The Truth Behind Reality Television

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty
of
Drexel University
by
Pen-u-sa Ruangrak
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of
Master of Science in Television Management
June 2016
Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my thesis advisor Professor Dave Culver at Drexel University because without him, I would never have been able to finish my thesis. Professor Culver was always encouraging me to try my best and always told me that I could finish my thesis on time if I put my mind into it. He gave me wonderful advice and directed me in the right direction whenever I felt lost.

I would like to thank our Academic Adviser and Program Director of Television Management Program at Drexel University, Professor Albert Tedesco, who believed in me and allowed me to start my master degree on Television Management. I am grateful for it.

My sincere appreciation is extended to the owner and workers at a production company in Philadelphia who allowed me to do my internship, interviews and observations for my study.

Special thanks go to all of classmates at Drexel University, especially Carlo Angelo Hernandez, Jingyu Yan, and Xiaojing Fang whom have always been there and encouraged me whenever I need it.

Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to my parents, my brothers and my fiancé, who have been providing me with boundless love and support throughout my years of study at Drexel University. I would not have this accomplishment without them. Thank you so much. I love you.
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Abstract

The Truth Behind Reality Television

Pen-u-sa Ruangrak

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the level of authenticity behind the process of creating reality television shows. This study focused on production and post-production processes, and content manipulation before airing the show on television. The study conducted observations and interviews with a small sample group of experts in producing reality television in a small production company located in Philadelphia. Observation notes were written on papers and interviews were recorded on mobile phone. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that there is still authenticity in reality television shows, but it is not completely pure truth. Events in reality television are often manipulated to benefit celebrities and participants on the shows. Small production companies have limited time, ability, and budget to create reality television shows compared to larger production companies. Because of a money factor, it was concluded that small production companies often apply more intensive and invasive manipulation techniques than large production companies since the smaller production companies may have less budget to create effective reality television shows than larger production companies.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The television industry is a competitive industry when it comes to revenue stream. A new study from Nielsen reviews that the monthly television viewership in the U.S. is 283 million, which is more than two thirds of the population in the country (313 million) (Thielman, 2014). Moreover, according to Thielman (2014) an average hour of each person watching television is 146 hours per month. There are so many networks and channels available for the audiences and these channels serve various niches in the industry as well. It is not only traditional television that is a competitive business, but also streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime that have become popular nowadays. The television networks are trying to make as much money as they can to survive in this industry, which means that they need commercial spots on their channel in order to generate revenue. According to the creator of Law and Order, “television basically is about one thing and one thing only. It provides the life support system for the commercial” (Bill Guttentag: The Reality of Documentary Film, 2008). With this in the network’s minds, they know that their customer’s products and brands require commercial spots in decent shows that are popular enough to attract viewers since they need as many as people they can get to viewing their commercial on television.

As a result, networks are seeking and making television shows that are able to draw viewers to their channel, which sometimes cost a lot of money. However, that is not the only solution that they have. Another possible solution would be to cut the cost of creating television shows yet still create content that draws a great amount of viewers to their channel. Thus, many networks and production companies who produce television
programs, are trying to cut the corner in order to gain as much revenue as possible. Reality television shows are great candidate for this purpose, since it is one of the most popular genres of programming on television and can be produced at a low-cost. Therefore, viewers now see a lot of reality shows on television. S. Shyam Sundar, a founder of the Media Effects Research Laboratory at Penn State University Park states in Why We're Obsessed with Reality TV that reality television has become viewer’s favorite shows because they think that reality television is more attractive and real than other television genres (McDermott, 2012).

The Oxford dictionary (2014) states “Reality television is a genre of television programming that documents unscripted situations and actual occurrences, and often features a previously publicly unknown cast. The genre often highlights personal drama and conflict to a much greater extent than other unscripted television such as documentary shows”.

While reality television shows are in the limelight, a controversial topic in society is whether the reality television shows are unscripted and contain untruthful content. People are wondering how much truth there is in reality television, and question if reality television can manipulate people’s thought.

Therefore, this case study will analyze how much truth there is in reality television especially production process, and how raw material develops in post-production before airing the show on television. This study will uncover the truth behind reality television production practice, and contribute the knowledge of practical editing in reality television to the people in the television industry who want to achieve a better understanding in this field.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The popularity and success of reality television with viewers and programmers has come with criticism as to the authenticity of its content in the public eyes. This problem could affect audiences of reality television because they might not understand whether the content is real or altered.

Today, there are many reality television shows currently on air, and viewers can find them on every channel. Reality television became part of pop culture. Many viewers turn into reality television fans. TV by the number (TV by the number, 2015) reported that during primetime broadcast on the week ending July 5, 2015, 52% of top 25 television shows were reality television shows among 18-49 years old viewers. America’s Got Talent were the top rated reality television show among 18-49 years old viewers and total viewers. Reality television is not a fresh genre in the United States. A chart below illustrates rating of top 20 television shows among 18-49 years old viewers on July 5, 2015.
It is crucial to clarify the definition of reality television programming for this case study. Ouellette and Murray (2009) believe that reality television programming is “an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real” (p. 3). According to Hill (2005), reality television programming is “a catch-all category that includes a wide range of entertainment programmes about real people. Sometimes called
popular factual television, reality TV is located in border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama” (p. 2). Kavka (2012) considers reality television programming “to be exemplary of television genre owing to the ease with which it mixes fictional and documentary forms, soap operas and game shows, talk shows and advertising platforms—all without losing its legibility as ‘reality TV’” (p. 7). Reality television show is one of the genres that combines fictional and documentary forms about real people and situations. It is also a great advertising channel.

This literature review will address three areas of research related to the authenticity of reality television programming. The first section will address research studies related to the history and trends of reality television programming. The second section will focus on why television networks keep on producing reality television programming. Finally, the third section will discuss research related to criticisms about reality television programming.

2.1 History and trends of reality television

Before the current reality television shows started, quiz shows, talent competitions, talk show, and documentaries were the pioneers of “reality” television programming. Many experts pointed out that Candid Camera, An American Family (PBS), and The Family (BBC) were fundamental as the basis for expansion of reality television programming (McCarthy, 2004). Miller (2007) believed that reality television began when Queen for a Day (1951), Candid Camera (1948) and I’d Like to See (1948) aired in the late of 1940s. However, DeVoLLD (2011) argued that even though numerous scholars would agree with
the media scholars mentioned above, at least one scholar would say that *The Original Amateur Hour*—a talent search programming was the first reality show that aired several months of the same year before *Candid Camera*.

Later, a television show called *The Dating Game (1966)* was considered as the first dating show genre for reality television programming (Flores, Glouner, & Tomback, n.d.). Huff (2006) stated, “The show was a contest of sorts among a group of amateurs who display their goofy and often absurd talents” (p. 16).

The demand for reality television programming continued to flourish among Americans. In 1973, *An American Family*, aired on PBS and had spectacular viewership and brought tens of millions Americans to watch the show at that time (DeVOLL, 2011). Mead stated in TV Guide in 1973, “*An American Family*’s “reality” format, was “as new and significant as the invention of the drama or the novel—a new way in which people can learn to look at life, by seeing the real life of others interpreted by the camera” (DeVOLL, 2011, 16).

During the 1988 Writers Guild of America strike, reality television programming was the only hope for the networks to air the fresh shows to the viewers. *COPS* and *America’s Funniest Home Videos* were aired (DeVOLL, 2011, p. 17).

Surprisingly, the reality television genre established one of its first major successes when *The Real World* on MTV aired in the 1990s. *The Real World* established the reality television genre. According to Thompson, “*The Real World*” introduced a whole new way of telling stories, as innovative and influential, in its own way, as the development of the novel” (Thompson, 2012).
However, the groundbreaking beginning of modern reality television started in 2000 when Big Brother and Survivor aired on television (Klien, 2014). They proved to Americans and television executives that reality television shows could deliver viable content without actors. All they needed were the participants in the shows (Sanneh, 2014). Huff (2006) said that Survivor had succeed in terms of making advertisers believe that it was not the end of reality television programming and it could work while there were many similar shows on the market (Huff, 2006, p. 19).

Moreover, the huge success of Survivor from CBS paved the way for the networks to continue producing shows in the same genre. Ouellette and Murray (2004) state “By early 2003, the staying power of the genre and the success of hit shows like American Idol, The Bachelorette, and Joe Millionaire convinced networks to make long-term plans for reality TV and its accompanying business strategies” (p.6).

In the past few years, many reality television shows have reached popularity. Today, the most popular and Emmy Awarded reality television shows are The Voice, The Amazing Race, Dancing with the Stars, Project Runway, So You Think You Can Dance, and Top Chef (Television Academy, 2014). According to TV Guide, almost one-third of the most popular current TV shows are reality television programming (TV Guide Most Popular Shows, 2015). Moreover, TV by the Numbers, a website that collects and analyzes rating from Nielsen, released analyses of ratings and total viewers on primetime schedules among adult 18-49 ending July12, 2015—nine out of top ten most rated and watched are reality television shows including America’s Got Talent, Celebrity Family Feud, Bachelorette, Big Brother, American Ninja Warrior, Master Chef, and Hollywood Game Night.
However, there was a study showed that reality television shows have reached their post-booming period. CivicScience (“CivicScience | Insight Report: Declines and Audience Shifts – The Unscripted Truth About Reality TV Viewership”, 2015) reported that from quarter three 2013 to quarter four 2014, viewership of super fans who watch reality television shows more than five hours per week has declined from 18% to 14% respectively; viewership of moderate watchers who watch reality television shows from one to five hours has also declined from 39% to 33% respectively.

2.2 Genres of reality television

Many subgenres in reality television shows depend on style and particular techniques in production of the shows. In the early life of reality television genres, it was mostly about real footage related to authority enforcement, lifestyle, and homemade unintentional comedy footage. Nowadays, it is about everything that has distinctive stories.

Hill, Weibull, and Nilsson (2007) recommend that there are five subgenres in reality television including “infotainment, often about crime or emergency services; docusoaps, often about institutions or groups of people; lifestyle, often about making over someone’s home or personal appearance; and reality gameShows, often about an experiment with a group of people, or situation. We would now add life experiment programmes to this group” (p. 18). On the other hand, DeVOLLD (2011, p. 27) suggests that there are seven subgenres including:

1. Documentary or Docu-Series
2. Reality Competition: Elimination
3. Makeover/Renovation

4. Dating

5. Hidden camera/Surveillance/Amateur Contest

6. Supernatural, Travel/Aspirational.

However, an article on The Washington Post was written by Yahr, Moore and Chow (Yahr, Chow & Moore, 2015) who believe that there are more subgenres than the experts mentioned above. They propose ten subgenres of reality shows, which are categorized by their popularity among audiences. Starting with the most powerful subgenre, competing for prices subgenre where most participants don’t need talent but strategy would do. Survivor, Big Brother, and The Amazing Race are examples of this subgenre. Secondly, talent competitions subgenre where participants compete against each other for prices by using their talents or abilities to do something, for instance The Voice, American Idol, So You Think You Can Dance, and America’s Next Top Model. Thirdly, dating and love subgenre is about searching for the right one. Examples include The Bachelor, Temptation Island, and Millionaire Matchmaker. Fourthly, family subgenre is about following celebrity or personality lives, for example, The Osbournes, Keeping Up With the Kardashians, and Duck Dynasty. Fifthly, autobiographical subgenre is for personalities who have image problems. Examples include The Anna Nicole Show, Kathy Griffin: My Life on the D-List, and Being Bobby Brown. Next is ridiculous people subgenre where these shows require a group of people whose lives fill with drama, for instance, The Simple Life, The Real Housewives of Orange County, and Jersey Shore. Next, life improvement subgenre is about helping people to improve themselves in some kind of way, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, and The Biggest Loser
are the examples. Following with businesses and careers subgenre is the shows that are following some interesting business or certain kind of jobs, such as Deadliest Catch, Say Yes to the Dress, and Pawn Stars. Going back to candid camera era, hidden camera and trickery consist in these groups of subgenre as well, for instance Joe Millionaire, Punk’d, and Undercover Boss. Last but not least, wives subgenre where the shows are about trading wives, Trading Spouses and Wife Swap are examples in this subgenre.

2.3 Why television networks keep on producing reality television

The main factor that makes reality television shows popular among networks is the low cost of production. Producing a reality television show is less expensive than other genres on prime time programming, such as scripted drama. Richard Crew (2009) stated in The Economic and Business Realities of Reality Television, “Fictional programs such as comedies and dramas require highly talented writers, actors, sets, studios, and specialized production personnel. By comparison, nonfiction reality shows use smaller crews, have fewer paid performers, and require less studio and set time”. According to Stelter (2014), the cost of producing a reality television show can be as low as $200,000 for a half-hour episode; however, it applies to a reality television show that does not have stars or celebrities in the show. It is less than an hour long scripted show that may cost $1 million or more.

Moreover, a report from Writers Guild of America West found that “the average pay range for reality writers was $2,000 to $2,500 per week” (Goodwin Simon Victoria Research, 2007). While the pay rate for a writer with a contract of at least 20 weeks was
$3,703 per week (TV Writers Make Pretty Impressive Salaries, 2013). Obviously, the networks save a lot of money in writer salaries when the writers are working in reality television.

Joyner (2010) agreed with Stelter on the point of low-cost production, and also pointed out that reality television shows not only produce at lower costs, but also allow for better product placements which generate revenue for the networks. For instance, *American Idol* devoted its show to Ford, AT&T and Apple iTunes. *Survivor*’s contestants are frequently rewarded with snacks and well-known beers. “This in-show placement accompanies regular commercial breaks, and increases the value of advertisement for sponsors” (Joyner, 2010). Rose (2014) also agreed with Joyner in term of product placements.

Furthermore, Elliott (2013) believed that it is easier to promote products in reality television shows, since the contestants are freer to promote products than are the actors in scripted television shows who may be contracted to endorse similar brands. Additionally, it is more realistic and tolerant if viewers see the products in actual place settings such as reality television show scenes.

CNBC reported that in 2011 reality television shows in primetime slots were the front-runners for product placement as a part of integrating brands by placing brands and products with the storylines and themes of the shows. It is because Nielsen reported that the viewers tend to remember those product placements on reality television shows more than those on scripted television shows (Weinberger & O'Dell, 2012). Justin Ricketts, a CEO of Ensemble who specializes in creating brand’s strategies, noted in an interview with News.com.au “In order to connect with consumers, brands need to get inside that
content and reality TV formats give brands permission to do this. So from an advertiser’s perspective, it’s massively important. It’s working and so naturally you’re going to find more and more brands wanting to be a part of it” (Stephenson, 2011).

2.4 Criticisms about reality television

Truth in reality television is always a controversial topic. Some people may think that stories that they have seen on reality television shows are true, especially younger viewers. However, many people know that the reality television shows that they watched are not totally accurate. MSNBC discovered that 82% of viewers believed that reality television shows are scripted, or at the very least distorted (TODAY.com, 2005). It is being called “reality” television shows because some portions of them are real. However, the purpose of reality television shows is to entertain the viewers, so during the production of those shows, staging and editing need to be done. According to Clive Tulloh (Brown, 2004) in The Truth Behind Reality TV, The Guardian’s article “Reality television has become like sitcoms, there is no magic wand. You have to have perfect casting, scripts and timing, and scheduling. There’s no alchemy to it.” Moreover, Jennifer Pozner (2010) discovered during her research that some reality television shows are scripted, and others may have only plots for the actors in which it is up to them to improvise their conversations. The producer of Big Brother and Fear Factor, J. Rupert Thompson (2009) admitted that “Certainly, reality TV is a very manipulated format where the basis of it is that real people are put into unreal situations to create a story”. Thompson also explained that sometimes the argument situations contain scripted dialog which has been created by producers of the
shows. Those situations are so convincing that the viewers think it is actually happening (Ventre, 2009).

We have heard several truths behind many famous reality television shows. David Hester, a buyer in *Storage Wars* claimed that the producers of the show have placed items of memorabilia into the storages for the purpose of the show. Hester also claimed that the interviews among casts were scripted and sometimes the auctions weren’t real (Gardner, 2014). On *Oprah*, the cars that Oprah gave away were not totally free: the guests who received the cars, were expected to pay hefty taxes because the show claimed the cars as prizes (Money.cnn.com, 2014). Despite this information, clearly the content in reality television shows are not the whole truth. Sometimes the person on *House Hunters* already bought a house, and it was just a setting on the show (Misener, 2014). Michael Lorber, a broker at Elliman from the Bravo show, *Million Dollar Listing New York*, quit the show after the first season. Lorber said there were a lot of recreation scenes and was asked Lorber to wear unseasonable clothes to shoot extra footage for editing purposes. Lorber thought “it was stupid” (Barrionuevo, 2013).

### 2.5 Conclusion

Shows like *Survival*, *The Voice* and *American Idol* give hope and create opportunities within reality television genre. Many networks show interests in this genre
because of low cost of production and advertising opportunities, even though there are a lot of rumors and deception about how much truth is in reality television.

However, there is less credible information on the truthfulness of the reality television shows. In addition, the literature showed that there is no detailed analysis of the production and post-production of reality television shows that addresses the truth quality of the genre. Thus, this researcher wanted to learn how a reality television show is created and processed during production and post-production to determine the degree of truthfulness the shows contained.
This case study explored the truth behind reality television shows and how footage and other materials make up into a show. The study focused on production and post-production processes of reality television shows in order to test the hypotheses and research questions in this study.

The following hypotheses and research questions were addressed in this study:

1. **Hypothesis 1: The process of post-production is the key component in the production of efficient reality television programming.**
   a. Research question 1: What is the post-production process for reality television?
   b. Research question 2: How is the size of the post-production staff affected by the budget of the show?
   c. Research question 3: Who is the person who will review and approve the final product from post-production process?

2. **Hypothesis 2: The flow of the story line is dictated by the producers, and not necessarily completely by the on camera participants during production process.**
   a. Research question 1: Do the producers have the story line before or after shooting?
   b. Research question 2: How do the producers create the story line?
   c. Research question 3: How much input do producers want to add in an episode of a reality television show?
   d. Research question 4: How much footage is needed to create one episode of reality television?
e. Research question 5: How much does the average reality television show require manipulation of time, space and dialog?

3. **Hypothesis 3: The post-production process in reality television often manipulates the raw material in order to support the story line.**

   a. Research question 1: What specific editing techniques are used in reality television production?

This study is a qualitative case study. To collect data, observations and interviews were conducted with a small group of staffs, who are experts in reality television show genre. The researcher interned at a reality show production company for four months and collected data for this study.

The case study took place at a small production company located in the Philadelphia area. The company is an award winning television production company offering a fresh creative style of cable programming, broadband and web production. However, the company mostly produces reality television shows and documentaries and currently has television shows on Animal Planet and Discovery ID. The observations were conducted while the researcher was interning at the company and typically happened in the office area and editing room. The researcher assisted and observed editors in editing rooms while they were working on a regular basis. The interviews were conducted individually in editing rooms.

In interview method, the researcher used purposive sampling. The interviewees were selected because of their specialties in reality television shows, restricted to the company that the researcher interned, and depended on their willingness to participate in
this study. However, only one of interviewees was from Hollywood. There were 7 interviewees including three editors, two story producers, one field producer, and one development producer. Despite the quantity of interviewees, the result from the sampling group for this study doesn’t project the industry as a whole since it includes some limitations which are discussed in Chapter 5.

The questions for the interviews were developed from the hypotheses and research questions to purposely find answers for this study, which mainly about production and post-production processes. During the interviews, the researcher used mobile phone as a recorder and also took notes for crucial information. For observations, because the researcher worked as an assistant producer, the researcher had chances to go on set and assisted editors who were working on shows that the company has on air. Hence, the researcher observed and took notes from the field and the editing room.

The interview questions were classified according to the type of experts in reality television shows. All the questions were open questions, since this study required in depth answers. The interview questions of this study included the following:

**Questions for Producer**

1. What is your position and responsibilities?

2. What are the main attributes that successful reality television shows should have?
3. What is the post-production process of reality television?

4. How many people work in post-production process and what are their responsibilities?

5. How long does it take to shoot one episode of reality television?

6. Do producers have story lines before or after shooting? If yes, how do you create a story line?

7. Do producers plan what will happen or what participants will say in the shows before the shooting? If yes, how?

8. How much does the average reality television require manipulation of time, space and dialog?

9. Who is the person who reviews and approves final products from post-production process?

10. What are strategies and tactics of editing used in post-production of reality television shows?

Questions for Editor

1. How does the editor determine what kind of footage producers want to include in an episode of a show?

2. What are the procedures use in editing in reality television shows?

3. How much footage is needed to create one episode of an average reality television show?

4. What is duration of editing process for a reality television show?

5. What specific editing techniques are used in reality television shows production?
6. What is a Frankenbite? How do you create it?

**Questions for Casting**

1. How do you determine who is the best fit for a role in reality TV? Do you have any procedure to do so?

The data were collected through interviews and observations. The interviews were conducted with the interviewees in editing rooms for privacy. However, the times and places depended on interviewees availability. Each interview was sound recorded and lasted between 20 – 45 minutes. The observations were collected under non manipulative settings, which were the editing rooms and documentary set. The researcher was participating as an assistant producer during a documentary production, and assisting during editing. During those times, notes were written on papers. Nonetheless, the collected data from interviews and observations were transcribed and organized regarding research questions.

**CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

The interviews and observations of the people who work in the reality production industry yielded data which revealed the findings within the research questions mentioned
in the previous chapter (Chapter 3 Methodologies). In this chapter, the answers to interview questions and observation notes from producers, editors and development producer were sorted to correspond to the hypotheses, which led to major findings.

4.1 Post-Production Process of Reality Television Show

Hypothesis 1 assumed that the process of post-production is the key component in the production of efficient in reality television programming. There were 3 research questions for this hypothesis.

The researchers found that because the particular program is shot in Las Vegas, the field producers send all the footage to the company via mail. Once the footage arrives, assistant editors ingest them into AVID systems. They also group audio with the footage and organize them into a bin within AVID editing systems. After that process, a story producer is assigned to each episode of a show. The story producer looks at notes provided by the field producers to see if anything has changed from the original pre-production plan for shooting. From that point, the story producer makes decisions on what to include in the episode and what is the intended story “arc” (Jeff Dawson (2013) stated “A story arc is a plot’s trajectory from start to finish. It is a storyline of the episode and/or series that is set up in the opening, supported throughout the show, and resolved at the end”).

Next, the story producer than starts cutting down a rough cut of a scene or some of them would it a “fat cut”, which could take half a day to two days on this process. After the rough cut scene is finished, it goes to an editor. The story producer and the editor will discuss what kind of music is needed, any important shots that they want to highlight, as
well as any kind of jokes need to be punctuated. Then the story producer leaves it up to the editor, and the story producer goes back to work on other rough cut scenes, (Note that there can be many story producers and editors that work on one episode of a show; in other words, one story producer and one editor may work on first scene and others may work on second scene). The next step for the editor is to connect the dots on the scene by adding B-roll, montage footage, music, graphics and interview bites. From the observation, once all the scenes are covered and assembled, the editor puts them all together and lay it out in a show format where they have act breaks and teasers before commercials.

After they have assembled whole episode, senior executives in the company come down to the editing room and watch the episode in its entirety. If they see anything that it is not necessary, they tell the editor to edit or cut it out in order to make the episode into a perfect cut. This process is called giving “notes”. After about two sessions of revision, the owner of the company watches the editor’s final cut and gives final thoughts. Once the editor finished the owner’s note which was the final comments from the owner of the company, now the company send it to the network who owns the show. The network watches it and gives the company the network’s notes. The editor than has to edit the episode to conform to the network’s notes. This process can go back and forth between the company and the network many times until the network feels satisfied with the episode. It depends on how long the show has been around and how much the network trust the show’s format. If the episode is a pilot, it could take up to 6-7 revision cycles. However, if the

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1 Dawson (2013) stated “The Montage is essentially the juxtaposition of clips, cut together, score with music, and sometimes bridged with unifying bites”
show has been in production for several seasons already, it may need only a few revision cycles. After all the notes are done and network is pleased, the editor starts the final process of the post-production. The editor checks the technical quality of all the audio and video. The video will change to high resolution, be color corrected, credit will be added and the show will be edited to exact time. After all of these technical processes are completed, the company will send the master edit to the network for airing later.

Generally, the editing process takes about two to eight weeks but in some shows it could take up to six to eight months depends on what kind of show is it and delivery schedule. A major factor that effects the post production timeline is network’s schedule. It depends on how fast the network wants the show to be on air.

One of the story producer claimed the coffee show that the company did took ten to twelve days in the field. However, three of those days were scout days where production crews visited shooting locations, met people who would be in the show. On the fish tank show which is a show about building customized tanks for customers, they usually shoot three days, but it is not three days in a row. Ultimately, it is about three days worth of footage, however.

The research was interested in how many people are needed in post-production of a reality show and what are their responsibilities. The data revealed that it depends on timeline and budget that the company has for each episode of the show. For this company, there are 7 main roles that the show would need for efficient delivery schedule.

- Assistant editor who ingests the footage and audio into the AVID system.
- Producer who oversees production and sometimes strings out the scenes, for the editors. Basically playing the role of the story producer.
• Story producers (2-3 people) who takes all of the footage shot in the field and compiles it into a story (A-roll\textsuperscript{2}) for the editors by using the audio bites.

• Editors (2-3 people) who edit the footage and add B-roll\textsuperscript{3} to cover the scene that story producer strung out and make it visually appealing.

• Audio mixer who is in charge of all audio once the show is locked meaning the episode is fully edited and changes are no longer being made. A final cut episode will get a once-over through a mixing board. The audio engineer will make sure all spoken lines are loud enough, background noises are lowered, and music tracks mixed properly. Nothing can be moved, only volumes and EQ changed.

• A production assistant creates paperwork, such as music tracks sheet and releases of people in a specific episodes and it is collated and checks for an accuracy.

• Senior executive who supervises everything in production process.

Hence, one episode of reality show would need about seven to ten people in post-production process for a healthy delivery timeline. Analysis of the data also discovered that if the company has a rush timeline and has many story producers and editors work on a single episode, that episode tends to lack of cohesion because everybody does not have time to talk it through.

\textsuperscript{2} A-roll is a primary footage that focuses on a storyline of a specific episode of a show.

\textsuperscript{3} B-roll is a secondary footage or a picture uses to cover A-roll to make a storyline more interesting or make a point.
The research was interested in who is the person that reviews and approves the final product that emerges from the post-production process. In the company that the researcher interned, the producer, the story producer, the executive producer of the show, and the owner of the company are the last group of people that give notes and watch all the editor final rough cut before they go to networks. However, the owner is the one who approves all final products before they leave the company.

4.2 Unscripted, but it does not mean there is no storyline

Hypothesis 2 assumed that the flow of the storyline is dictated by the producers, and not necessarily completely by the on-camera participants during production process.

The researcher was interested in if the producers have a storyline in mind before or after shooting. The questions that corresponded to this research question were question 6 and 7 on questions for producer section.

The researcher discovered that many producers responded that they always have storylines before they start shooting shows because the field producers need some ideas and a framework. If they didn’t have any storyline or plan, the production could end up with “home videos”. Therefore, production crews need permission of all places that they will shoot beforehand.
An example of storyline from the fish tank show.
From one of the story producer interviews

However, the storylines can change before or after shooting as well. If the first storyline has falling apart, the field producers have to come up with a new plan to solve whatever situations arrive. The data show many examples situations in this case. A male story producer revealed that changing storyline happened in one of the renovation shows of the company because clients may change their minds from what they wanted at first. Consequently, the footage came back with different storylines from what they had originally planned. Another example is people do not want to be in the show or they are missing and nowhere to be found. A field producer said “About 50-70% of the original outline actually plays out. As we start to film scenes, things change and those changes have
to be edited into the outline.” Hence, solutions of these problems are either change the storyline or make the problem as a part of the show.

When it comes to storylines, the director, executive producer, story producer and field producer are the people who initiate ideas and storyline. They will have discussions and brainstorm how one specific episode should go or sometimes they have an idea that they will try to create a show around. For example, the producers wanted to do an episode in Iceland for coffee show that the company had. They did lots of research and made calls to many people. Finally, they came up with a storyline that would work in Iceland. On the fish tank show, sometimes they create their storylines around the guest celebrities that will appear on the show. It depends on what celebrities are famous for or what are their preferences. On the fish tank show, the field producer will probe the participants for ideas and suggestions because they are experts at building fish tanks. For example, the field producer may ask is there a unique thing they are doing in this build, is there anything interesting about the location we are installing the tank, or if there is a possible side story. From there, the field producers create an outline and start scheduling scenes.

The data revealed that the amount of footage needed to create one episode of reality television depends on each show, but most editors said the more footage editors have, there is better chance for editors to edit efficiently and be more creative because they have more options. If they did not have enough footage, it may create limitations in editing. If people in the show talk about specific places, people, or situations, there should be footage (B-roll) for these stories for better understanding.

The researcher was interesting in how much does the average reality television shows require manipulation of time, space and dialog. From the interviews and
observations there are so many manipulations involved in reality television shows that the company produces. An on-going crime documentary show has several recreation scenes to complete storylines and make it looks more realistic and dramatic to viewers.

The story producers claimed that their co-producers mostly have not planned what participants or celebrities would say on the shows, but they have told them the context or framework before shooting scenes, so the participants or celebrities would see the big picture of the shows. However, there are some parts on the show that the field producers would tell the participants or celebrities to say certain things, but they try not to tell the participants or celebrities specific lines, just the content and let them improvise to their own personalities. For instance, in a house renovation show of the company, the producer interviewed participants about a condition of the house, but those interviews were not energetic enough. So, the producer asked them to do the interview again and added some words and reactions that the producers wanted which made the interview much more effective.

Moreover, the story producers also revealed that they have created obstacles and problems on the show to create drama or just to get the visual. They would discuss the possible problems with the participants to figure out what they can do. For example, on fish tank show, the participants might say they are worried about a tank that they are building. That tank will be located on the second floor of the client’s house, so the tank could not weight more than 800 pounds otherwise it would fall through the floor. Normally the participants could do some calculation and figured it out, but the story producers would see this possible problem as an opportunity to make it more dramatic that it should be. Thus, they would want to build a fake floor and piling on as much weight onto the floor
until it fell through as a weight test, so they can get that visual and see the participants working through this problem on the scene. This scene would look more interesting than seeing people do formula calculation and it also allows the participants to interact with their team or other people on the show. Another example is also from the same show. A male worker in the fish tank shop actually glued the panels together of the tank but it was upside down. The production team discovered it on camera with one of the main participants who is the owner of the shop, but it was not a big deal for him. Yet, the producer thought it was a great opportunity and asked the participant to give an over the top soundbite response.

A female story producer at the company said the story producers are always looking for extraordinary events; such as something falling over or breaking and even someone being mad, to build those opportunities up and make it becomes a bigger moment on the show.

A female editor admitted that on a crime show she was working on, she found a shot of the killer doing an eye roll. The editor edited to the storyline where the killer was listening to the judge reading her sentencing. The editor knew that it was not at that moment, but it was the actual killer’s eye rolling while the killer was in court. Thus, the editor used it to create drama for the show and to show how the killer felt about the justice system.

The most manipulated part of the show are interviews. Many are not really “interviewed” in the traditional sense. These interview bites are written for participants to say in front of the camera. These narrative helps make the storylines make sense. The story producers write interview bites beforehand (During the editing process, a network would
see interview bites with the producer saying the joke or dialog instead of real participants). Once the episode is finalized and approved by the network, the producers would have the participants record those interview bites. Then the editor drops these interview bites where they are supposed to go. A former editor of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* claimed that for these shows, they tried to do interview bites while the situation is happening or at least in the same day because they wanted to get the character’s recollections of the moment. However, interview bites could happen after shooting if editing process needs something more to connect the dots for storyline to make sense. Then they would have the characters or the actors come back for follow up interviews. The producers would ask questions about specific moments for more footage or soundbites as well as lead the characters or the actors to certain direction because it helps the producers get the soundbites they need to complete the storyline.

Time is often manipulated during shooting reality television show because the longer an episode takes, the more money the company is spent on crews, hotels, meals and so on. On the fish tank show, it takes 3-4 weeks to build a tank and 2 days to install at the client’s place, but the crew did not follow and shoot every day. They choose to shoot only on important days and they actually shoot it out of order. For instance, when the participant’s shop agrees to build a tank for a client, they make an agreement off camera and then they build the tank. Then on the day that the participants go to install the tank at client’s place, the crews shoot the tank installation and the consultation, so it would be a recreation of consultation. The participants and the client will talk about the whole design and idea as if it is their first consultation. A lot of build shows are like this because it is
more cost efficient, since the production companies do not want to spend the money to have their crews go shooting twice.

Furthermore, manipulation also happens to storylines as well. A male development producer stated that he worked on the show called *Amish Mafia* and it was a heavily scripted reality television show. The Amish people on the show were no longer practicing Amish, but during shooting and a lot of stories that they told on show were things that happened, things that they have read, but those things did not happen to these characters on the show. The producers took pieces of something that was true and put their own spin to it to make it more entertaining.

In conclusion, the ultimate objective of reality television is to create entertainment. Thus, the people in the reality television try to create dramatic experience to viewers by manipulating material that they have. There are scenarios where producers will instigate dramatic situations and problems to make the participants, characters, or actors working through them. Nevertheless, they still want people on the show to act naturally within the false premise that they provide for them.

### 4.3 Editing techniques

Hypothesis 3 assumed that the post-production process in reality television often manipulates the raw material in order to support the story line. Research question 1 asked about what specific editing techniques are used in reality television production. The
questions that corresponded to this research question were question 5 and 6 on questions for editor section.

There are 4 specific editing techniques are being used in the company.

1. OTF (On The Fly) is an interview situation that happened after the scene or the end of the day because the producer tries to get somebody’s actual opinion or feeling about a certain thing.

2. Green screen or interview bites are written by story producers. They are usually inserted to bridge the scene for the next moment before commercials, so that viewers know where the story would go and it also gives them a chance to come back to the show after commercials.

3. Wild lines are voice over segments recorded at a later date for editing purposes. These Wild lines are important editing tools. They can evoke a more energetic reaction from the participants, say something more clearly, or bridge a scene. These lines are usually written by the production staff because something in the scene was missing, so sometimes they created the myths that person was saying things in the actual scene.

4. Frankenbite is an editing technique that takes one part of a sentence and merges with another part of a sentence to either change what people are saying, shorten what they are saying, or sometimes to convey some different meaning in post-production. All the editors that the researcher interviewed said Frankenbites are used all the time, but usually they are not doing it to change the story that people are telling. Rather, they are doing it to paraphrase or clarify something that happened at that moment.
Frankenbites happen under the B-roll that covers rough cut of an episode that story producers gave to editors.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction
Reality television is currently one of the most popular genre among viewers and networks. To viewers, it offers various subject matter whether it be talent search shows, makeover shows, documentaries, hidden camera shows, dating shows, celebrity lifestyles shows, and so on. To networks, when it comes to cost of production, reality television shows are inexpensive to produce compared to scripted drama shows, yet attract decent viewers that lead to advertising revenue, which is the backbone for the networks.

It is questionable that the public believes the content of reality television shows is authentic (truthful). Many people are concerned about how much truth there is in reality television, especially when there are several reports that show the reality television shows are being manipulated.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the degree of truth and authenticity in the process of creating reality television shows. This study concentrated on production and post-production processes before airing the show on television. The researcher sought to determine how the content was being manipulated during production process and also sought to contribute to the knowledge of people who want to achieve a better understanding of reality television business.

5.2 Discussion

The following hypotheses were assumed in this study:
1. Hypothesis 1: The process of post-production is the key component in the production of efficient reality television programming.

2. Hypothesis 2: The flow of the storyline is dictated by the producers and not necessarily completely by the on-camera participants during production process.

3. Hypothesis 3: The post-production process in reality television often manipulates the raw material in order to support the storyline.

The process of post-production is a key component in the production of efficient reality television programming. In the company that the researcher studied, they have a clear and consistent production process. Cooperation and communication are the most crucial actions in creating an efficient show. Workers in the company had to communicate to each other and knew their individual responsibilities. However, the researcher found out that not only is the post production process that plays a part for producing an efficient reality show in the company, but also the network’s schedule that could affect the production efficiency. If the company has more time to produce a show, the more likely the show is “naturally” coherent. The researcher also learned the network was the party who determined when a show is ready for air by authorizing the show to go on air.

The flow of storylines is often dictated by the producers, and not by the on-camera participants during production process. The researcher learned that there are storylines behind every reality television show in the company that the researcher studied, these storylines were determined well before shooting the shows. This is because the production team needs a framework to work with. The field producers and story producers were the people who create storylines by researching and discussing among each other or sometimes
with the participants in their shows. Sometimes storylines were based on the participants or celebrities on specific episodes. A field producer was the one who is in charge of the storyline while shooting an episode of a reality television show. Occasionally, they might have to come up with problems or obstacles to achieve dramatic actions from the participants on the shows.

The raw footage or materials in a reality television show could be manipulated in the post-production process to support storylines. This was proven correct as supported by the interviews conducted by the researcher. In post-production process, editors were looking for footage to finish rough cuts that story producers gave to them. They usually tried to work with the footage they originally had at first, but if the storylines were incomplete they had to create or manipulate some materials by using editing techniques whether it be OTF, green screen, Wild lines, or Frankenbites.

5.3 Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The first limitation was related to the sample and sample size. The sample size was a small segment of the reality television industry and limited because the researcher had only four months to participate in an internship. The researcher conducted interviews and observations during internship at a small production company based in Philadelphia. Thus, the interviews were conducted with a small group of experts in only one company. This is a small sample group of experts in the reality television industry. The second limitation was the time period allowed for this study. For the majority of the time, the researcher tried to be acquainted with the people in the company before conducting interviews because the researcher
wanted people to become comfortable in order to give out information. Therefore, the data obtained for this study was limited to only one company; it did not project the entirety of the reality television show business which reduced the chances of seeing how other companies or other people in reality television industry would work.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the result of the study, there are several recommendations for future research. First, to improve the validity of this study, expanding sample size would eliminate the sample limitation. Future researchers should conduct interviews and observations at companies that have larger budget or to bigger networks for greater data that could lead to results that could better represent the entire industry. Furthermore, the data from those bigger companies and networks could be used to compare and contrast how much they manipulate reality television shows versus small production companies.

Second, this study specifically examined production and post production process of reality television, but did not study other aspects of reality television production that affect the content authenticity such as business model, size of companies, and network perspectives (since networks are the major players in the industry). Third, the future researchers should extend the time of collecting data in order to accommodate the first and second recommendations.

5.5 Conclusion
According to this study, there is authenticity left in reality television shows, but the truth is not completely pure. Every reality show has a kernel of truth to it whether it is based on an event that actually happened or something else, but sometimes the production process does not portray real events as they unfolded. The reality shows often manipulate reality for several reasons. First, events are often changed and re-arranged to put celebrities in a more favorable light. Second, one of the reasons that people watch television is because they want some entertainment in their lives, to take a break from their personal reality. Therefore, they seek out somebody else’s reality and reality television shows are the answer for this desire. Networks and production companies know this reason as well; therefore, they seek interesting stories. If they do not have immediately interesting stories, they have to create them to draw viewers to their shows. Consequently, manipulation happens. Third, money appears to be a major factor. In this research, the researcher interned in a small production company that has a couple of reality television shows on air on small cable networks. The company might not have a large budget from cable networks to spend on production process, so the company would have to make do with all material they have gotten and try to cut corners to save money. For instance, reality television shows should have characters or talent that are interesting enough to have the shows based around them. A small production company with a small network may have limited budget to search for those characters or talent, or most them them would go for bigger production companies or networks which they would also have greater budget. Also, the small production companies would have small production crews with limited time and ability. Consequently, smaller production companies often apply more intensive and invasive manipulation techniques than large budget reality television shows. Large network shows have larger
budgets, allowing for greatly increased pre-production and production efforts. These
greater resources yield better stories, better and greater amount of raw footage and perhaps
most importantly more experienced producers and editors. Based on the researcher’s
experience and collected data, there is little question that money is a pervasive factor in all
reality show manipulation, for both small and large production companies.

While the public may be aware of the manipulation of reality in reality television
shows, they keep on watching them because they are easy to follow and understand. It also
could serve as a conversation piece. While there is some data to suggest that the reality
television genre is going through its “post-booming period”, the researcher thinks that
reality television is still in a strong position because of its ability to deliver a variety of
demographic groups for network advertisers at a very low production cost.

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