocktail party with your husband, or something like that, will you talk about it? Or not talk about it?

MEISTER: Well, if people ask me about it that are my friends or my husband's friends, I am not going to be rude about it or anything.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: Um, but he's ten years older than me so, and he works here, so most of the people he works with don't know MTV or anything like that. You know? If they know,

they just know about it through the grapevine. Through somebody mentioning it or something. Or like at my church, they sure don't know but, um, most people are real curious about it though.

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: Because it is a unique experience, and everything. But if people have thoughtful questions, then it's fun to talk about it. But most of the people on the street are very, you know, thoughtful.

HC: But even friend wise, things like that...

MEISTER: Um hmm, I like to talk about it if people are interested. Or if people ask different questions about, like, the events or something.

HC: Right. Ok. So at three o'clock you have...

MEISTER: The stage antics!

HC: The stage antics. So, when does that end?

MEISTER: That ends at, like, 4:30.

HC: Oh that's not bad.

MEISTER: No.

HC: And it's all outside on the beach?

MEISTER: Yeah, right by the pool. And then, we'd be free until eleven.

HC: Eleven at night?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Oh man.

MEISTER: So, there was a lot...what I liked about it, there was a lot of time to hangout with the other cast members. Who were shallow and superficial having shared and

experience with me so I feel comfortable with them. You know, I don't feel like I need to hold anything back. So, that's nice. I like to be with people that have done it. And then, um, we'd just hang out until eleven and do another party. This was more like in a square, um, event, like in dance music and stuff and we just stayed on stage or we could just stand there or host a game or be in a party. But I just stood there.

HC: So, you just stood there.

MEISTER: Yeah, and I would smile and take pictures if anyone wanted them...

HC: Right.

MEISTER: But I didn't cut up a rug or anything.

HC: You didn't dance?

MEISTER: Not really, no.

HC: So, when you hung out with the cast members, between 4:30 and eleven...

MEISTER: Yeah?

HC: what did you guys talk about? I mean besides the tanning and all that kind of stuff.

MEISTER: No.

HC: But did you ever talk about anything like your experiences?

MEISTER: Yeah. Yeah, everyone always talks about that because it is so unique and, like I said, it's sort of therapy to talk about it with other people who have gone through it.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: So, um, but I've only had a different experience. Especially the new people, it is just like I said, they...their trip was incidental and then this is their life now. It was the opposite for me. I couldn't wait to travel and do all the fun things. Um, they don't have,

they don't feel like that as much. And they really love the challenges where they get to be with like all the different people...

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: and frolic. Cause at the challenges there is like an open bar that the producers supply and all that. It is like spring break but only for cast members.

HC: And that just goes on for the whole time?

MEISTER: Yeah. It's crazy. There's so much sex you wouldn't believe.

HC: On the *Challenge*?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: Just among the cast members?

MEISTER: You wouldn't believe it.

HC: So, how many of them have had sex with each other?

MEISTER: It's so incestuous. I mean almost everybody, I would say.

HC: Really?

MEISTER: Yeah.

HC: And then, what about substance abuse?

MEISTER: Oh, that's really bad.

HC: So, they drink a lot?

MEISTER: They do drugs, even when they are not supposed to. Like, in the contract...

HC: Uh huh...

MEISTER: I heard the last *Challenge* was just, like, a mess – drugs everywhere. Like, that...hard drugs.

HC: Like what?

MEISTER: Like, um, cocaine. Stuff like that. Um, it's just because, it's almost like, you know, *E! True Hollywood stories* where, you know, they're not famous so they don't get into trouble. You know?

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: And, um, I don't think a lot of them are very happy. So, I feel like they peeked and they want it back, they want to be back in the spotlight. It's sort of sad.

HC: So, have you seen that *E! True Hollywood Stories*?

MEISTER: Um hmm.

HC: Like, behind...

MEISTER: I forgot about that. Yeah. But that's so inaccurate though.

HC: It's not accurate?

MEISTER: It's accurate but it's, like, there's so much more. Even, I am like...out of it and I still know stories of who is hooking up with who and, like, they didn't even tell you. You know what I mean? Because, it is really underneath the surface. They told about the stupid stuff, I guess.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: But, I think it's out of context.

HC: So, there's a lot more going on behind the scenes?

MEISTER: It's such a subculture. Like, it's so unimportant and so ridiculous discussing it because it is so stupid. But there is a subculture there. It seems important to them...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: when you're in it, including myself. Like, at the time you're in it you think it is a big deal to be part of it. And especially for *Real Worlders*, people are really interested and get attached to the characters and stuff.

HC: What do you mean they get attached to the characters?

MEISTER: I would say the public knows the *Real Worlders* better. It's just more popular. And, um, so public gets really attached to the people that are on it and they are really interested in them. Those people are really famous.

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: And they're like...they just want it to be like that all the time. But it eventually does sort of slow down.

HC: Where do you think, if you just had to guess, this is all going to end up? Like where do you Eric, from the first *Real World*, is going to be 40 years from now?

MEISTER: I don't see good things.

HC: You don't see good things?

MEISTER: Unless they have some sort of moment where they're like, "ok, I am done. And I want to do this." Like, have a goal...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: Even if they're not done, even if they participate in some stuff, sometimes, that's ok. But they don't have any goals. I asked Eric...this is what they say, this is code: I was always like, "what do you do at home?" Like, that's always what I want to talk about and nobody has an answer. They're always like, "ah, I just do my thing." Like what is that? That's their code for, like, I just wait for the phone to ring and have, come, come here.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: You know? They all do their thing.

HC: Right, their thing.

MEISTER: [laughing] What is that?

HC: If someone were to ask you, “what do you do?” What would you say?

MEISTER: I would say that I, ah, have my family, and a job...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: and a church, and a community, and...I don't have an exciting life but I have more than my fame.

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: You know?

HC: Do you think that it bothers them, um, the same things around celebrity bother them that bother you? Getting noticed in the street...

MEISTER: No, I know they don't.

HC: They don't?

MEISTER: I know that it doesn't bother them. I know that they love it.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: They think I am crazy. They don't get it. I know that they love it.

HC: So, if you were to give someone a piece of advice...

MEISTER: That was going on?

HC: that was going on, on how to deal with this celebrity once you are off of it, off of the show, and not just people meeting you or recognizing you but also, just like, coping with the fact that you're not on the show anymore?

MEISTER: Um hmm...

HC: What would you say?

MEISTER: Well first of all, I know that it is different now...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: And that I am not sure I know how, like I wasn't sure how to tell Mallory how to deal with it because it is so much more intense...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: but I just really, really would encourage them to enjoy the event. And enjoy the things you get to do that you would never, ever, get to do in real life.

HC: Ok.

MEISTER: Like, all the fun things that you get to do, um, on the show. Especially *Road Rules*, all those crazy things

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: that you would never, ever, do in the real world; and the free travel, and meeting people that are so different from you...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: Just, um, if you can enjoy that and have memories of that, it makes it all a lot easy to deal with when you get back and nobody cares that you're tying your shoes anymore and that you're walking down the street anymore – like as far as a camera crew...

HC: Um hmm...

MEISTER: Um, and just move on...

HC: Yeah.

MEISTER: and, like, have a new goal, and make the best out of what that was but don't live in it forever.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: Because they live in it forever, and I don't understand. I mean life goes on. Make something else happen, do something else fun.

HC: Right.

MEISTER: But they don't. So, that would be what I say.

HC: Ok. Alright well great.

APPENDIX C
TIM BEGGY INTERVIEW

HC: So you are from Pittsburgh, is that correct?

Beggy: Yeah, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15228.

HC: Where is 15228?

Beggy: It's up on the hill.

HC: Which would be?

Beggy: South Hills, Mount Lebanon area.

HC: Okay, South Hills.

Beggy: Yeah, the mean streets of Mount Lebanon.

HC: Do you come from a larger family?

Beggy: Youngest of four.

HC: Okay, youngest of four. And do you have plans to come back to Pittsburgh?

Beggy: Sure, absolutely. As a matter of fact after this I have a meeting at WQED.

HC: Oh, really?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: To do?

Beggy: Yeah well, we'll see. We'll see where that will leave me. If they have room for me or are interested in some of my ideas, or maybe that will have some ideas for me as well.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: I recently have acquired in the stage in my life, trying to get TV programs on the air, and I have acquired the rights to The Farmer's Almanac, if you've heard of that?

HC: Yeah, sure.

Beggy: I have the rights to it.

HC: Oh, wow, okay.

Beggy: People are like, are you serious? Like, yes I do. And ah, I think it would make a great WQED or PBS-type TV show.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Slice of America, which I love. And I think I could turn it into a pretty good show.

HC: Okay, so you would produce it?

Beggy: Produce it and if, you know, depending the exact feel, I would host it if need be.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: But you don't know if you'd rather have your Wilfred Brimley-type.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: You know, hosting certainly takes a backseat to whatever creativity is involved whether coming from me or someone else.

HC: Okay. Do you have any other sorts of things you are attempting to do along the lines of television?

Beggy: Yeah, there is lots of, ah, I really over the past couple of years have been concentrating on behind-the-scenes, and getting TV shows off the ground. I've signed a lot of if-come-deals. That is...

HC: What's an if-come-deal?

Beggy: if-come-deal is basically you come up with a treatment or a concept. And some of them are extremely detailed to the minute, and you sign them to networks or production companies. And if it gets made, it get made and you get paid.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: And some have come to fruition, um, of my own personal ideas I have come up with. None have made it past the pilot stage. A pilot is test episode...

HC: Right.

Beggy: ...where they film an episode and they green-light it yes or no.

HC: So you've had pilots made, they just haven't made it past that?

Beggy: Yes, I have had many pilots made.

HC: Can you tell me, like, about a couple of them?

Beggy: Sure. One in particular which I really wish someday would get off the ground, or maybe, you know I wish it did back then, I wish maybe it will, is one called, *Drop Everything*. And that's kind of...the best way to describe it would be like a pidgeon version of extreme makeover. Where people drop everything in there lives to do do-gooding.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Yeah, if you will. So, we did a pilot of that for UPN,

HC: UPN?

Beggy: it's a channel...

HC: Oh, right of course.

Beggy: Did something fall out of my nose, you looked at me funny?

HC: Oh, no, no...

Beggy: I'm just kidding.

HC: I thought you said UPM and I was like, 'wait what is that?'

Beggy: No, UPN.

HC: So, so go ahead.

Beggy: UPN and Castlerock and Telepictures, it was a big-to-do but it didn't make a date. Honestly, no creative input I firmly believe squashed the show. Made it more into a Nickelodeon gameshow rather than a big-to-do.

HC: How long did it take you to make it, the pilot?

Beggy: We filmed over two days, but the preparation took months and months. Probably seven months before we actually rolled camera.

HC: And were you onscreen for that?

Tim. Yeah. Yeah, that I was. So that's just one example of all kinds of stuff out there

HC: Okay.

Beggy: But I've also had the great fortune of hosting my own show on, ah, FOX SPORTS.

HC: Yeah, I read about that. I did a, like, search on Internet whatever movie-database search and something on there. What was that?

Beggy: That was a college magazine format. College football, basketball half-hour, who is who and what's going on in college football and basketball.

HC: Did you like it?

Beggy: Loved it. It was five years of traveling around seeing ah, I played college football and it was just, ah, it wasn't really work.

HC: Yeah, yeah.

Beggy: It was just kind of fun and really cool interviews. And from my own personal perspective it's all about life experience and I was able to fill a lot of them with that show.

HC: What school did you play for?

Beggy: Duquesne.

HC: Duquesne, okay, all right.

Beggy: Duquesne, small football.

HC: What position?

Beggy: Receiver, Yeah

HC: Oh, good.

Beggy: So, it was fun.

HC: Yeah, I noticed when I was watching the last *Gauntlet* you had the Steelers jersey...

Beggy: Sure, always, always.

HC: But you didn't have a name on it. And I was wondering...I don't think you did, right? I could tell it was a Steelers jersey but it was...

Beggy: They made you cover up.

HC: They made you cover it up?

Beggy: Yeah they make you because they don't have the rights to it so they can't show, you tell.

HC: You could totally tell.

Beggy: Even the Steelers on the front, they make you put tape over it.

HC: So that, when did you film that?

Beggy: That was over last summer, that particular, that was *The Gauntlet 2*, electric bugaloo. Yeah, that was last summer. It takes awhile to edit before they toss it on the air...

HC: Okay.

Beggy: ...as well. So yes, I was wearing a football jersey in the middle of the Caribbean during the scorching heat because I was that much of a fan.

HC: Well it perfect timing though because while it was on, I was just thinking this is so weird.

Beggy: Unbelievable. Of course they showed it a lot and I certainly went over the top with it, wore it everywhere.

HC: So you did where it that much?

Beggy: I wore it that much. And also, I knew when to wear it. Like if I was going to be in the Gauntlet, I wanted to wear it you know, because they had no choice but to show it. And then I had terrible towels I gave to you know my teammates. We used terrible towels. They didn't really show that too much.

HC: Yeah, I don't remember seeing that but I missed a couple of them.

Beggy: The timing of it all was really, really, unbelievable.

HC: Yeah, that was pretty cool. And so, how many of the Challenge shows have you been on?

Beggy: I've done three.

HC: So you've done three, okay.

Beggy: Three and I guess it would be, oh boy, about six years. About one every two years is what I am averaging (laugh).

HC: And do they recruit people to do every so often? Do they do it in intervals, like every few years you would expect to get a phone call or is it more random?

Beggy: Everyone is different. I think it's kind of random. But they kind of have your favorites if you will.

HC: Like, what would be a favorite?

Beggy: Well, there is ah, if you're familiar with the shows, there's certainly your Corals and your, ah, Darrels. And ah, I mean, you could probably rattle off a couple, Veronica...

HC: And Beth, she seems to be...

Beggy:...Beth, yeah, who are always on it. And there are people like myself who are on it, well, every two years.

HC: Are there people who just go on it once and then never go on it again?

Beggy: Definitely. Yes, some by choice some by, you know most cast members don't ever get asked. You have to figure by now there's been in the teens for both *Real World* and *Road Rules*. So, do the quick math, there's I don't know, probably 200 of us. Which is a motley crew. And they can only choose so many to go on a Challenge so.

HC: So, if you could like, I mean, just guess how some get picked. I mean, maybe not just go-to people, like a Beth of Darrel, but um people who you see over and over again, the groups they are picking over and over again, I mean, could you hazard a guess as to kind of how they are doing that? Like what the producers are thinking?

Beggy: Oh, who's the biggest sucker.

HC: Okay, so that's what I mean...

Beggy: Not really, they are basically recasting. It's all about ratings, obviously. They are picking who they think will cause the most drama, to the best on the show, and ultimately just bring in ratings.

HC: Yeah, because I mean you have a unique perspective because you are also sort of producing television.

Beggy: Yep.

HC: So you might be able to step into the producer's shoes a little bit of the show or...

Beggy: Well, they certainly don't allow that. There is a line they try to keep very divided between cast and crew.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Yeah, they try to keep that extremely separate.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Yeah, because it is a reality show and ultimately the production is not supposed to be there. They are flies on the wall watching you live and interact.

HC: So, is there just in general, when you are there, a feel that you are cast on a television show, I am speaking specifically about the Challenges now, or do you feel like, um, it's more of a documentary feel? Like you know, flies on the wall?

Beggy: I would say, at this point everyone there knows the ropes. You've already been on a reality show. Now this is like part two. And for some this is part two, three, four, five, six, seven.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: Everyone has been through the wringer; they know what's up.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: You know when the drama is going to happen, what's going to occur, when they are filming, when they are not filming. You pretty much...you know the ropes.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: So it's more of adult summer camp...

HC: Okay.

Beggy:...is really how it is.

HC: Okay, so what's adult summer camp like?

Beggy: There's really no worries. It's a vacation. Of course, you know the drama that is going to ensue. You can't stay out of it. And if you stay out of it, you'll get pulled into it or they will make stories, or someone will pull you into a drama somehow, it just happens.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: But as far as, like, adult summer camp, it's a free-for-all, you're going there, you're not working. By no means is this even close to being work. I mean, I went snorkeling everyday for five weeks in Tobago.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: I wasn't working.

HC: No that...

Beggy: You are there with friends...

HC: Sounds amazing...

Beggy: It's great. I was on The Veteran's team, in the guys' room, where all the guys stayed, and it was like a gym locker. It was like summer camp. We told stories every night and, um, you can do whatever you want to.

HC: Are there some people who look at it more like a job than others, or everyone sort of just kind of taking it...

Beggy: Everyone takes a different slant on it. Some people take it as business. Like, a lot of people will attempt to pimp products or gear or clothing lines. Eric Neece was trying to sell jump ropes.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: So you recollect that everywhere he went he was wearing a jump rope?

HC: I don't remember that, but I remember Eric Neece and ah, yeah.

Beggy: So the last Challenge he was on he had jump rope around his neck everywhere he went.

HC: Yeah...

Beggy: Hey, you know, if you can capitalize on it the way that they are capitalizing on you, then go ahead, to each his own. Frankly, I think...

HC: Well jump ropes...

Beggy: Jump ropes is a little much.

HC: Yeah. Okay, so aside from things like product placement that people bring in...

Beggy: Yeah.

HC:...on their own, do any of the casts you find, or yourself included, is there any sort of preparation that goes into, you know, continuing to go on these shows as far as...

Beggy: They definitely, most people really get into shape.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Most people really train because it is, ah, there's ah, it's multi-level. They want to perform well to win. You certainly are there to win money, that's why you go. And

there's lots of egos being tossed around. You don't want to lose because you're going up against another team or one-on-one against someone. There's a lot of pride, there's a lot of pride on the line. And then on top of that, everyone knows damn well they are on national TV.

HC: Sure.

Beggy: And you never want to look like a punk...

HC: Yeah.

Beggy:...on TV.

HC: And for, like, more successful people who maybe, I am just thinking like Elton or someone because it seems like he was really good...

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Or at least that's how they made it look...

Beggy: No, he is really good.

HC: Would that be someone you could see going back on another one of these shows?

Beggy: Oh yeah, yeah, he'll be back. He's done three as well. Yeah, he'll definitely be back. He's a good story. He kisses all the girls and looks great and performs great. You know, he's a keeper. He'll be back.

HC: So, he kisses all the girls? Are there relationships too?

Beggy: Yeah, people hook-up all over the place.

HC: Because I know that Ace and, um, who is, it's not Ace. There was Ace and Mallory.

Beggy: Right, right, yeah.

HC: But there was someone else recently, um, and she was, they were from the Austin cast, no they weren't from Austin. They got married or they were engaged, or something

like this. Oh, I can't believe I am forgetting their names. Ah, he's from Boston, his mother died...

Beggy: Oh okay. Yeah yeah, Danny...

HC: Yeah Danny and her name...

Beggy: and I don't know the girl's name.

HC: Yeah, neither do I Danny. So relationships, aside from hooking-up, do people actually date each other?

Beggy: Oh yeah, the definitely do, it certainly occurs just like any work environment, you're around each other and it happens. It's also kind of a, I would say, a security blanket because it's a very strange thing to be a reality-personality.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: It's very strange. So it's kind of like a, 'hey someone else gets it.' It's a comfort zone.

HC: What would you say are some of the strange things about it, or the strangest thing?

Beggy: Well, it's just kind of the whole recognition thing is definitely weird because it comes and goes. It's ah, because you are certainly not Tom Cruise and, um, but you still are yourself. You're the same person that just graduated college or was waiting tables. But you haven't really done anything but runaround like an idiot on TV show. And so, it's just kind of awkward in the spotlight when you don't expect it.

HC: Right.

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Do you find that people are stressed out by that a little bit, or...

Beggy: I think a lot. I think everyone definitely goes through a stressful period at some point. Whether it's initially, hugely or later on down the line. Because it's weird, because especially being on the shows with the cameras following you and a lot of attention, then that attention can go away. But you were used to it for five weeks straight.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: You have cameras every morning, you wake up to cameras. Now all of sudden you wake up, and live in your own apartment by yourself and you're like, oh this is weird. Not that you want the attention, you're just used to it.

HC: So after the five weeks, it's almost like you go through a type of withdrawal?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Because it's not there?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Oh, that's so strange.

Beggy: Yeah, it definitely is. And it all depends on your experience, sometimes you get away from the five weeks and you're like, I don't want anyone around, for the love of god.

HC: So do you find more often than not that people, after they sort of had that experience, and have gone on these shows, they try to come back to the shows?

Beggy: I think, ah, every case is different. Some people just do the show to do the show. But I think, ah, if you're going to do the show, or did the show to begin with, you'll want to in someway shape or form, do it again, or do something similar.

HC: And, I mean, have you noticed, because you were on one of the first *Road Rules*, right?

Beggy: Yeah, second season.

HC: Second season. Do you notice a difference between the people you were with on that *Road Rules* and the *Road Rulers* and *Real Worlders* that you're seeing now on like *The Gauntlet*?

Beggy: Yeah, largely. Largely. Honestly, you know, I don't know how could properly convey it and I only think it can be truthfully foreseen through my perspective. And I think anyone who has watched it long-term as well could possibly relate. But basically, ah, when I started out it was very much so all about the experience. Really was. And as years have gone by, and reality TV in general has sort of upped the ante on antics and stories. It's changed. The cast has changed. It's more about the rock-star appeal of it all and more about camera-time. I definitely see that. Where people aren't really going on these shows and forming life long bonds. It's more of, 'hey I am famous.'

HC: Okay.

Beggy: So they are definitely choosing these people who will have the mindset of, 'get me famous and I want to cause a lot of drama no matter what.'

HC: So you think they go on sort of having an understanding that if they act a certain way...

Beggy: Yeah.

HC:...they might be more famous?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Or be more successful?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Yeah, definitely. It', you know, to the point where it's all about face-time, camera-time. And I, you know, have first-hand experience, will watch girls cry on cue when the camera walks in the room.

HC: Really?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: And so they are conscious of this and everyone else knows it is going on too? You can be sitting there with somebody and you're like, 'that person is going to cry now because the camera just walked in?'

Beggy: Oh, yeah. Yeah, it's crazy.

HC: Do the people that film it, the interviewers, the producers, the directors do they...

Beggy: No, they know it's coming.

HC: They do?

Beggy: Yeah, they pick these people on purpose. They certainly do.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: I, on the other hand, will do the same thing for humor purposes. I will wait to bust someone's chops until a camera comes around so I can bust someone's chops on-camera.

HC: So everyone sort of has what they do?

Beggy: Sure.

HC: Like maybe, you're the humorous person who can, like, bust someone's chops and another person is going to cry?

Beggy: Yeah

HC: Something like that?

Beggy: Yeah, yeah, certainly have all of that.

HC: And do you think that when they cast for a show like *The Challenge* or *The Gauntlet* and they have experience with everybody, that they try to have a mix of them?

Beggy: Yeah, I think they try and mix it in, yeah, they definitely do. I think also as the years go by, the stranger you name is the more likely you are to get on these shows.

Have you ever noticed that?

HC: What to you mean strange?

Beggy: How weird their names turn, you no like...

HC: No I hadn't noticed that actually.

Beggy: No? Like I did. Well on my season, the season before me it was like Mark, you know? And I am like, Tim and Christian and Emily. And as the years go by it's like Yes and Ace and all the names get more and more bizarre. It's so funny to me because every season will have one or two names that are like, huh?

HC: Do you think those names represent the personalities a little bit too a little bit? Like as far as...because you know the first names you listed off, you can picture these 'everyday,' 'all-American' but just you know, 'everyday people'...

Beggy: Yeah, most people live up to their name. Most people do. If you come across a Bob, you're like that's a Bob. I think I am Tim, I think so.

HC: You seem like a Tim. That's a good thing, right?

Beggy: Yeah [laughing].

HC: So are some people friends with other people where they actually enjoy each other's company and then there some people who won't work with other people?

Beggy: Oh yeah, there's plenty of that. There's plenty of uh ah, 'tell who's going or I am not going. If they're going I am not going. There's plenty of that going on.'

HC: Okay, and who contacts you to go on these shows?

Beggy: Production, the producers.

HC: So, like, Bunim-Murray?

Beggy: Yep, Bunim-Murray will call up.

HC: And they just say? Do they give you much time?

Beggy: They usually check you availability and be like, 'hey, we're going to be filming in June.' And it will be like two months ahead of time, 'are you available?'

HC: Okay.

Beggy: And they probably, if they're going to have twenty people of the show, they will probably ask forty.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Are you available? And then the ones that are available, they will narrow it down.

HC: And so do you think, lets say they ask forty...

Beggy: Yeah.

HC:...how of the many do you think have regular jobs? If you could just guess, like I mean, you know, an accountant or something.

Beggy: Percentage wise?

HC: Yeah.

---Pause---

Beggy: Ah just a guess, probably fifty percent have regular jobs. I am just guessing.

HC: And then the other fifty?

Beggy: Ah, do whatever.

HC: Do whatever?

Beggy: Well, yeah. I would even say that more than, less than forty percent have regular jobs, especially if you're on the Challenges now.

HC: Yeah, the people that they call.

Beggy: Well they're, yeah, the appearances, the public appearances and speaking gigs and...

HC: Yeah...

Beggy:...it has turned into big business. I mean they are public speakers. And certainly there are many managers out there that will book you. And you can pay, and you know these people that come off these shows can easily make three grand week cash...

HC: Really?

Beggy:...just going around country talking.

HC: And do they pay for air travel, hotels and everything?

Beggy: Oh yeah, they pay for everything. Yeah, definitely.

HC: I know they go to colleges and speak. I actually saw Julie from the New Orleans *Real World*, she came and spoke at Georgetown when I was there.

Beggy: oh, wow, yeah.

HC: And, um, you know she talked about her experience as a Mormon on film and you know not to do drugs and this sort of thing.

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: And I also know they go to, like ah, bars too?

Beggy: Sure. Yeah, big time tour.

HC: So, I mean, is there anything else they, any other speaking engagements you might...

Beggy: Well there's certainly, there's appearances in anything. Of course the colleges and their will be malls and amusement parks. Anywhere where crowds of people will be.

HC: So how does that work? What would you expect to do on one of these appearances?

Beggy: I haven't done too many of them.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: But, um, a lot of them are kind of meet-and-greets. It could be as simple as shaking hands. Or you have to give a speech on a certain topic like, 'Julie the Storming Mormon.'

HC: Okay.

Beggy: You know she will talk about that. And, ah, you know then there is, of course, bar tours that go on where a couple of them will go just as promotion to bring people to the bar. Say, 'hey xy and z are coming to the bar tonight.' They'll advertise and a get some people. There is someone named xy and z too...

HC: Yeah, I know.

Beggy: No I am just saying that. But ah, yeah, yeah, if you do a bar tour it's like minimum, minimum five hundred bucks cash a night.

HC: And how many, like, will they have it setup so you hit number of bars a night?

Beggy: Oh yeah, usually.

HC: So they will reserve you time for a certain amount?

Beggy: Yeah, usually you go knockout a city or two.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: and you'll go, you know...

HC: And that will last over how many days would you say?

Beggy: It is all various. Sometimes it is a one-night tour, sometimes people do it for months straight.

HC: Really?

Beggy: Yeah, just go from bar to bar. I certainly haven't done that, but I have friends that have just, that's they have lived on a bus just going from, that's all they have done, like five six nights a week, just going to bars.

HC: And, that's incredible.

Beggy: Yeah, it's baffling.

HC: So do they see their, ah, where do they live when they are doing it? I mean, it almost sounds like they are on tour.

Beggy: Yeah, they are basically on tour.

HC: Okay. And what about things like spring break vacations?

Beggy: yeah, that's huge, big stuff like that. They will take you down to spring break, put you up, go to all the different clubs, events on the beach, meet people.

HC: And is it specifically around MTV's sort of, like, little group of talent, reality-talent there?

Beggy: Oh, yeah.

HC: So you don't see other people from other reality shows. Like you wouldn't see *Survivor* people on it or something?

Beggy: No, usually just that particular tour. Yeah, just MTV. But *Survivor* certainly does there on speaking gigs as well. This isn't MTV or Bunim-Murray doing these speaking gigs. This is just other people whoring out MTV talent.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: So there are agencies that just specialize in going after MTV talent?

Beggy: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Sure.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Yeah, and there are so many different speaking agencies and management companies out there that have everything from magicians to, ah, hypnotists to Barbara Bush, you know, that will grab whatever if they can get them gigs and make money off of them.

HC: And do you hear about, or do you find, that the casts are, people are pretty receptive to this after get off of a *Road Rules* or *Real World*?

Beggy: Ah yeah, very much so. Yeah, because it's kind of like, 'wait I can continue not working? Sign me up.' You know you play your cards right, you also get to see the country.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: They pick a lot of kids, you know they pick a kid from Mississippi and he's only been to two states his whole life and now he's like, 'what, I am getting paid to speak around the country? Yeah, sign me up.'

HC: So, do you know of any that might have done this and kind of put their life on hold to...

Beggy: Oh yeah, lots of people that have done it right, who have socked away big money.

HC: Really?

Beggy: Yep, socked away big money.

HC: Do they at a certain point to some of them decide they want to turn this into an acting career?

Beggy: A lot of them do. A lot of them did. A lot do and did. You know, that comes from the whole reality misconception.

HC: What do you mean misconception?

Beggy: Well, you're put on TV but that doesn't mean you have talent. It doesn't mean you are an actor. Yes, you are on TV but that doesn't mean you can go now be on an episode of friends.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: There is definitely that misconception out there. And, um, with the more popular shows, especially like a *Real World*, if you're a standout on there, you're getting a lot of attention. You go to a Mall, there are twenty people that are going to come up to you that is going to freak you the hell out. You're going to think, all right get a headshot and I am going to LA and get on more TV.

HC: So do a lot of them move to Los Angeles?

Beggy: Lots, yeah. Lots and lots.

HC: Do you notice a difference between the people who first started on these shows and the like you and the people now, I mean, is there a higher proportion that move to LA?

Beggy: Much higher, extremely higher. I think out of the first season of *Road Rules*, speaking of *Road Rules*, two people moved to LA. Second season, my season, two

people moved. Third season, one person moved. Forth season, one person moved. You know, and beyond that, you know, I think it still dwindled to even less. But once it gets up to the higher numbers, like the high eight nine ten, where it's more of like a rock-star, more popular, more popularity, it drives them faster too. Like I said, it changes from the people doing it for the experience, the people doing it to either launch a career.

HC: So, they might look at going on something like, *Road Rules* or *Real World* as an entry point into...

Beggy: Right.

HC:...a certain type of profession.

Beggy: Right.

HC: Into being a celebrity, basically, a certain type of celebrity.

Beggy: Right.

HC: So, why did you, when you wanted to go on it, where were you at in life?

Beggy: I just finished college at Duquesne. I was living out here on the South Side.

And, it honestly, if I could have come up with something I would like to do in life, or my perfect scenario of a life experience I couldn't have written a better option for my self. I mean, it was, of course it was the second season so there had only been one *Road Rules*.

And I had heard of it but I hadn't seen it. And I watched one episode and, um, at the commercial break they advertised: 'hey, if you want to be on this show, apply here, send

in a tape. And I was hooked. I was like, 'this show is great.' You know, because I am very, very much so, I've always enjoyed entertaining. I wanted to work in television or radio and, ah, I am all about adventure, life experience and adventure. And to wrap it all into one big present, it just had my name written all over it.

HC: Did it turn out to be what you expected?

Beggy: Yeah, loved it.

HC: So, you would do it again?

Beggy: Yeah, absolutely. I would leave right now. I'd finish my coffee, I'd take my coffee with me.

HC: And do it all over again?

Beggy: Do it all over again, yeah. It was just that much fun, yeah.

HC: Do you still have that kind of fun when you go on the Challenge shows? Or is it different?

Beggy: ehh, it's a different kind. It's nothing like your first time. You know, with just about everything. So, it's different. The personalities are a little bit more boisterous. And, ah, there's more tension. And, ah, the whole feel of the show has changed. The 'hey this a great experience' has kind of been watered-down.

HC: If you could say, specifically, one thing that has changed the most from like it being this experience to something watered-down...

Beggy: It's very much so. It's more sometimes you feel you're in a glam rock band.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: You know, it's, ah, people making a really big to-do out of it. And ah, when you do these Challenges it's different. Like, I did *Road Rules* fifty-eight years ago and you got people who are fresh off the show. So it is completely different mentalities. You know, some people are waking up in the morning and getting dressed and putting a lot of make-up on and they're ready to be on TV.

HC: Oh, really?

Beggy: Yeah. Then there's other people that are like, 'all right how do we?' There's people fighting to get on camera and then there's people hiding from the camera.

HC: [Laughing] Okay.

Beggy: Like I, and a lot of people there, are more like, 'okay, how do we get away from the camera. I am here to do the show, I know the drill but I want to go snorkeling today.'

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: You know, there have been times where I am like, 'I am hitting the beach, I am going snorkeling.' And they will say 'you are not allowed.' Or, 'you can't leave the house because you have to film today.' I will be like, 'I am an adult. I am going to the beach with my snorkel gear. If you want to fire me and send me home go ahead.'

HC: So can they do that?

Beggy: Yeah, they can.

HC: Do they do that? Do they ever do that with someone who just isn't playing ball?

Beggy: Oh, they will can people. But usually it's for their, their, you'll have a sot who is just ah, you know, a drunkard or all pillled out. There's definitely people who are out of their minds and they bounce them.

HC: And do you see that on the show, or do they just edit that out?

Beggy: Changes, sometimes they are not in it like they never even existed.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: And then sometimes they show them having a meltdown.

HC: But if you say, 'you know, I want to go snorkeling. I haven't been snorkeling in three days, I came here to have some fun, do this stuff.' And they are like, 'we need you

the house because we just need footage of you in the house today.’ And you say, ‘no way, I am out of here.’ They are usually pretty cool about that?

Beggy: Depends on the producer, depends on whose shift it is.

HC: So they have different people who are better work with in that way? Different to work with?

Beggy: There’s some that you’ve done these show for years and years with, ‘like come on man, I am sneaking out the back door, I’ll be at the beach.’ You know?

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: Then there are some that are not lenient and you have to sneak out. Then there are some that you just don’t give a damn, do whatever you want to.

HC: Okay. So, you said when you sort of started this, right, and you went on, um, *Road Rules* you hadn’t really watched much of it...

Beggy: Well, there had only been one season.

HC: Right, and you didn’t really watch much of that season? Or, had you watched most of it? Or...

Beggy: It hadn’t completely aired.

HC: Oh.

Beggy: I had never seen an episode.

HC: Oh, right.

Beggy: I had heard of it.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: You know, probably only a couple episodes had aired.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: And, ah, I watched it.

HC: Okay, do you still watch them now?

Beggy: No.

HC: No?

Beggy: No.

HC: Can you watch them now or does it...

Beggy: Yeah, I just don't, you know I just never owned a TV set.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: And, ah, I don't know, it was probably a trend that started in college with my friends. We never, in the house we lived in all through college, we never for the most part had a TV. Um, even when we did have TV, all my friends have never ever been sit around and watch TV kind of people. Instead of TV, we would play trivia pursuit. There was a group of guys in college, we'd sit around and play trivia pursuit. That was all.

HC: I have friends who do that same thing, yeah.

Beggy: So even now, there are so many things I just fill my time with. The hours just zip away.

HC: Do you think you're an exception, ah, with the group of people who go on *The Real World* or *Road Rules* in that sense? Like, having seen the show, especially the people going on it now...

Beggy: Well now, you know the whole drill. You've seen the show, you know the personalities, yeah.

HC: So, does anyone ever talk about that? Like, 'I know who I am, if I were to pick a cast, what I am like.' Or does everyone just kind of, is there any sort of consciousness that people talk about when you are sitting around.

Beggy: Ah, I think most people pretty much know. There definitely are a couple people there who are really clueless.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: That don't know any better...which is why I am sure they're cast because they pour emotion and pour themselves in a true manner.

Beggy: And you're like, god you're such an idiot.

HC: So, I mean, those people when you see them, their emotions, you'd say they genuinely...

Beggy: Some of them, yeah, have very genuine emotions. And they just caught up in it, and this is who they are and, um, their genuine emotions are coming out.

HC: So when you are asked to, ah, lets say you lose a gauntlet. You know, and you're asked to, 'okay you got to go.'

Beggy: [laugh]

HC: Oh yeah, you made it all the way through.

Beggy: I've never been kicked off.

--- Tim's friend, Sam, joins us ---

Beggy: Sam knows this whole drill, it's all I talk about, right Sam?

Sam: What?

Beggy: *Road Rule, Road Rules*, it's all I talk about with you, *Road Rules, Road Rules*.

HC: Do you get interviewed a lot, or asked to talk about it?

Beggy: Um, yeah I guess...

Sam: On the street all the time.

HC: Really, you've noticed that?

Sam: Yeah, when I go with him, all the time.

Beggy: Depends on where you go. If you're going to a Pirate game of Steeler game, yeah, where there are large crowds of people. If you go to a mall, yeah.

Sam: Don't go to South Hills Village with him at Christmas time [laughing].

HC: So, how many people, I mean if you were just to go, is just one of two or do you get like every ten minutes...

Beggy: It depends on the crowd you get a lot. Mostly just in general, it's a lot of double-takes and a lot of where do I know you from.

Sam: One time we literally had to run with a coat over your head straight outside...

Beggy: That's because I was stealing the coat [laugh].

HC: Is this the first time you guys have seen each other in awhile, or?

Beggy: But it will also spread though. So if there are twenty people in a room, maybe only one will recognize you and they will quickly tell.

HC: Then they'll be like...

Beggy: Right, so it's not like twenty people recognize you, it's one person that recognizes you and then spreads it. So, and it gets to the point when you know its happening. Where you see the person go [imitates someone recognizing him] you know? You know? And you look at them and they'll look away. And they'll [making whispering noises]. You're are just like, 'oh, man.'

HC: So, I mean, does it bother you when that happens?

Beggy: No.

Beggy: I mean, not really. I mean, it depends on the scenario. Not often, but sometimes you do want privacy. You know, whatever you are doing. A lot of times when I am, like, with my parents, and if you're at a Denney's or something like that, you just want to b.s. with your parents and it's just not the right setting.

HC: Do people who go on the show ever end having, like, stalkers or anything like that?

Beggy: Um, yeah sure. Yeah. There's definitely...I don't know about everyone's scenario but I am sure...

HC: But do you see part of the people who have problems with that?

Beggy: Yeah, yeah. Um, yeah there definitely are, especially with technology nowadays you can get a hold of people's information or emails or cell phones, it's not all that problematic.

HC: So, I mean, do they find that it's more in the case of people who go on the shows over and over again or do you think have that problem, or do you just think it could be anybody who has been on the show?

Beggy: It's all in the individual. Anyone who puts themselves in the public eye, at some point I am sure there is someone out there that just flips on a goofy switch.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: I am sure the Snapple lady has had some people harass her.

HC: Well no, I am sure she has.

Beggy: [Laughing].

HC: If you could just like, this a way to wrap-up, what would you say is, um, like, you've sort of told me all the good things about it, lets hear some of the more frustrating, I don't want to say they're bad but...

Beggy: Ah well, you know, I would say ah, I think with how ah, first of all being a social guinea pig certainly is a difficult way to go through life. Um, and also the stigma of being on reality TV for some people is like, 'oh my god' [positive inflection]. And then some people like, 'oh god' [negative inflection].

HC: Yeah?

Beggy: So it's like hey you don't even know me, and you've probably never even seen me on TV and you heard I was *Road Rules*, so now you don't like me. And, also the opposite: you've heard I was *Road Rules* so now you love me. So it's really weird, it's weird like that. And um, I think also with how reality TV has morphed, and has kind of taken over the airwaves, and it has cheapened television. It also, there is a price to pay when you associate with that. Not that I am any, ah, actor, or I do anything ultimately overwhelmingly important in life, but you still get lumped in with a certain crowd of reality folk that you have a bad stigma. You know, the guy picking his nose and putting it in the peanut butter, you'll get lumped in with him.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: In certain cases.

HC: So within the industry, like within Hollywood, right, you say a lot of them move to LA...

Beggy: Yeah.

HC:...to become professional actors.

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Do you find that it's, ah, basically a bad thing to have on your resume?

Beggy: Yes.

HC: It's like a stigma. Like, you won't get hired if you were on a reality show?

Beggy: You know, I did reality TV before it was called reality TV. So it was TV show and it very much so helped me out. It helped me instantly get a FOX Sports job which turned into a History Channel job.

HC: Right?

Beggy: So, that was, you know, almost nine years of my own show. I am very fortunate to be able to do what I wanted to do. But I also firmly believe that if I tried that nowadays, it just not going to happen because there are too many reality shows out there. There's too many weird reality show out there. I think that reality TV can certainly be fun but I think it has cheapened programming, I think it has cheapened the industry and, ah, it has forced a lot of, ah, inferior talent onto the airwaves. Rather than good quality television, it's a lot of people running around with earthworms in their mouth trying to win Sony Playstation.

HC: Right.

Beggy: You know, I feel guilty for being a part of that or associating with it at times but I certainly have chalked-up a lot of experiences and travels because of it.

HC: Would you...

Beggy: It's, ah, the good with the bad.

HC: Would you go on it again, if they called you up, and said, 'do you want to come out in a year?'

Beggy: No, I think I am done. You know, I thought I was done before the last time and then, you know, there is always a way they lure you back.

HC: Is it just, maybe, because it has been a few years and you're like, 'why not?' Or is there anything specific that they...

Beggy: Well, a lot of it is location. You know, I always want to spend a month in a Carribean island, it's pretty tempting. And then, past that, is definitely who you are with. So if there are a bunch of genuine friends who are going, which I know I a going to have a good time with then...

HC: So, they will send you a list? Like, for sure these people...

Beggy: Well, you can also call your friends and say, 'hey are you going?'

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: And they say yes or no and then...

HC: So you keep in touch with people?

Beggy: Yeah, well the ones, you know, you genuinely form bonds with, yeah.

HC: How many of them would you say you're pretty close with, that you would consider real friends?

Beggy: Ah, probably about ten.

HC: Ten?

Beggy: Ten that I consider definitely friends.

HC: Now, are they more from you time?

Beggy: Scattered, definitely scatter. My season, of course, we all have an extremely close bond which I think has diminished since the season's roll have past.

HC: So you don't see that as much?

Beggy: Yeah, I don't see the bonding, I don't see the true friendships that I think last. I don't think too many people are going to be each other's weddings.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: You know?

HC: But if you could pick a year when you really started to see this. Like or just, like, in your experience going on these shows, if you could pick a year when you could sort of say, 'man, that was the year when everything changed, or something like that.'

Beggy: Nah, that's a toughy. I would have to say, I don't know what the year is, but I would have to say when reality TV jumped past MTV. Honestly, when it scattered into other reality shows.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: When it started kicking up your *Survivor's* and *Apprentices* and, ah, *Fear Factors* and all this crap that came about. I think that's when it changed.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: I think that is when the Andy Warhol syndrome kicked in. And, ah, everyone grabbed their fifteen minutes.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: Which, you know, I don't have anything against it. Go at it, have fun. You know change it up a notch. Hop on TV, win some money, get the most out of life.

HC: Sure, sure.

Beggy: So my advice for anybody who goes on reality TV is, get more out of them than they get out of you.

HC: Do you think that happens often, or do you think it's the other way around?

Beggy: No. I don't know, probably the other way around.

HC: How would you do that?

Beggy: Um...

HC: Like, advice for someone who's nineteen and they are going to go on *The Real World* and...

Beggy: Don't.

HC: Don't?

Beggy: [laugh]

HC: Would you let your kids go on *The Real World*?

Beggy: I would let the boys go. The girls, no. Unless, they were mature enough and knew what the hell they were getting into.

HC: Why?

Beggy: Because, I just think for girls in general it's kind of, ah, more difficult. You're, ah, prey to more sharks out there, a naïve girl. And guys can kind of roll with the punches with anything. We're guys, and ultimately don't care too much.

HC: So, do you think that the female cast members, especially the young ones have a harder time. Like, with the drama, or just being away from...

Beggy: Yeah, I think so.

HC:...sort of what they consider to be 'normal' life?

Beggy: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, certainly. But it's certainly on an individual basis as well.

HC: Do you find they get swept up in more than the boys, or would you say it's the same?

Beggy: Yeah, it's the same. Again, it's all in the individual.

HC: Right.

Beggy: But yeah, you can parlay these experiences into ah, and you meet so many unique people. Because of my experiences I have great fortunate hosting TV shows which has lead to experiences themselves on those shows. And then at the same time just meeting people all over the world. And whether it be acquiring free white water rafting trips, or a free round of beer at a local pub...

HC: Yeah.

Beggy:...there's definitely a lot of ways to get more out of it than they get out of you.

HC: Great, okay.

Beggy: But ah, yeah, It will be interesting to see when reality TV dies.

HC: It will. Do you see an end for, specifically MTV's sort of like *Road Rules* Challenge thing, or do you think they will just keep going, does it seem like they have pretty...

Beggy: My answer to that is, I have no clue.

HC: Yeah?

Beggy: When I first did the show, if you were going to ask me, 'are you still going to be doing this in some shape or form ten years down the road?' I would have absolutely said no. I never foresaw that it would keep going.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: It's baffling. And they are bringing back *Road Rules* again.

HC: Oh, they are?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: So, they are going to start it up again?

Beggy: Yeah. It's just like, I just can't believe it would be that much of an identity that people would think of it that way.

--- Side A End ---

HC: So, do you know, like, if they are going to have it in a Winnebago, same sort of...

Beggy: Yeah, that I don't know. I am sure they would.

HC: Have you seen the new, *Fresh Meat* Challenge show?

Beggy: I haven't

HC: Have you heard of this?

Beggy: I haven't seen it. I have certainly heard about it. You know, just from speaking to cast members you hear a good bit.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Yeah, you hear. The one that's, the next one, I even know who won the next one.

The one after *Fresh Meat*, I even know who one the one after that.

HC: Yeah, so they have had two, another *Fresh Meat*...

Beggy: And they filmed one after the *Fresh Meat*.

HC: So how far ahead, if you could guess?

Beggy: It all changes, sometimes they film them back to back to back. They film at least two a year.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Yeah, because the ratings are just...

HC: The ratings are good?

Beggy: Yeah, they are that good.

HC: Do you know which seasons have had the highest ratings? Or...

Beggy: I don't know.

HC: Do they stay about the same?

Beggy: They stay roughly about the same. As far which season and ratings are the highest, I don't know.

HC: You might not know this but with in MTV's schedule, primetime schedule, are they really competitive within all, like compared to something like *The Hills* or *Laguna Beach*?

Beggy: You know, I don't even know. I am too out of touch.

HC: Well, well thank you.

Beggy: Certainly.

HC: I mean, that's great.

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: This has been really good, really informative.

Beggy: I am sure come tomorrow, the next week you'll be, 'damn I wish I asked him xyz.'

HC: I probably will.

Beggy: Just shoot me an email.

HC: Is that okay?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: If I have any follow-up questions?

Beggy: Absolutely.

---Tape recorder turned off and then started again a few minutes later---

Beggy: I've, I've...

Sam: Sixteen fighter jets, you've...

Beggy: Yeah, I've been the speed of sound.

HC: Really?

Beggy: I've opened the Panama Canal, I've ridden bulls at rodeos, I've been on fire.

HC: And this just your experience on all the different shows?

Beggy: Yeah, oh yeah.

HC: Of the shows that you have you been on, aside from the MTV shows, or even including those, do you have a favorite, one that you found to be the most rewarding?

Beggy: Well, my History Channel show certainly was my favorite. It was ah hands-on technology show.

Sam: He's kind of the Cliff Claven of...

Beggy: [Laughing] I'm kind of the Cliff Claven of reality TV.

Sam: He's kind of like a cooler hipper Cliff Claven.

HC: I liked Cliff Claven.

Sam: I liked him too, I think he's real cool.

HC: Yeah, I think he's really cool.

Beggy: I actually worked with him. I have a picture of him on me.

HC: You worked with Cliff Claven?

Beggy: Thee Cliff Claven. You like Cliff Claven?

HC: Yeah sure, I like Cliff Claven.

Beggy: I'll email it to you.

HC: And did you get that Sidekick for free when you went on the show? Do they give out that kind of swag, or anything?

Beggy: Yeah, you definitely get all kinds of swag. Definitely get all kinds but, ah, yeah like this was...

HC: Yeah, I'd love you to email it if you...

Beggy: Sure.

Beggy: [Showing me the picture on his Sidekick] That's Cliff right there.

HC: Let me see that.

Beggy: We did a sitcom together. I had the great fortune that I've been able to do some sitcom work. Not for auditioning, just because people have asked me, 'hey, can you hope on a sitcom for an episode.'

HC: So it was this sitcom?

Beggy: This one was called, *Rodney*.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: And, ah...

HC: Did you get picked up?

Beggy: [Laughing] That's the funny part, it's been on for years. I said the same thing.

HC: [Laughing] What channel was it on?

Beggy: It was on ABC.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: And, ah, it just got canceled like a month or two ago. And yeah, that, when they asked me to be on it, I was like, 'oh, okay, so when will it start airing?' And there like, 'well, it's been on for two years.' And I'm like, 'oh, okay.' [Laughing] No one has heard of it.

HC: But he said there were people trying to imitate what you were doing?

Beggy: Here [showing me picture on Sidekick].

HC: Oh wow, yeah that's really cool.

Beggy: I specifically have had a lot of guys who were in the same shoes as me on shows after mine aired. And they really are, many of them from different seasons have called me up and been like, 'hey, I want to do what you've done.' You know, 'how did you do it?' Management, auditioning, what's your technique and what have you. And ah, I think it was just more of timing with myself.

HC: So yeah, because you said you didn't think they would be able to do it now because there's this stigma attached to ah...

Beggy: Yeah it's more of, 'hey you're a reality person you're not a TV host.'

Sam: It's not just that, you're a hard worker.

Beggy: Well, I definitely, I mean, it's a lot of knocking on doors and it's a lot of you know, swinging the bat, you'll get the balls pitched to you, you got to hit them.

HC: Do you find the people who go on now maybe don't have that same sort of, I don't know, work ethic is the right thing, but don't expect to do what you've had to do?

Beggy: I think definitely, it is a craft. I mean, from my angle it's hosting. I am not an actor;

I am a TV host, big difference.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: But it's a craft. You have to be able to interview. You have to be able to interact on-camera, not run around with a mouthful of earthworms. You have got to be able to interview people, talk to people, deliver lines, look appropriate, the whole ball of wax. There's a talent to it.

HC: Are there some people who just have 'it,' when you see them on these shows?

Beggy: Sure. Oh yeah, yeah.

HC: And some who, like, because, when I talked to Susie she said that they would go through the interviews over and over again sometimes. Like it would be a whole schedule they would setup. It's like, 'okay Susie, I am going to interview you at three,'

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: or something like this...

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: ...and take you out to some place where they had their cameras setup. And you would just be interviewed.

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: And it was almost like they were taking takes, or something.

Beggy: Oh, absolutely. Yeah

HC: And so, is that what you're talking about when you say sort of an ability to express yourself?

Beggy: Yeah, more of, more like being a TV host, being a news anchor or being on the sidelines for a sports show. Anything like that, I mean there's a talent to it. I studied it in college. I wanted to be radio DJ, I interned at the radio station...

HC: So you had background going into this?

Beggy: I had a background but I wanted to. During the interview process, I said, 'this is what I want to do with my life, I want to be a TV host.'

HC: And how many people, or do you know anybody else who has a background?

Like the kind of background you can into MTV with...

Beggy: Not many, definitely not many.

HC: Not many?

Beggy: Yeah, definitely not.

HC: How many of would say have actually completed college?

Beggy: Oh, that's a great question. I know most don't. Most definitely put it off. Yeah that's the sweet spot, that's right around the college, you know, early twenties when they hit you. And most people don't come back and finish. It's funny how it can side-track peoples lives.

HC: If you could guess how many people go on there now, as opposed to when you did it, go on there now and lets say, as you said it's a sweet spot...

Beggy: I'd say half of them postpone finishing college.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Yeah, either don't finish or at least postpone it.

HC: And that's to go on and do more...

Beggy: Yeah, to keep doing the madness and yeah.

HC: Is it competitive to get on *The Gauntlet* shows?

Beggy: Yeah. Yeah, people want on, they definitely want on. Especially if you've just coming off the shows too, you want, ah, to keep riding the rollercoaster.

HC: So, that's a preferred place to be, to being doing this?

Beggy: Oh, yeah.

HC: That's like you're on top, if you're on these shows?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: I saw one where, I think his name was Derek, and he was from your *Gauntlet*, really intense guy. Ah, he was, they had one of those behind-the-scenes where they interviewed him. Some guy interviewed him who I think was on a *Road Rules* once.

Beggy: Okay.

HC: He was kind of funny guy...

Beggy: Right, right, Blair.

HC: Blair, right, okay, and he asked him like, you know, 'did you like this or whatever?' And Derek kept referencing it like work and how you're privileged to be on these shows. And would you say that he's one of those people who you said was really intense and their emotions are real?

Beggy: Yeah, he definitely is.

HC: He's one of those guys?

Beggy: Yeah, and he's one of those who got roped-up into, 'how do I become a movie star?'

HC: Yeah?

Beggy: Yeah, he definitely is ah...

HC: So he wants to parlay this something...

Beggy: Yeah, he wants to be in movies. It happens, when you get that much attention.

HC: Yeah?

Beggy: I've been with Derek in many scenarios and he will get ten times more attention than I will. You know, he's younger and off a more recent season.

HC: Yeah?

Beggy: And I have been in malls with him. And I've, I will go to a mall and five people will recognize me, and fifty will recognize Derek. You know?

HC: Yes.

Beggy: It's crazy.

HC: And does he sort of expect that and have that persona that he puts on when people recognize him? I don't mean, like, act a different way, I just mean...

Beggy: From what I've seen, not really – surprisingly. He puts on a persona when he's on-camera.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: He's a lot more, you know, sort of the wife-beater comes out.

HC: Yeah, he seems really ultra-masculine...

Beggy: Like I said about egos, and, ah, trying to be a dominant person, and, ah, competitive. And yeah, it really comes down to egos. But off-camera he not really like that.

HC: So he's a little more laid-back?

Beggy: Yeah, but when it's on-camera it's all [makes a groaning noise]. I don't really get into that stuff.

HC: All right, can you think of anyone else you would put into that category?

Beggy: But Blair, by the way, is a great, great person. He specifically, like, when I met him, he got down on his shoulders and was like, 'hey, I want to do what you want to do and what have you.'

HC: What season was he on? He was on *Road Rules*...

Beggy: Yeah, he was on, ah, nine or ten. But he's, I think he's got great talent. He wants to be a TV host and I think he will be.

HC: So do you think they will bring him on to do, um, to do like a *Gauntlet* thing?

Beggy: I don't think that he'll do it. He doesn't want to be seen as that, he wants to be in TV.

HC: Because he was hosting this little thing where he interviewed, did he interview you?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Yeah, okay. And what about T.J. Lavin? Is he on it again? Is he just the new host?

Beggy: Yeah, they pick one. They pick a gen-x-er-type, alternative person and they cast them as a host.

HC: And are they around a lot, or do they...

Beggy: Oh, not too much.

HC:...just kind of show up?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: And do their little shtick and leave?

Beggy: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah.

HC: But they are not sequestered in the house in anyway?

Beggy: No, they're not even in the house, yeah. They keep separate.

HC: Oh, and just, do they pay you?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: So, you get paid is it like, ah, you don't need to tell me how much, but is it worth it to go on the show if you don't win?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: So, you do get compensated.

Beggy: Yes.

HC: Okay, all right.

Beggy: So, yeah, that certainly has a lot to do with it.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: Because, you know, even you're going for one day you're getting paid and you're like, 'all right, hey.'

HC: Would that...

Beggy: A lot of people will just go for a day and have plans to be kicked off or leave just because they are going to make a quick buck and go home.

HC: Like that one girl, who I think is Australian, who was there the first day.

Beggy: Like, Jo, yeah.

HC: Like some put something in her bed, or something. Didn't they mess with her bed?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: And she literally was gone that day.

Beggy: I am sure. She's got a lot of problems. She's, ah, her babysitter was Sybil. And, ah, she, ah, either she was crazy, was on drugs or wanted the camera attention. Or a combination of all of these, just definitely something was off its rocker.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Yeah, I have contacted, ah, Cara and Beth. Susie gave me both their emails. So I am looking forward to hopefully, she said that Beth may not get back to me because she can be kind of busy or flighty or something like that.

Beggy: [sigh] Ah, Beth.

HC: But, I would love to talk with her just because she seems to have been on it, I mean she was on in L.A. *The LA Real World*.

Beggy: Oh yeah, she's...

HC: She's been on this stuff forever.

Beggy: I mean it's the lifestyle for her. She's been on so many of these Challenges. She's probably done, I am guessing, six of seven Challenges.

HC: Do some people try to do other reality gigs, like that show *Kill Reality*?

Beggy: Sure, yeah.

HC: You know that movie, do they, you know girl Tara? I think her name is Tara. She's blond. She's from *Real World Chicago*.

Beggy: Oh yeah, yeah, what's ah...

HC: I could be wrong about her, I could have mistaken her name. But she was in *Kill Reality*, she's been on bunch of stuff.

Beggy: Yeah, hold on real quick [checking sidekick]...this is, ah...

HC: Oh, I can ah...

Beggy: Well, this is my WQED...

---Tape recorder turned off then restarted after asking Tim about how more recent casts interact with older casts ---

HC: Repeat what you just said. So...

Beggy: It's a strange concept of, because reality TV spans so many years and when you come back to do any type of reunion or Challenge-type shows, someone who will recently been recently cast in, or cast in years later, will look upon the people they used

to watch and, I guess, admire, if you will, when they were a non-cast member. Now they are a cast member, you are put in the same bubble but they don't, will still look at you not as an equal cast member, but as wow the person who they saw on TV years before. So kind of like the girl who works behind the counter at The Gap, you're still that girl going, 'woe, isn't that such and such?' And 'wow!' You know, they are kind of admiring other people, whereas they are the equal.

HC: So, will they come up to you and act like a star struck...

Beggy: Yeah, yeah sure. It's funny.

HC: Really?

Beggy: It's really weird. It's really strange. Ah, even, I remember, when we were filming our original season of *Real World*, when we had the good fortune of, *Road Rules*, sorry, when we had the good fortune of staying in hotel rooms sometimes because we would be in the city or for photoshoots or whatever. You'd be in the middle of taping *Road Rules*, and some of our cast members would be glued to the *Real World*.

HC: Really?

Beggy: Like watching, like, 'oh my god, that such and such.' And I'd be looking at them like, 'you're make one of these shows right now.' Like they, it was so weird to see them as, like, a fan of the show while they are filming the show.

HC: Now would they have preferred to be on *The Real World*, as opposed, I mean did some people...

Beggy: I think, yeah, I mean, it's not cut and dry but I think a lot of people, our people, would rather be on *Real World* because of the more popularity. But most *Road Rulers* are hardcore *Road Rulers*, like want to be on *Road Rules*.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: You know, very much so for the adventure. Like, I specifically applied for *Road Rules*.

HC: Okay, so you apply for one or the other, you don't apply for, or you can apply for both and...

Beggy: You apply for, usually you apply for one or the other and then they will certainly mix and match. And there have been definite arguments over, huge blowouts between *Real World* and *Road Rules*' casting and production people over specific members. Like, 'we want him *Road Rules*, no we want him on *Real World*.' Yeah, there definitely are.

HC: Do you ever talk to the producers about how they pick people?

Beggy: Sure, yeah.

HC: And do they, I mean, you said sort of that they want people who maybe have drama and things like this but...

Beggy: Ratings. Ratings and also, definitely, definitely combination.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Definitely they match people up: 'I bet that person will hookup with that person, and I bet that person will fight with that person, this person is better here and yeah.'

HC: Do they ever think about them in the context of, just from you talking with producers and directors of *Road Rules* and *The Real World* and the Challenges, um, do they ever think about them in the context of other actors? Like, 'well that person is going to be like Ace' or 'that person will be more like ah...' Do you know what I mean?

Beggy: Well, maybe not specific words, ah, specific people. Probably like, 'well she looks like the drama, she'll be the drama queen and he'll be the angry stuck-up whatever.'

HC: Okay.

Beggy: You know? They will definitely place you in those categories. So I think people kind of know themselves and expect to be cast as that person as well.

HC: When they cast, have you noticed that the process of being cast, or have you heard that it is different than when you did it as far as like the number of interviews you have to do, the things you have to fill out.

Beggy: You know, I don't know, good question. I think it's pretty much the same.

HC: Did you have to sign a contract?

Beggy: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

HC: What were like some of the...Susie told that her contract limited things like, if she made money off of appearances afterwards she would had to give some of it to...

Beggy: Oh, really? See, back in my day there weren't appearance so that...

HC: Not appearances. I think it was commercials. Like, if she got any commercial fame she had to give some of it to, like a larger portion actually.

Beggy: Wow.

HC: Like, she said she only got a few hundred dollars.

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: It was only for a few years.

Beggy: Wow. Yeah, my contract wasn't like that. It just wasn't as popular of a show. Or wasn't, there weren't, you weren't being utilized outside the show. You did *Road Rules*, *Real World* and that was it. No speaking gigs, no commercials.

HC: That didn't exist then is what you are saying?

Beggy: Well no one really did the math.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: No one, you know, Gap or Old Navy didn't think, 'wow, use these people in an ad.'

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: It just wasn't there.

HC: So, but now, I mean, does Bunim/Murray forward their information to these different agents?

Beggy: No, the agents come and grab you for sure. Yeah, they definitely do. But, Bunim/Murray will also steer you to certain ones they work with as well.

HC: So they have ones they prefer to work with?

Beggy: Yeah, for sure. So, yeah, it's definitely crossed the gap over the years from just being MTV to being utilized in different commercials, or what have you. It is, I mean, you're on TV and they repeat the hell out of it and basically reality TV makes you the most popular person at Burger King.

HC: [Laughing] That's a good quote.

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: So if you were going to, so I know there's Jason Murray and Mary...

Beggy: John.

HC: Oh, is it John?

Beggy: John, yeah.

HC: Oh, John Murray. Have you met them?

Beggy: Oh, sure yeah. Oh, god yeah.

HC: Do they have a lot of hands on sort of, I know Mary Ellis Bunim passed away.

Beggy: Yeah, yeah.

HC: And I know, one she worked on soap operas...

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: and he did more like documentary film work.

Beggy: Yep, yep.

HC: So, ah, between the two did they both seem to, ah, was it a collaboration or was one more...

Beggy: Yeah, very much so a collaboration. Very, very much so – I think they're immensely talented and just really kind of changed TV.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: When you think about it, they really started the spark.

HC: Yeah.

Beggy: They were visionaries. Um, when they came up with concept of *Real World* and it just kind of morphed into other shows. And they have *Simple Life* and they have, what else do they have out there, *Starting Over*. They have many reality shows. Of course, *Real World* being their biggest. But they had a vision. And they kind of saw where TV could be, could go, and they drove it there.

Beggy: So even now, though, when you're doing *Gauntlet 2*, are they on-location sometimes? Do they show up or...

Beggy: Sometimes they show up. Usually the people who have been working for decade right underneath them show up.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: I mean, they are older now. Mary Ellis has passed on. John has, ah, has adopted a kid. Wow, how old is John now, he's probably in his fifties.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: That's not old.

HC: No, but I guess when he started he seemed like a much younger guy.

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Just kind of...

Beggy: Yeah, so...and they also have so many shows they can't be everywhere.

HC: And the, sort of, producers and the directors and the people who do lighting sometimes they are the same, sometimes they are not?

Beggy: Ah yeah, they change it up. But a lot of people, ah, come around and, ah, they stick to being reality genre.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: They make their, the light of their career is being a cameraman for reality TV.

HC: And they've worked on other shows too, not just, like, *The Real World*.

Beggy: Oh yeah, yeah. Actually I did a show called *The Eco Challenge*.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: Which was, um, Mark Burnett's expedition race.

HC: I remember hearing about that, did you like working with Mark Burnett?

Beggy: Yeah.

HC: Was he different in anyway than like, Bunim/Murray?

Beggy: He was great. Oh, as compared to Bunim/Murray?

HC: Yeah, just styled differently. Was there any differences that you noticed?

Beggy: He's more intense. I mean, he's much more of an intense adventurous person.

Push it to the limit, um, rather capturing the full human, um, spectrum.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: The waves of emotions which Bunim/Murray captures, someone like Mark Burnett goes for the peaks, goes for driving people to the peak of competitiveness. Or, um, just, um, self-preservation with a show like *Survivor*.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: So he's a pretty intense guy, but a very nice guy.

HC: Who were you on that show with?

Beggy: Adam, from *Road Rules*, Jenna, from *Survivor*, Ethan, from, ah, *Survivor: Africa*.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: So, we had reality team. And that was pretty neat to see one of the cameraman for that, *Eco Challenge*, was one my cameraman I traveled with on *Road Rules*.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: And so, and actually, he went to W and J and was quite a refreshing face.

HC: He went to WMJ?

Beggy: W and J?

HC: What is that?

Beggy: The college, W and J? You never heard of that?

HC: No, I haven't. WMJ.

Beggy: W and J.

HC: WNJ.

Beggy: Washington Jefferson, W and J.

HC: Well, okay.

Beggy: So that's pretty cool to see how...

Sam: W and J

Beggy: W and J.

HC: Have you done any other, aside for *The Eco Challenge*?

Beggy: Ah, nope that's it.

HC: All right.

Beggy: Cool.

HC: That's so interesting.

Beggy: [Laughing] I hope it helped.

---Tape turned off then restarted once Tim began talking about moving back to

Pittsburgh---

HC: Okay, so go ahead. You were telling me about Pittsburgh and...

Beggy: I would love to come back and work in Pittsburgh in anyway shape or form that, ah, I think the city itself certainly watches a lot of reality television. There's a very high level of reality viewers in Pittsburgh. And I think they are quite...

---Sam leaves to put a quarter in the meter---

Beggy:...I think Pittsburgh is very receptive to the fact that I have pretty much just been a Pittsburgher on TV and I have showcased my passion for the city and how much I love being from the city. And I think hopefully that can translate into some kind of career in Pittsburgh. I would love to back into media here, whether it be TV or radio. And I think it would be a rather warm welcome reception from, I wouldn't even say fans, I would say just the friends who have watched me on TV over the years.

HC: Do you think that would translate into other people's success too? Like other *Real Worlders* and *Road Rulers* if they maybe targeted local media markets for, you know, work? Or do they do that?

Beggy: I don't know because the work you're looking for would be reporter or a journalist or a DJ or what have you. You know most of them are not really into that field.

HC: Okay.

Beggy: I don't think it's too sexy to a person that goes on a reality show, 'ooh I get to be reporter.' I don't think they have that desire.

HC: Radio talk show...

Beggy: Yeah, I don't think that's really...

HC: So their dream job, if you could just, like, throw out an example of, like, what do you think Derek would love to do? If you could say, 'Derek, you can write your ticket into celebrity what would you be?'

Beggy: He would want to be the next Claude Van Damnit.

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