

Hate Watching Trash TV: Intersections of Class and Anti-Fandom

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Abstract

“Hate watching” has been described as fun and campy (Nussbaum, 2012); a form of self-deception in viewers who refuse to admit they “like shitty things” (Davies, 2013); a frustrating inability to let go of a show one no longer enjoys (Drumming, 2013); or “a colossal waste of time” (Goodman, 2013). Despite its popularity in entertainment journalism, hate watching remains largely unexplored in academic literature. Jonathan Gray (2003) argues for the importance of critically examining anti-fans as part of audience studies. He finds that anti-fans have a complex, if oppositional, reading of the text that is often just as critical as that of fans. I propose that educated middle-class viewers use the discourse of hate watching to distance themselves from the “trashy” TV shows they consume in order to protect their cultural capital from erosion. This research examines the results of my interviews with 18-35-year-old university students, who hate watch.

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Introduction

I am 13 years old and I'm home for the summer. I get up late, after my mom has left for work, and turn on the TV to *Maury*. The talk-show format, never-ending paternity tests and out-of-control guests captivate me. Part of me is revolted by the fights, the profanity and the promiscuity that make up the bulk of the on-screen action. Another part of me, perhaps something a bit meaner, is fascinated by the excess of emotion, the small dramas unfolding between guests, each predictable yet unique in its own way. After *Maury*, I usually watch *Ricki Lake*; one of Lake's specialties is hosting confrontations between "promiscuous" young women and their families, which are usually resolved through the power of the makeover. The wayward girls are stripped of their garish make-up and made to exchange their provocative clothes for modest-yet-stylish outfits provided by the show. Sometimes, furtively, I watch the *Jerry Springer* show. There is something threatening about the sheer vulgarity of the guests on *Jerry Springer* so I change the channel if anyone walks in the room.

I am starting the first semester of my Master's in the Communication and Culture program and I'm feeling overwhelmed by the material and the intellectual weight of my classmates. I'm not sleeping and I'm quickly falling in a dark place of self-doubt and negativity. Between readings and assignments, I discover that American Netflix has *Bridezillas* and I watch every single episode. The meltdowns give me a sick pleasure and a feeling of superiority—at least I'm not as bad as *those* women. *I'm doing something valuable with my life*, I tell myself as I queue another episode at 10 in the morning. Sometimes I even surprise myself by empathizing with

the bride and her clearly mounting frustration with the needling production team. It bothers me that the show frames the brides as demanding harpies while their inconsiderate, uninvolved husbands-to-be are cast in the role of innocent victims. Surely, they are under a lot of stress too, so maybe they should get to have a few temper tantrums.

I am sitting in the middle row at Rainbow Cinemas in downtown Toronto waiting for *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* to begin. I don't have high expectations for the movie, but it's a Saturday night and my partner and I had free movie vouchers lying around. It soon becomes apparent that the four people sitting directly in front of us are here to hate watch. One man, in particular, seems to want everyone to know it. He laughs out loud during all the dramatic moments, followed by some quick typing on his phone that I'm convinced is him live-tweeting his witty observations. His behavior irritates me deeply, firstly because it is rude and disruptive, but also because I feel like his showy hate watching now involves me—if I enjoy the movie genuinely, then surely I'm not in on the joke, I'm not sophisticated enough to separate real cinema from a movie that is unintentionally funny at best. I call the group of hate watchers smug assholes on my way out, loud enough for them to hear, and feel the savage satisfaction of having brought them down a peg.

In many ways, my experiences with trash TV growing up and as a young adult shape my interest in and attitudes towards the genre: a mix of ironic affection and clandestine voyeurism. However, my affective responses—fascination, revulsion, shame, pleasure, comfort, and frustration—also mirror many of the ways in which other viewers engage with trash TV, ironically or not. The genre of trash

TV, a definition of which will follow in this chapter, is entangled with questions of accessible entertainment, commercialization, marginalization, exploitation and morality. It can be a distressing discursive minefield to navigate for viewers who feel the tension between trash TV's easy-to-consume brand of entertainment and public criticism of the genre as morally depraved and intellectually degenerative. For this reason, I was captivated by the idea of hate watching, which put a name to my brand of conflicted engagement with trash TV.

“Hate watching” means watching a television show (or movie) that one does not earnestly enjoy, or no longer enjoys, often mocking and deriding the show or its participants or characters. Though television critics, journalists and bloggers, who have written about hate watching, cannot seem to agree on what exactly hate watching is and what motivates it, they all cite a form of enjoyment in the practice. Trash TV is particularly interesting for interrogating the practice of hate watching because of how discourses of morality, class, gender and sexuality are intertwined and constructed within the genre through elements like public discourse, experts, and the participatory audience. Talk shows and reality television, as two of the latest forms of populist, lowbrow entertainment, have often served as stepping-stones for women, people of colour and sexual minorities seeking a spot in the media and public discourse. However, these shows' reliance on stereotypes, middle-class experts and a paternalistic focus on “fixing” participants' lives has also served to marginalize these groups, both as participants and viewers (Gamson, 1998; Skeggs & Wood, 2008). Trash TV and its viewers often face pushback and critique both from conservative commentators concerned with the erosion of morality and

traditional values, and from leftist intellectuals who argue that trash TV perpetuates harmful discourses about gender, race, sexuality and class. In this thesis, I examine hate watching of trash TV as a form of class anxiety in which viewers use the discourse of hate watching to distance themselves from the negative implications of their consumption as a devalued, lowbrow experience.

Methodology

The research employs semi-structured interviews with 25 university students aged 18-35 (see Appendix 1 for individual participant details) who self-identify as hate watchers. Participants were selected via non-random convenience sampling—they were all volunteers who had heard about my research through departmental emails, flyers around campus, word of mouth or social media, and contacted me to take part in the research. A few participants were interviewed in groups of two or three, but most interviews were conducted individually. Group interviews took between 30 and 50 minutes to complete, while individual interviews took between 15 and 30 minutes. Participants were asked to discuss their childhood and current viewing habits, their class background, their perception of what is “good” and “bad” television and their experiences with hate watching and ironic or oppositional viewership.

My research focuses on university students exclusively¹ as a means to ensure that participants all have a similar level of cultural expertise and cultural capital,

¹ One participant, Aidan, has a high school education only, but was included in the sample, because he engaged in hate watching with another participant, James, a university student, and their shared dynamic offered interesting insights into the ways in which hate watching is a social activity. See Appendix 1 for more details.

making the group fairly homogenous in its views. Claessens and Dhoest's (2010) analysis of comedy taste and class employs participants' highest attained level of education as a substitute for class, because they argue that viewers' level of education has a more direct effect on their frames of reference and ability to enjoy more multi-layered, highbrow entertainment. Similarly, in *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984) Pierre Bourdieu examines class-based aesthetic taste using his subjects' level of education and professional background as a way of operationalizing class distinctions. I use critical discourse analysis to evaluate the ways in which participants talk about trash TV and hate watching as it relates to their class and educational background.

Initially, I intended to use focus group interviews in order to understand the social dynamics behind hate watching and the ways in which hate watchers construct meaning collectively through their shared experiences. However, it quickly became apparent that holding focus groups was not feasible with the resources I had available to me within the research timeline. Focus groups required a higher investment on the part of participants, as they had to commit to a full hour at a preset time, rather than 15 to 30 minutes at a time and location that was convenient to them. As I could not offer participants monetary compensation for their time, I decided to switch my focus to individual interviews in order to lessen the burden on participants and to expedite my research. In comparing transcripts of group and individual interviews, I did not encounter a significant difference in the ways in which participants discussed hate watching and trash TV, except in the sense that group interviewees were able to have a dialogue between themselves and

respond to each other or build on each other's statements. Nevertheless, I believe that using individual interviews instead of focus groups did not detract from the value of my research findings.

It should be noted that the research is limited by the fact that only university students were interviewed. Other demographic groups might consume trash TV in different ways that could be revelatory of the relationship between class and viewership, but the scope of the research did not permit an in-depth comparative analysis. Further, many of the participants were communication or sociology students and had a preexisting interest in media studies. Some approached the topic of trash TV from a position of academic expertise. This adds an interesting dimension to their engagement with hate watching and trash TV, but it also means that their answers to interview questions could sometimes be read as more of an academic than a personal reflection. I managed this through the interviews by redirecting participants to speak about their own experiences and opinions. Finally, the research scope did not allow me to directly study hate watching by, for example, playing clips for participants in order to observe their reactions and responses. Skeggs and Wood (2008) provide a good model for the ethnographic study of the habits and reactions of reality television viewers, which can serve to further future research on hate watching.

Defining Trash TV and Hate Watching

Trash TV emerges from the populist entertainment tradition of publicly exposing private emotions, interpersonal drama and conflict, as well as causing shock through aberration and transgression—other forms of trash entertainment

include soap operas, pulp fiction, confessional magazines and freak shows (Gamson, 1998). Overall, it tends to be an affective medium that is high on emotion and low on information (Kavka, 2008).

Many participants identified low production values as a marker of trash TV, including cheap looking sets, bad writing and acting, and poorly executed transitions and camera work. Participants associated more polished, cinematic television, like shows produced by HBO, with more highbrow, high cultural value entertainment. Further, participants also cared about the quality of the writing: trash TV was seen as relying on simplistic two-dimensional characters, lowbrow humor based on catchphrases and stereotypes, and unrealistic, overly-dramatic storylines, whereas “good” TV was seen as containing well-developed, diverse characters, multiple layers of meaning and reflected participants’ progressive politics. In short, participants said that trash TV portrays excessive emotion and melodrama, while good TV uses realistic, understated drama.

Participants also liked recognizing the intertextuality of media texts that used references to other texts to structure jokes, such as the humor on *The Simpsons*. Intertextual humor contains multiple layered meanings and invites viewers to decode those meanings by accessing their familiarity with real-world or media people, objects, places or events external to the text. By contrast, trash TV was not seen as containing intertextual references and did not invite multiple readings. Moreover, participants craved a certain complexity to the intertextuality of the media texts they were consuming. They did not want the references to be too immediate or obvious, but rather to present a challenge to the viewer decoding

them. In this way, they could take pleasure in exercising and recognizing their own media and cultural expertise and knowledge. Aidan (22) stressed this point, particularly in discussing what he perceived as good and bad comedy shows: “There's no unexpectedness about the jokes, there's no surprise, there's no thought process, it's just plain boring jokes that require no thinking. There's no good references. And even if there is a reference, it's so right in your face that it's not even funny.” Nikki (21), described trash TV as “anything that doesn't educate you. It doesn't bring anything new to your palate. All it really does is have you sit there and digest crap. It's just for entertainment, to pass the time.” Good TV, by contrast, invites viewers to engage intellectually with the material and to decode different meanings, references or symbols in the text. Trash TV is seen as intellectually and educationally valueless, allowing participants to consume without thinking. In brief, it relies on the display of emotion rather than the imparting of information to generate further interest.

Many participants identified reality television and talk shows as inherently trashy, based on the cast's “trashy” or non-middle class behavior, including violence, profanity and the public airing of dirty laundry: “The first thing is always *Jersey Shore*. Only because the way they're always drunk [...]. When people act crazy and drunk and fight for no reason, I feel like that's when they have no class and they have no manners” (Iman, 21). The cultural values of trash TV and the people who appear on it are interrelated and mutually constructive—trashy people appear on trashy TV shows and trashy TV shows feature trashy people.

Participants also discussed the trashy/good divide in terms of the way media discourse constructs the shows in the public sphere—good shows are critically acclaimed by official institutions in the entertainment industry and have think pieces written about them in serious publications. Trash TV, on the other hand, is popular among viewers and discussed in tabloid media. There is a sense of intellectual superiority and exclusivity that is inherent to “good” TV—one must have the tools and cultural capital necessary to truly decode and appreciate it. This reliance on cultural institutions, such as highbrow publications like *The New Yorker* or industry awarding bodies like the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (which administers the Primetime Emmy awards), to choose what is considered good and what is not also reflects the value that TV consumption has for viewers’ cultural capital. While *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* may be more popular in terms of viewership than *Curb Your Enthusiasm* or *Breaking Bad*, following them faithfully and reading about the Kardashian family in tabloid magazines does not carry the same cultural cachet as watching prestige television and reading weekly episode analyses by respected critics. The latter carries the approval and endorsement of industry insiders and cultural leaders and is therefore a much less shameful way of consuming television. Kavka (2008) writes that intellectuals (and by extension, viewers possessed of a high level of cultural capital) often feel shame in admitting that they are enthralled by television, which is seen as a much more affective and less serious medium than film or books. In brief, the approval of highbrow media and cultural leaders elevates good television to the level of something worth discussing at an intellectual, rather than affective level.

Moreover, participants saw political and social meaning in good TV—the shows they identified as good reflected major social issues, like police violence against people of colour: “I like accurate TV. *Scandal*, they bring up issues, or they change certain issues happening in the real world. For example, Black Lives Matter or when a lot of black youth are being murdered by police in the States, they made an entire episode surrounding that. And you won't see that anywhere else” (Nikki, 21). When asked about the best shows on television right now, some participants even named shows they have never watched, such as *Transparent*,² because of their perceived political value in reflecting identities generally not represented in media. Reality television, by contrast, focuses on individual dramas and interpersonal conflicts, rather than larger political topics. Participants therefore argued that trash TV is less meaningful and less worthy of attention because it does not grapple with political issues like some scripted television shows.

Reality versus “Reality” TV

Nearly all participants uttered a variation on the phrase “I know reality TV is scripted”:

The Bachelor is good, it's a decent production, it's clearly scripted but it's actually a good production. (James, 21)

There are reasons I don't watch reality shows like *Big Brother*, like that just gets a little too uncomfortable. I realize it's scripted, but the idea behind it, the glamorization of surveillance is not something I can endorse. (Cecyl, 33)

Jerry Springer is probably the most trashy one I have on my list. It's most likely heavily scripted, super sensationalized. It's interesting that they

² *Transparent* focuses on the transition of a middle-aged trans woman and her family's efforts to understand and accept her.

only have certain folks that ever appear on the show and it's very hostile.
(Sincerity, 20)

Overall, participants had a strong sense that reality TV does not actually reflect reality, and that the drama it displays is contrived or manufactured by producers. Some participants even differentiated between more “real” reality shows, such as *16 and Pregnant* and *Hoarders*, which have a higher barrier to “faking it” and more polished shows, like *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, which were perceived as completely or almost completely scripted:

[*Real Housewives of Atlanta*] is scripted, this is constructed specifically for reality TV, so it's not “reality” TV, it's not real. There's parts of it that are not a hundred percent true to form. I think if you really want to talk about shows that aren't scripted, I want to say *Teen Mom* and *16 and Pregnant*. Because they didn't script them to go get pregnant. (Nikki, 21)

Participants indicated that they saw scripted television as more reflective of their reality, because they found many of the characters and situations more relatable to their own lives, whereas they saw reality television focusing on celebrity life as unachievable and unfathomable. This could partly be because many scripted shows, especially sitcoms, focus on working-, middle- and upper-middle class characters, which generally reflect(s) the class background of participants, whereas reality shows focusing on the extremely poor or extremely wealthy do not. Similarly, participants could not relate to lower class individuals on reality TV, like the cast of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* or many of the guests on talk shows like *Springer*, but rather perceived their presentation as a spectacle or something to be understood through the mediation and intervention of trash TV.

Further, participants valued scripted television that addresses real world issues and events, such as systemic sexism or racism, as indicated by Nikki's

comment on *Scandal* referenced above. In comparison, reality television exists in its own contained world and rarely addresses current events (directly at least, although they do sometimes establish a temporal and socio-cultural context), despite its much shorter and more efficient production schedule. It also individualizes and decontextualizes issues like racism and sexism by portraying them as interpersonal drama between cast members instead of systemic and unequal power relations (Bell-Jordan, 2008). Thus, reality television actually fails to reflect a reality that is recognizable or that matters to participants, which many found frustrating.

The Mechanics of Hate Watching

Many participants reported that they hate watched certain shows because they felt pressured by their friends, peers or partners. Some found it necessary to watch in order to keep up social conversations and understand trends and culturally important reference points, or to keep up with what was buzz-worthy in the media. For others, it was more of a bonding activity with siblings or friends than an obligation or unpleasant experience. These participants would only hate watch with specific people, and never alone. Some participants even indicated that they had organized social gatherings around their hate watching, such as weekly themed dinners, Skype hangouts or just inviting friends over to watch a specific show and make fun of it together on a regular basis. However, some participants exclusively hate watched alone and felt uncomfortable bringing it up in conversation with other people who were not viewers of the same show. Carol (29) found herself craving conversation with other viewers of the shows she hate watches (primarily the *Real*

Housewives franchises), but was simultaneously embarrassed to admit that she watches these shows to other people:

I think I'm a genuine fan of all these shows, I would just never self-identify that way publicly. There's a genuine interest and entertainment value in there for me, it's just I don't want to admit I find it entertaining. I'm fine with admitting it's entertaining, not with admitting that it's a good use of time, I guess.

Viewers like Carol indicated that they felt ashamed or embarrassed to be watching something they perceive as trashy, exploitative or intellectually beneath them. They believed that their consumption of the shows they hate watched would degrade them and cast them socially as unintelligent and unsophisticated, not unlike the on-screen depiction of the cast or guests.

Most participants reported a low level of engagement with the shows they hate watched. They would often have the show on in the background while doing other things, like cleaning, doing homework, or talking with other people. These viewers often did not follow the shows faithfully but rather watched them when they happened to be on and there was nothing better to do. Further, they would not seek out outside information on the shows they hate watched or on their casts. By contrast, they reported a much higher level of engagement with their favourite shows, seeking outside information, tuning in regularly and watching attentively and without distraction.

Despite this general tendency, some participants were very interested in critically engaging with trash TV—they enjoyed discussing it with friends to make fun of the show or the cast, but some went a step further and used the shows to critique unequal power relations they perceived through the shows: “For me, it's not

even so much that I'm trying to make fun of them. I'm just trying to critique all the intersections and media discourse that goes into shows like [Jerry Springer]. How people are even chosen for shows like this" (Sincerity, 20). Critical viewers sought out critical discussions of the shows they hate watched online to confirm their oppositional readings. Some participants also reported engaging in online discussion of the shows they hate watched, especially through Twitter so they could interact with other fans and anti-fans in real time and take part in a shared reaction to the shows they were watching.

Many participants also reported hate watching for comfort or stress relief. Some started watching the shows they hate watched when they were sick or depressed. For some, it was a way to "turn off their brains" at the end of the day or during stressful periods in their lives, because as they claim watching trash TV does not require their intellectual engagement. Hate watching also allowed some participants to feel better about themselves through a sense of *schadenfreude* and intellectual superiority in comparing themselves to the people who appear on reality shows or talk shows:

I think there's a sense of superiority that comes from watching that sort of reality TV show. It's like a spectacle: you sit there and you're like "I'm not like those people, oh my God. I might be poor, I might never be able to afford a pregnancy specialist to help me redecorate my fucking two-story loft in New York, but at least I'm not crazy." (Carolyn, 26)

Though many of these participants recognized the constructedness of reality TV, they also seemed to take the portrayals of the cast on the shows they watched at face-value, at least as far as it served their preferred reading of the show. This negotiated reading allowed them to slip between engagement and ironic distance,

maintaining their status as savvy viewers, while also taking pleasure in the excess and melodrama of the shows they hate watched. However, a few participants actually found hate watching stressful because the shows caused them feelings of anger and frustration in response to the exploitative or marginalizing discourses they read in them.

Moreover, participants were drawn to watch because they felt intrigued by the theme of shows, especially on talk shows centred on interpersonal conflicts and salacious topics, like infidelity and paternity tests. Participants even used phrases like “compelled to watch” and “can’t look away” to describe the mixture of pleasure and frustration they experienced when watching trash TV:

It was kind of like a car wreck. I didn't want to keep watching it but I couldn't turn away. And that is exactly what happens whenever *Geordie Shore* [the northern British answer to *Jersey Shore*] gets put on by my partner. I cannot stand it. I do not understand why it keeps getting renewed, but as soon as it's on, it's like a mixture of awe and disgust. And yet, ... if my partner is watching it on the laptop, I will lean over and pay attention even though I really don't want to. (Cecyl, 33)

Cecyl, in particular, found the binge drinking and promiscuity on *Geordie Shore* disturbing and off-putting, and described the cast as lacking aspirations and unable to articulate deep thoughts. Nevertheless, he felt drawn to watch almost despite himself and admitted that he enjoyed the spectacle and judging the cast. In other words, participants like Cecyl felt drawn to watch conflict-heavy shows out of human curiosity and a desire to see the performance of emotion that takes place on talk shows and reality TV, but they also felt repulsed by this same excess and publicity of emotion.

Finally, some participants simply reported feeling boredom, especially when watching reality TV:

Say Yes to the Dress, Cakeboss, Keeping Up With the Kardashians—it's reruns so I'm often seeing the same episode over and over again and that's annoying because it's boring. But it's still mindless so I don't really care. I think reality television in general is not good. That being said I watch it and I love it. (Brienne, 20)

Participants like Brienne were bored by the repetitiveness of the shows, the predictability of the plots and the lack of a coherent storyline guiding the show, but they still felt compelled to watch or took pleasure in watching because reality TV filled the time or allowed them to tune in and out as they did other things. This low level of engagement further allows participants to distance themselves from lowbrow genres like reality TV and to consume them without having to identify as fans or loyal viewers of those particular shows.

Overview

The first chapter introduces and examines existing writing on the history of lowbrow entertainment from the 19th century to the rise of reality television in the mid-2000s, the relationship between marginalized social groups and talk shows and reality television, as well as writing on fandom, anti-fandom and the major affective responses generated by trash TV. Chapter One also introduces the concept of cultural capital and the argument that hate watching is a distancing discourse that separates viewers from the implications of their lowbrow media consumption. Chapter Two, *Identity and Trash Entertainment: Gender, Race, Class and Sexuality*, explores in more detail the representation and marginalization of identity on trash TV and the ways in which participants understood these identity categories through

their consumption of trash TV. Chapter Three, Fandom, Anti-Fandom and Affect: Pleasure, Frustration and Boredom, examines the ways in which participants distinguish themselves as anti-fans from fans of trash TV, the affective states they experience when they consume trash TV and the ways in which hate watching allows them to negotiate their position vis-à-vis televisual texts that are considered trashy. The concluding chapter draws the research findings together in order to propose ways in which participants consume of trash TV under the guise of hate watching as a constructive practice that allows them to preserve and build up their cultural capital and their status as savvy, critical viewers.

Chapter One: Literature Review

The History of Trash Entertainment: From Freak Shows to *Jerry Springer*

The label “trash,” as a metaphor for media products or people, is intimately tied up with its connotations of poor, rural, uneducated, Southern white people in the United States. Frequently, it is used to set apart “those people” from “respectable” middle-class white people. To be trashy is to fail at middle-class “moral and aesthetic superiority” (Grindstaff, 2002, p. 25). Trash TV participants have alternatively been labeled trashy or “ghetto,” the latter of which refers to poor, urban black or Latino youth (Gamson, 1998). These racialized and classed discourses often bleed out to the audience of trash TV, especially the televised audience on daytime talk shows, which is nearly as much on display as the participants. The audience’s loudness, rowdiness, lack of discipline and thirst for confrontation and drama set them apart from the “classy,” rational, disciplined middle-class audiences of more middle- or highbrow entertainment, like critically-acclaimed dramas and cinema, or high-concept humor.

Working-class audience participation can be traced back to spaces like pre-20th century American theatres, where members of different classes sat in the same audience, and it was not at all uncommon for the spectators to heckle, sing, joke loudly or throw food during the performance. Most of this behavior was attributed to the gallery, where the cheapest seats were located and where “deviants” like black people and prostitutes were allowed to sit, while more affluent spectators sat in the pit or the boxes. Gamson writes that theatre audiences became “tamed” and

fragmented along class-lines by the turn of the century, doing away with this shared class space (Gamson, 1998, p. 36).

This same trend can be observed in curio and art museums popular in the 1850s, which exhibited masterful paintings by respected artists alongside mutant animals and curiosities, like mermaids and dwarves, and which had largely disappeared by the 1900s. Lower-class entertainment then moved on to dime museums and freak shows, which promised spectacular, bizarre and often grotesque entertainment and challenged the boundaries of what was “normal.” Freak shows’ promoters, called “barkers,” in particular, evoke the way in which talk show tag lines today hail audiences with promises of aberration, transgression, and scandal—a perusal of the *Jerry Springer* website reveals show titles like “Mom don’t ruin my tranny wedding!” and “She took my man... and my car!” (Gamson, 1998; NBC Universal, 2014). A similar appeal to sensationalism, melodrama and transgression can be observed in many other popular media, such as pulp novels, which have been labeled as trashy over the years.

In the early to mid-20th century, freak shows were phased out, but populist entertainment continued with call-in radio shows and true confession magazines, both of which were heavily aimed at women and focused on reality, relationships and suffering (Skeggs & Wood, 2008). The rise of modern talk shows is credited to *The Phil Donahue Show*, which debuted in 1967 and which was the first show of its kind to do away with the host’s desk while inviting the audience to participate and comment on the issues being discussed. Donahue approached topics including the women’s movement, reproduction, homosexuality, trans issues, infidelity, sexual

assault and racism, among others, with a mix of seriousness and compassion, blurring the lines between the private and the public (Grindstaff, 2002). He brought political and personal topics together by inviting his largely female audience to comment on them and contribute their own stories and experiences on the subjects under discussion (Gamson, 1998). In talk shows like Phil Donahue's, women found an outlet through which they could participate in public life, and a way to have their voices represented in the media that had previously been denied to them (Skeggs & Wood, 2008).

The talk show genre took off in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the premiere of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Geraldo*. *Geraldo* brought a new, confrontational style to talk shows—in a famous 1988 episode, Geraldo Rivera's nose was broken when a fight erupted between participants and audience members—while *Oprah* expanded the genre's focus on personal matters even further and aimed for a gentler, more therapeutic style (Gamson, 1998). The growth in numbers of talk shows led to increasingly stiff competition for audiences and a bid to draw in young, urban viewers of colour. *Ricki Lake* and *The Jerry Springer Show* were both immensely popular and actively encouraged audience members to react loudly to the participants on-stage, not unlike the crowds at 19th century plays described above (Grindstaff, 2002).

Confrontational talk shows were not without their critics, from journalists to politicians. Criticism of the genre peaked in 1995 when Jonathan Schmitz shot and killed Scott Amedure several days after they appeared on an episode of *The Jenny Jones Show*, where Amedure confessed his attraction to Schmitz. Many television

talk shows toned down their confrontational style after public pressure following the murder, though the genre is still popular on daytime television (Gamson, 1998; Grindstaff, 2002).

Due in part to networks' growing need for cheap-to-produce content, the 2000s brought about the rise of reality television as a new incarnation of previous affective media, like soap operas and talk shows. Like talk shows, reality shows are premised on giving a platform to "ordinary" people, while also promising its audience the voyeuristic pleasure of watching aberrant and boundary-crossing behavior and emotional excess, not unlike the draw of freak shows and confessional magazines. Reality television's focus on the "ordinary" and an appearance of unscripted realism are extensions of trash entertainment's blurring of the boundaries between private and public and its emphasis on emotion over rationality, making it ripe for the label of trash TV (Skeggs & Wood, 2008).

Marginalized Identities and Trash Entertainment

Gender and Trash TV

As the concept of class emerged in the 19th century, the middle class consolidated as a group around the ideas of taste and moral superiority, which they used to gain and maintain political power in the newly forming public sphere (Wood & Skeggs, 2011). Middle-class women were able to gain some political power over the domestic sphere by embodying a "bourgeois feminine ideal" against which working-class women were measured and found lacking. This power is premised not on economic control or the formal political system, but on a subtle yet complex

code of behaviors, values, and aesthetic tastes that privilege privacy, self-discipline, restraint, motherhood and modesty (Skeggs & Wood, 2008).

Trash TV, though by no means an exclusively female genre, has a long history of appealing to female viewers. Though audience research shows that talk show viewers are extremely diverse, Grindstaff found during her ethnographic study of talk show production that most producers assume the typical talk show viewer is “a housewife with a ninth grade education in a lower socioeconomic bracket” (Grindstaff, 2002, p. 62). Indeed, talk shows’ predecessor, talk radio, fragmented into shows for women and men in the 1970s—programs aimed at women took on a tamer approach and covered more personal stories, while programs aimed at men, typified by the *Howard Stern Show*, got louder and tackled more political topics. Shock jock radio shows in particular pursued popularity through controversy and an unapologetic willingness to offend liberal sensibilities (Douglas, 2004). Talk shows and reality television both borrow many elements from the quintessentially female genre of melodramatic soap operas, including a focus on personal issues, emotion, reaction over action, suffering and the performance of affect (Skeggs & Wood, 2008).

Talk shows, and later reality television, focus on disciplining female viewers into the right moral and aesthetic behavior more so than male viewers. This is a classed as well as a gendered dynamic, not unlike the valorization of middle-class femininity in the 19th century. Lifestyle shows and reality television shows construct working-class culture as excessive, consumptive, flashy, uncontrolled and in need of intervention. Working-class participants, particularly women, are often

shown eating excessively and messily, swearing loudly, taking pleasure in physicality, and wearing distastefully tight and garish clothes (Palmer, 2011).

Make-over shows and self-help shows like *The Dr. Oz Show* or *What Not to Wear*, have taken up the project of reforming working-class femininity by disciplining working-class women into the right consumptive practices and aesthetics in order to construct their “true, better selves.” Skeggs and Wood write that though women may see financial and social returns when they invest in their beauty, they must keep re-investing because femininity loses value over time. While talk shows through the 1990s privileged personal experience over expert advice, more recent therapeutic-style talk shows, lifestyle television, and makeover reality shows discipline participants and viewers through the use of fashion, medical and relationship experts (Skeggs & Wood, 2008).

Sexuality and Trash TV

Trash TV and the LGBTQ community have a complicated relationship and history that has been both mutually beneficial and exploitative. *The Phil Donahue Show* was an important forum for gay and lesbian advocates throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with a strong commitment to challenging stereotypes and humanizing the debate on homosexuality. In his interviews with talk show participants, Gamson writes:

[W]hen it came to social issues, Donahue had a genuine commitment to bashing stereotypes: when looking for guests from stigmatized groups, get the ones who seem the most normal. "They didn't want somebody who acts crazy and crawls the walls and carries on—in plain language, a screaming faggot," says Bruce Spencer, who appeared on a Donahue show in the late 1980s. "They wanted to shock people by interviewing people from portions of the gay community in the business world, in various fields, where if you walk into the room nobody would look at you

twice and say, 'Aha.' They wanted us to be as normal as we are in everyday life." (Gamson, 1998, p. 53)

Donahue often pitted gay-rights advocates against opponents in on-air debates, and the audience was encouraged to express their reasons for supporting or opposing gay rights, and to tolerate differences of opinion. This allowed Donahue to maintain a veneer of objectivity and toe the line of respectable, rational middle-class discourse and morality, while he brought members of marginalized groups, like drag queens and trans people, on air (Gamson, 1998).

Gamson discusses how important it was, for him as a young gay man, to see sexual minorities represented on television in a way that was not medicalized or pathologizing. "For people whose life experience is so heavily tilted toward invisibility, whose nonconformity, even when it looks very much like conformity, discredits them and disenfranchises them, daytime TV talk shows are a big shot of visibility and media accreditation," (Gamson, 1998, p. 5). By bringing private matters into the public sphere and showing transgressive sexualities and identities in the intimate setting of daytime television, talk shows, and reality television normalize behavior that was previously seen as deviant and push the boundaries of prescriptive morality. Further, the placement of these shows during daytime programming allowed them to reach a wider audience, while avoiding the salaciousness of late-night television.

Yet shows that privileged "normal," middle-class, educated, respectable members of minority sexual identities as spokespeople also served to further stigmatize people who did not fit that mold. Furthermore, once talk shows moved from Donahue's conversational model to Jerry Springer and Ricki Lake's more

confrontational model, talk shows began using more deception and ambush techniques to get guests on stage and surprise them in order to elicit a stronger emotional response. As a result, many guests would leave the shows feeling attacked and exploited, rather than represented and validated (Gamson, 1998; Grindstaff, 2002).

Shows on LGBTQ topics often set up confrontations by inviting queer guests along with opponents of LGBTQ rights, such as conversion therapists, representatives of anti-gay religious groups, or even individuals who hold particularly strong bigoted views on sexuality. Gamson finds that audience members often attack queer guests for being too open and public with their sexuality, too promiscuous or improper, and not embodying their masculinity or femininity in the right way—in other words, queer guests fail the middle-class morality test of normalcy, propriety, privacy, and restraint. However, the audience tends to support queer guests when they are pitted against anti-gay guests, especially if those guests attempt to speak from a position of religious or political power. Gamson writes that the shows themselves, mainly through the hosts, do not tend to endorse anti-gay guests, as their exclusionary rhetoric goes against the shows' liberal pluralism, which rests ostensibly on tolerance and respect for difference; after all, the success of talk shows is dependent on the conflict and shock generated by the display of difference. Gamson remarks that it is actually the absence of anti-gay guests that pushes the audience to take up the role of religious or moral authority, while their presence pushes the audience to gravitate towards a position of tolerance and inclusivity. This supports the talk show format's privileging of interpersonal conflict

over political debate or expert discourse. The main exception is in cases where the show pits queer white guests against conservative religious black guests. Gamson writes:

As a general rule, when white speakers are bigoted, their racial privilege (and sometimes class privilege as well) undercuts their authority to a large degree; when people of color speak, they speak with the talk show authority of everyday, less powerful folks, less susceptible to the hostility aroused by those who seem to think they're better than everybody else. (Gamson, 1998, p. 127)

When set up against African-American speakers, queer white guests come to embody cosmopolitan, middle-class privilege and moral lassitude. Ultimately, the interplay of class and race in these confrontations allow talk shows to amp up the conflict on-stage without having to officially adopt an anti-gay stance.

Class and Trash TV

Wood and Skeggs (2011) argue that the category of class has been virtually erased from public and, to a certain degree, academic discourse despite a marked rise in income inequality over the past 30 years. On television, the word “ordinary” has become a stand-in for “working class.” Further, Taylor (2011) argues that the decline of trade unions, the labour movement and the manufacturing sector led to a decline in visibility for the working class. Consequently, the middle class has filled the void and become the “normal” against which behaviors are judged. The effect of the erasure of “class” as a category is that poverty and the failure to achieve middle-class success is individualized and recast as a personal, rather than systemic, issue. This is exacerbated by what Skeggs and Wood (2008) describe as a “therapeutic culture” arising out of middle- and upper-classes’ early-20th-century fascination with psychoanalysis and neuroses that assumes that only certain groups are

possessed of a complex and neurotic interiority. Middle-class neuroses become a marker of intellectual superiority over working classes and marginalized ethnic groups, whose failures are completely uncomplicated and due to their own poor choices.

Indeed, Gamson compares talk shows to a two-headed monster—one head represents middle-class respectability and values, while the other represents lower-class emotional spectatorship and participation. He argues that these two heads constantly clash on talk shows, whereas lower-class participants are encouraged to discuss personal matters and confront each other, while they are judged based on middle-class standards of respectability that dictate the importance of privacy and manners. In this set-up, the participants cannot meet the standards of middle-class respectability and are therefore cast in the category of “trash” or “ghetto” (Skeggs & Wood, 2008). The host, who remains calm and often maintains a critical distance from participants, embodies middle-class respectability in his or her role as moderator, therapist and expert. Further, while the heads of middle-class respectability and lower-class participation may clash, they are inextricable from one another as the clash of class cultures creates much of the show’s tension and drama (Gamson, 1998; Grindstaff, 2002).

Though talk shows have been an avenue for members of the underrepresented lower-class to appear on television, this representation often contains an element of exploitation. Grindstaff’s ethnographical work on talk shows revealed that most guests have no media training or experience. In fact, most have never been on an airplane before and may choose to appear on a show for the free

trip to cities like New York and Los Angeles. Producers also instruct guests to amp up their emotional display on stage, as a way of getting them to perform their class. In “reveal” shows, they may deceive guests about why they are on the show to capture a better, more authentic “money shot” of guests’ reactions of shock and surprise (Grindstaff, 2002).

Skeggs and Wood argue that this exploitation of lower-class culture and participants has been carried over to reality television, where participants are judged based on middle-class morals and aesthetics and disciplined into conforming to them, abandoning their own class culture. Further, they argue that while early talk shows had opened a space for lower-class people to gain public recognition through their performance of suffering, more contemporary shows, such as *The Jerry Springer Show*, deny them that same recognition by casting them in the category of “trash,” or “ghetto.” They find that many reality shows that juxtapose working-class and middle-class participants, such as *Wife Swap* and *Faking It*, are premised on the performance of upper- and middle-class skills, etiquette and disposition. The entertainment factor on these shows is in working-class participants’ failure to perform and embody the signifiers of a higher class in their new environment (Skeggs & Wood, 2008). Similarly, transformation shows are premised on the working-class body’s inability to perform normative codes of behavior. Working-class women’s femininity is portrayed as excessive, too loud and sexual and uncontrolled, or lacking, too vulgar and labour-worn to be beautiful. Palmer (2011) writes that the “before” moment on transformation shows

represents the working-class body, an unpolished version to be perfected through retraining in middle-class skills and the right consumptive practices.

Race and trash TV

Grindstaff writes that one of the reasons for talk shows to start marketing themselves more to urban youth of colour is because it allowed them to capitalize on the demographic's "cool factor"—the trends espoused by this demographic often filter down to white suburban youth with time, increasing the show's market reach. However, the descriptor most often used for guests on talk shows is "white trash" (Grindstaff, 2002). The 'white trash' stereotype connotes a lack of education, poor hygiene, laziness, sexual promiscuity and backwards social values. 'White trash' people are about as far from middle-class respectability as one can get. On the one hand, the foregrounding of 'white trash' guests challenges the presumed superiority of whiteness and makes class inequality explicit. On the other hand, writes Grindstaff (quoting Bettie, 1995), the phrase "white trash" suggests that "color, poverty, and degenerate lifestyles go together so naturally that, when white folks behave this way, 'their whiteness needs to be named'" (Grindstaff, 2002, p. 263).

Gamson argues that talk shows have set up a binary where whiteness is associated with elite authority, while darker skin is imbued with everyday authority. As talk shows tend to celebrate and foreground the everyday authority of lived experience and marginalize expert or academic authority, queer white guests and conservative audience members of colour are encouraged to clash over respectability and morality. This further exacerbates the invisibility of queer people of colour and the assumed whiteness of queer identities.

Bell-Jordan (2008) examines the representation of race on three reality television shows: *Black. White.*, *The Real World: Denver* and *Survivor: Cook Island*. While she admits that reality television has increased the media visibility of people of colour, she problematizes that visibility by examining the discourses and representations that structure these programs. She finds that these reality television shows play on racial divisions and racial stereotypes to create drama and conflict among cast members, without addressing the underlying discourses and assumptions about race in the culture at large. Further, when the shows do depict racialized conflicts, they decontextualize them and erase the existence of systemic racism by framing them as interpersonal problems to be resolved between cast-members, rather than systemic socio-political issues to be addressed in a complex and nuanced way. Ultimately, the way race is represented on talk shows and reality television is depoliticized and individualized in order to remain commercially friendly and non-threatening. Racist remarks play on racial tensions and discourses to “amp up” on-screen drama, without challenging the status quo or saying anything substantial about race.

Fandom, Anti-Fandom and Affect: Pleasure, Frustration, and Boredom

The study of affect in media is focused on the unconscious, or preconscious emotional states provoked by consumption of the text or product. Kavka (2008) writes that affect is more accurately translated as a mood rather than an emotion, because it precedes rationalization or articulation. While emotions are intense, short-lived and can be identified and linked to a salient cause, affect is a low-intensity, diffuse and enduring state of mind and being. It is the opposite of

cognition in the sense that it is pre-rational, though the two intersect and operate concurrently to shape viewers' overall interpretation and impression of the text. This thesis examines three major affective states experienced by viewers who hate watch: pleasure, frustration and boredom.

Pleasure

Despite its problematic and contested nature, trash TV brings viewers different kinds of pleasures and keeps them coming back. Gamson argues that the pleasure he takes from watching talk shows stems from the ability to see people transgress moral and social conventions and reject the authority and privilege of educated middle-class experts over public discourse. Though he does not fully accept the optimism of defenders who call talk shows a democratizing force, he takes pleasure in the subversion of rational, "civilized" public discourse that sometimes takes place on talk shows. He appreciates talk shows as a space for the "monstrosities" of society, "poverty, lack of education, sex and gender nonconformity and race," to have their day in the sun (Gamson, 1998, p. 13).

Ironic viewers also take pleasure in the "realness" of talk shows and reality television, meaning the way they present themselves as a window into real situations, real suffering and real emotions. Though the realness of these shows is disputed, these viewers can take voyeuristic pleasure in watching participants' raw experiences and reactions (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 173). Grindstaff likens the height of voyeuristic pleasure in watching participants' reactions to the money shot in pornography, the moment of the male performer's on-film orgasm. The money shot is the "joy, sorrow, rage, or remorse expressed in visible, bodily terms" at the

moment of surprise and reveal that talk show and reality television producers set up so painstakingly (Grindstaff, 2002, p. 19). In other words, ironic viewers experience pleasure, fascination and repulsion from watching participants lose control of themselves in the money shot moment.

Tied in with the voyeuristic pleasure of watching participants transgress codes of proper public behavior is the pleasure of watching confrontation, anger and aggression play out among them. Grindstaff likens confrontational talk shows to gladiatorial combat or professional wrestling, where participants serve up “emotional slams” instead of “body slams.” Emotions and conflicts are ‘amped up’ ahead of time, stoked by the host and producers leading up to the reveal, and released in a show of aggression, posturing, swearing and sometimes physical violence, often to the studio audience’s delight and cheering.³ In fact, talk shows and reality television often prep audiences to react in a specific way by casting participants as villains or heroes in their own narratives through expository montages, interviews, and behind-the-scenes footage. In the studio, the televised audience is encouraged to argue with guests and demonstrate their displeasure with the “villain” in the narrative. In this way, trash TV can be placed on the spectrum of “uncivilized” low-brow entertainment that like carnival shows and minstrel shows (Grindstaff, 2002).

³ Grindstaff notes that the studio audience’s emotional reaction is often stoked and encouraged by producers, who prompt specific responses (cheering, jeering...) with signs. These prompts remain behind the camera, giving the impression of live theatre and authentic audience participation.

Finally, viewers often take pleasure in identifying with or against participants. Grindstaff writes that viewers often watch particular talk shows because they find the topics and problems they address pertinent to their own lives, because they feel better about their lives by comparing them to those of the participants, or because they enjoy watching the participants act in ways the viewers never would (Grindstaff, 2002). Viewers, particularly anti-fans, also take pleasure in defining themselves in opposition to the show, its characters and the types of people they assume the real fans to be. This allows them to position themselves as critical viewers, rather than dupes of the show, and to take pleasure in their own savviness (Hermes, 2005; Andrejevic, 2004).

An even more extreme response is in taking pleasure at making fun of participants. Unlike viewers who enjoy watching talk show and reality TV participants transgress social boundaries and codes of proper behavior, some viewers watch in order to mock them or be entertained by their debasement on-air. For these viewers, participants' "trashiness" serves to bolster their sense of self and class superiority (Grindstaff, 2002). Further, in their focus groups with female viewers of reality television, Skeggs and Wood (2008) identify a sense of *schadenfreude* that their participants' experience and use as a claim for moral authority over the people portrayed on reality television. *Schadenfreude* is the delight one experiences at another's misfortune. They found that their participants not only felt better about their lives after witnessing the misfortune of others on reality TV, they also used it to bolster their own choices and claims to knowledge, certainty and expertise. Their participants would judge the televised subjects'

reactions to specific situations as inadequate and add the way that they would have handled the same situations, implying that they knew the right or proper way to behave.

Frustration

Another side of the pleasure coin is the frustration that viewers of trash TV experience. Part of the frustration viewers feel when watching trash TV, especially if they are watching it critically, is in identifying the show as exploitative and its participants as bad role models or representations. Viewers might feel ideologically or morally opposed to the messages of a show or its participants. This is particularly frustrating if they look to the show for validation of their ideologies and choices, and find them mis- or unrepresented within the text. Moreover, critical fans look for a reflection of reality in the televisual texts they consume. Hermes writes that realism as understood by television audiences denotes “the real, or deeper, truth and as the opposite of ‘appearances’: inner reality against outward appearance” (Hermes, 2005, p. 107). In other words, critical viewers crave socio-political and emotional depth and meaning that aligns with their understanding of the world within the texts they consume.

For viewers who are fans of talk shows or reality television, or who do see themselves represented in the genre in some way, frustration may come externally, from the ways in which trash TV is talked about by critics and media commentators. Talk shows have been described as “tasteless, crude and pornographic,” as well as “a trashy forum for trashy people to act trashy” (Grindstaff, 2002, p. 22). Critics worry that talk shows teach the audience harmful lessons about psychology and proper

behavior, and dull people's ability to feel empathy for "true" suffering. They also moralize about the audience taking pleasure in the suffering of others (Gamson, 1998). This moral panic continues among critics of reality television, who worry that the genre perverts the public's moral standards by constantly portraying deviant behavior. Andrejevic quotes a spokesperson for the Parents Television Council saying, on the subject of the reality television show *Temptation Island*: "The producers [...] should be ashamed of themselves for trying to force the destruction of four relationships for the entertainment purposes of those lowlifes who consent to watch this trash" (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 174).

Kavka (2008) writes that television watching generally is associated with a particular kind of lowbrow shame because of how intimate yet uninvolved a medium it is. Television reimagines the world by bringing different realities into the space of the viewer's home. However, unlike reading (and to a certain extent film), which interacts with one's imagination, television does not invite the viewer to construct this reimagined world. It merely flattens it through space-time and presents it to the viewer ready-made. Though this view of television may be debatable, especially in light of Stuart Hall's writings on encoding and decoding, the image of television as a low-value cultural product shames not only viewers, but also theorists and critics, and makes them reluctant to admit that they watch television with interest or that they pay attention to it. For viewers holding high cultural capital, such as an advanced education or middle- or upper-class tastes, television becomes something to glance at, rather than something to engage with, the way one might with a book, a play or a film. Further, the shame associated with

watching television varies depending on the type of program—Kavka argues that the level of shame depends on an information versus affect scale, where shows that are high in information, such as the news, will produce less shame in viewers than shows that are high in affect, such as reality television. Kavka writes that this shame of watching television ultimately rests on viewers' assumption that their peers are not watching, and that they are engaging in an activity that separates them from the shared identity of their social and cultural class.

Moreover, fans who earnestly enjoy television texts are often marginalized and mocked for their over-investment, sometimes even within fan communities and through the texts themselves. Johnson (2007) finds that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fans were frequently the butt of jokes on the show through characters like Xavier and later Warren, Jonathan and Andrew, three Buffy superfans who became season six's main antagonists and whose attempts to control the *Buffy* universe parallel the intervention of fans who engage in activities like fanfiction, discussion boards and fan art. Even within fan communities, there is a delineation between fans who consume and accept the text uncritically and unquestioningly, and those who are willing to criticize producers when the show fails to meet their expectations. Simply put, being an uncritical fan is not cool—viewers can gain a lot more cultural cachet by maintaining a critical distance from the text with which they are engaging.

The devaluation of talk shows and reality television as trashy and the denigration of its viewers as “lowlifes” creates a strong delineation between middle- and highbrow “good,” worthwhile entertainment, and lowbrow, worthless televised garbage, and it disciplines the consumers of that garbage into feeling shame at their

“mindless” consumptive practices. Like junk food, trash TV is perceived as an empty filler lacking in (intellectual) value that is ultimately harmful to consumers. The failure to nourish the mind by consuming the right kind of entertainment becomes a moral and intellectual failure that degrades both the individual viewer and his or her society.

Boredom

Finally, boredom must be addressed, not only as a force driving people to watch trash TV, but also as an affective response to it. Kavka (2008) writes that reality television is an affective medium, in the sense that it relies on the performance and visualization of affect in order to simulate reality. Grindstaff (2002) and Gamson (1998) echo this observation on the performance of affect on talk shows, where guests will sometimes be encouraged to perform and re-perform their emotional breakdowns on-stage in order to get the right take. Talk shows and reality television depend on the performance of emotion, or the money-shot as Grindstaff calls it, to generate drama and affective connection for viewers. Viewers watch reality television and talk shows because of the promise of reality—the promise of seeing their emotions and experiences reflected on the screen. Kavka calls this the ordinariness or banality of affect—the emotions played out on the screen are attractive to viewers precisely because they are familiar and in reaction to everyday situations. Even shows that expose participants to extreme conditions, such as *Fear Factor*, or that feature clips of dangerous stunts, routinize the emotional response they provoke through sheer repetition—viewers come to

expect those moments of shock, which effectively neutralizes them and robs them of their ability to produce truly unexpected affect (Kavka, 2008).

Andrejevic (2004) writes that a major appeal of reality television for viewers is the fact that they can influence the program through processes like voting to eliminate participants every week or even through commenting online to “advise” producers on the direction in which the show should progress. Paradoxically, he finds that reality television shows become boring to viewers precisely when they have the most control over the participants and the content. On shows like *Big Brother*, viewers strive to preserve the “realness” of the show by eliminating contestants, who are perceived as fake or actor-like and keeping those who are most real. However, often this results in the elimination of the show’s most drama-generating contestants, those most likely to scheme or create the conflict on which the show’s affective promise rests. Contestants on *Big Brother* often referred to the omnipresent camera and the audience’s ability to eliminate as controls keeping them “real.” The elimination of those contestants most willing to play the game that the show sets up suggests that the audience most values contestants willing to ignore the contrivance of the show and the fact that they are under constant surveillance specifically to produce entertainment. However, while the audience was willing to vote with their conscience in order to preserve the “realness” on-screen, they lost interest in watching as only the most “real” contestants remained, and the show’s ratings dropped with every subsequent episode. Ultimately, Kavka (2008) concludes, the boredom affected by reality television is not only a failing of the genre, but also a guarantee of its realness and familiarity.

Cultural Capital and Viewership: Hate Watching as Distancing Discourse

Viewers who hate watch trash TV often take pains to distance themselves from the show they consider trashy by bringing up the “good” highbrow entertainment they also consume:

I like shows like *Mad Men* and *The Wire* just as much as the next person with an appreciation for high quality and thoughtful storytelling, but the fact of the matter is that sometimes I watch TV not to think at all. I watched *Smash* through season one and will continue to watch through season two, I've wasted plenty of days to a *Real Housewives* marathons and I've seen every episode of *Glee*. (Davies, 2013)

This need to distance oneself from one's consumptive practices can be examined through Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory. Cultural capital is a person's value in a system of relationship exchange based on his or her education, knowledge, parentage, skills and attitudes. Children do not inherit their parents' cultural capital automatically—rather, their parents impart it to them through the moral, cultural and scholarly education they provide them with, the values and pursuits they encourage in them and the ways of thinking and doing, or *habitus*, they instill in them. Institutions, like the education system or media, shape cultural capital by promoting certain texts as canonical and culturally important over others. Further, they model good citizenship by promoting normative consumptive practices and participation in the capitalist labour market. Bourdieu used cultural capital to explain the difference in scholastic achievement in children of different classes—though it is possible to acquire (or lose) cultural capital, the tastes, knowledge and attitudes imparted to a person by their social position have real effects (Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, 1986).

In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), Bourdieu demonstrates that aesthetic taste is related to social class—he examines the cultural knowledge and aesthetic preferences of people and finds that members of the same class have similar levels of cultural knowledge around subjects like composers and painters, as well as similar preferences in art and entertainment. He finds that working-class subjects prefer art that does not have multiple layers of signification, but that speaks to the spectator or viewer directly. They often complained that more highbrow art was inaccessible to them because it did not make itself understandable to them and their frames of reference. Middle-class subjects also had a disdain for experimentation and signification in art, but they spoke of their taste and cultural knowledge more self-consciously, careful not to reveal what they perceived as a lack of sophistication or education. This group was also the most disdainful of commercial art, such as popular music.⁴ Bourdieu distinguishes between the upper economic class and the upper intellectual class in his research, noting that the upper economic class, which are made up of managers, bankers and the like tended to align with more middle-class aesthetic tastes, while the upper intellectual or cultural class, made up of university faculty, artists, and some teachers, were the most open to experimentation and signification in art and entertainment. They were

⁴ Theodor Adorno's criticism of commercial art in "On Popular Music" (1941) somewhat typifies this position by dismissing the possibility that commercial cultural products may hold higher artistic or intellectual meaning. Adorno argues that commercial art is consumed passively because it is formulaic, predictable and constructed specifically to be easily understood by a mass audience—it does not challenge its consumers. However, those of Bourdieu's respondents who belonged to an intellectual class indicated that they saw the possibility in popular cultural products to transcend commercialism and hold deeper meanings about society and culture.

also more likely to say that aesthetic value can be found in any subject, regardless of how mundane it may be, and to hold composition and content as more important than the subject of a piece of art or entertainment.

Claessens and Dhoest (2010) take up Bourdieu's research on cultural capital and class in the 21st century by studying the comedy preferences of viewers with lower and higher levels of education. They argue that respondents with a higher level of education have a greater, or more suitable, wealth of knowledge from which to draw in interpreting middle- and highbrow comedy, while respondents with lower levels of education preferred more formulaic, less critical comedy. Claessens and Dhoest write that taste is not only a set of preferences and aversions, but also "a form of cultural knowledge, linked to social status" (p. 52). Highly educated respondents' stated preference for highbrow comedy is a function of their high cultural capital. They define highbrow comedy, such as *Monty Python*, as satiric, absurdist and containing multiple levels of meaning. In contrast, they define lowbrow comedy, like classic sitcoms, as formulaic, predictable and anchored in a circular narrative structure, where conflict is resolved, and the situation is restored to its equilibrium, usually within an episode. Finally, they define middlebrow comedy, like *The Office*, as "less experimental and absurd than highbrow comedies but more hybrid and intertextual than classic sitcoms" (p. 55).

In their interviews, Claessens and Dhoest found that the lower educated participants appreciated the lowbrow program's accessibility and the fact that it was not difficult to understand the humor. They liked watching it to relax without having to think. They were more divided in their appreciation for the middlebrow

comedy. The younger interviewees enjoyed the visual jokes and stereotypical characters, while the older participants found it boring, serious and “different.” None of the lower educated participants enjoyed the highbrow comedy, describing the absurdist humor as ridiculous and requiring a higher degree of effort and engagement to understand. Interestingly, many of the lower educated participants found the humor in the highbrow series silly, predictable and uncritical. Their understanding of it focused on the use of visual jokes, rather than the more subtle references and social criticisms. Claessens and Dhoest argue that this deeper level of meaning was not accessible to the participants with lower levels of education, because of their lack of high cultural knowledge. The higher educated participants were divided on their interpretation of the highbrow series. Some found it more simplistic than the middlebrow series and focused on the visual jokes, while others found it more complex because of the vocabulary, syntax and social commentary used. They described the humor in the highbrow series as a mix of predictable and unpredictable storytelling, and they appreciated its use of irony, layered meaning and that it addressed controversial social topics. Ultimately, using general viewership statistics from the networks revealing that the middlebrow series was the most popular for both segments of viewers, Claessens and Dhoest conclude that their more highly educated participants’ stated preference for highbrow comedy did not reflect their viewership habits and was more of an affectation that served to bolster those viewers’ cultural capital.

Skeggs and Wood (2008) find that their working-class and middle-class participants have different responses to reality television participants and experts.

The middle-class participants tend to place more critical distance between themselves and the television show by emphasizing their critical reading of it over their affective response and by challenging the authority of experts in order to bolster their own cultural knowledge. The working-class participants, on the other hand, were more likely to criticize the reality television subjects' judgments and moral authority, particularly those of women appearing on reality shows. Moreover, as stated earlier, working-class participants were also more likely to display their affective response to the action on-screen by talking to the TV or exclaiming in shock or revulsion out-loud. This suggests that these two groups have different ways of engaging with reality television and positioning themselves as viewers—the working-class group was more affectively engaged and connected to the subjects appearing on reality television, while the middle-class group maintained more critical distance and connected more with the experts appearing on reality shows.

Indeed, in a media environment where talk shows and reality television have been devalued as morally bankrupt trash, viewers feel the need to defend their cultural capital from being eroded by their consumption of trash TV, particularly if they use their higher cultural capital, as writers and media commentators, to legitimize their work in the public sphere. However, hate watching is not guaranteed to preserve a viewer's cultural capital, and its merits and validity are heavily contested in online media commentary, where critics may call it a waste of time or a performative action (Goodman, 2013; Ambrosino, 2014).

Hate watching's performative value is another way in which it can serve to build up a viewer's cultural capital. Anti-fans define themselves in opposition not

only to the show they hate, but also to their perception of the show's fans. Hermes's observation of a forum of anti-fans led her to conclude that many used their stated dislike of a show to build themselves up as critical, intelligent viewers by casting fans as cultural dupes of the show's faulty morals or pedestrian, lowest common denominator entertainment value. Further, they shame fans for their engagement with the show (Hermes, 2005). Fans who engage lose critical distance and open themselves up to being constructed through their association with the show. Anti-fans, on the other hand, maintain enough distance and disengagement to watch without being wholly defined by their consumption.

Hate watchers are more likely to publicly mock a show's failings than its viewers, but the effect is similar. NBC's recent live performance of *Peter Pan* was hailed as "created for hate watching" well ahead of its airdate (O'Neil, 2014). In fact, some TV commentators were disappointed when it failed to be as bad as they had hoped: "The biggest disappointment of the evening was that it just wasn't disappointing enough. This wasn't the kind of thing you could hate-watch. This was a meh-watch" (Goldstein, 2014). There is a particular kind of glee that comes from hate watching a show that was not meant to be trash, but promised high-brow entertainment only to fail in its lofty ambition, such as *Smash*, *The Killing* and *The Newsroom*:

Hate-watching isn't just about a show being bad. [...] Sometimes it's a matter of scale: How grand is this failure? How big was the ambition behind this fiasco? Other times it's a matter of expectations, when a show so profoundly underdelivers on its epic promise that the resulting chasm becomes more important than any of the characters on the series. (Lyons, 2012)

Though the target of hate watchers' mockery is the pretention of high-mindedness, in this case, the pleasure of watching the failure as it happens over and over again is not unlike the pleasure that talk show viewers take in witnessing participants lose control of themselves and fly into a rage or a crying fit during talk shows' money shot moment. In this case, it is the show's creators and actors who are losing control over their work as they envisioned it, and recognizing that allows the viewers to feel savvy, to showcase the refinement of their tastes and to deride the excess in ambition or the lack of subtlety in the execution of the show.

Andrejevic (2004) finds that viewers take pleasure in the sense of cynical savviness that they get out of being able to identify the artificiality of the shows they are watching. However, he argues that this awareness of the artificiality of reality television does not challenge it but rather that taking pleasure in identifying it naturalizes the artifice as an inevitable part of mediated culture. Andrejevic writes that savvy viewers use their self-acknowledgment of lowbrow taste in order to escape the trap of the dupe, who believes that there is something more to television than its constructedness and artificiality. These viewers do not demand better of television, because to demand better or to critique would imply that they care and are affected by television. Identifying with the lowest-common-denominator appeal of trash TV instead of bemoaning it allows savvy viewers to revel in it from a safe distance—they are neither in its thrall, nor self-deluded enough to think that anything exists outside of the market forces that bring us *Jerry Springer* and *The Bachelor*.

Critics of hate watching argue that the practice is cynical and that it detracts hate watchers from truly enjoying and appreciating the media they consume and its conventions (Ambrosino, 2014; Borders, 2014). However, Cloud (2010) argues that trash TV bribes its audiences to continue watching with moments of irony and the pleasure of rejecting the fantasy presented, particularly in reality shows like *The Bachelor*. Irony is a recognition that what is meant is the opposite of what is said, a recognition of the “unrealness” of what is presented or perceived, and an appreciation for the humor in the contradiction between the fantasy and the reality. *The Bachelor* presents an unrealistic scenario for romance: finding one’s true love from a pool of 25 candidates chosen by television producers, all set to beautiful and romantic backdrops. Cloud argues that the show invites two types of investment simultaneously in viewers, “the pleasure of the romantic fantasy and the pleasure of irony in recognizing the fantasy’s folly” (Cloud, 2010, p. 414). Her analysis of fan boards devoted to *The Bachelor* reveals that viewers are capable of maintaining a simultaneous investment in both types of pleasure, contrary to worries by critics of reality television that viewers’ ability to differentiate between fantasy and reality is damaged when they consume these types of shows. Thus, reality television builds the irony bribe, “a strategic mechanism of a cultural text that invites audiences to identify with the pleasures of the reaction against the taking seriously of a patently ideological fantasy,” into the text, playing along with critical viewers and hate watchers (Cloud, 2010, p. 415).

Viewers who adopt an ironic reading of the text can distance themselves from it, and the ideologies contained within it, allowing themselves to take pleasure

in watching it, without having to address how the text's internal logics might construct its consumer in a way other than how these viewers want to be perceived. Cloud warns that, while the irony bribe allows viewers to take "tongue-in-cheek" pleasure in shows whose foundational ideologies they would normally find troubling, such as the commodification of women on *The Bachelor*, their detachment makes them complacent in the face of those ideologies, effectively naturalizing them (Cloud, 2010). Similarly, quoting Zizek, Andrejevic cautions that "'perversion is always a socially constructive attitude'—not a socially subversive one" (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 177). To recognize something as perverse or against the norm is to implicitly ideologically legitimize and reinforce the norm. Moreover, recognizing the marginalizing discourses that run through trash TV is not to deconstruct or neutralize them. Though the discourse of hate watching might liberate viewers to take pleasure in trash TV and media products outside the bounds of what is culturally sanctioned, it does not liberate them from the ideologies of class, race, gender and sexuality and the relations of power that construct, circulate within, and are legitimized by those products.

Chapter Two: Identity and Trash Entertainment: Gender, Race, Class and Sexuality

I'd define trashy TV as shows that are unapologetically racist, sexist, homophobic, misogynistic, violent, especially physical violence, or just plain ignorant. (Sincerity, 20)

The interplay between socially marginalized people and lower-class (or trash) entertainment can be traced historically through examples like 19th century freak shows, which often featured performers with disabilities or physical deformities, as well as performers who transgressed the bounds of traditional femininity and masculinity; curio museums, where artifacts from far-away places, like China or Fiji, were assembled for Western audiences and presented exoticizing, if fascinating, images of the racial Other; and to soap operas aimed at female audiences whose appeal rested on their melodramatic storylines and displays of affect and emotion. For my participants, stereotypes about race, class, gender and sexuality, as well as a focus on interpersonal and individual drama and the publicization of private matters, were major markers of trash TV.

Participants in this research project were primarily asked to discuss trash entertainment in relation to gender, class, race and sexuality. Though the category of dis/ability has historically been very present in lowbrow entertainment formats, modern formats, like reality television, more often avoid rather than exploit the portrayal of disability. This is not to say that disability is completely ignored within lowbrow entertainment—for example, Nyle DiMarco made *America's Next Top Model* history as not only the first deaf contestant on the show, but also the first deaf

person to win the title in 2015. Additionally, shows such as *Hoarders*, *My Strange Addiction* and *Intervention* arguably rely on portraying people suffering from mental illness to generate shock and fascination, but the visibility of disabilities on television is overall very low and for this reason, dis/ability was not used as a major category of identity in the analysis.

Many participants expressed a frustration with the stereotyping of women, people of colour and working- and lower-class people on talk shows and reality television. In fact, some participants argued that stereotypical and normative representations of marginalized identities were two of the criteria that defined trash TV. Caitlin, a 28-year-old woman in the second focus group, said that “one of the ways I would define trash TV is having very normative representations or racist or sexist representations,” a sentiment echoed by Sincerity in her statement quoted at the top of the chapter. For these participants, trash TV not only deals in easy-to-read, stereotypical portrayals of identity, but also denies the possibility of complexity to characters who are female, of colour and/or of a lower socio-economic class. This is not to say that middle-class white male characters are never portrayed through stereotypes, but they are not perceived as being defined by their whiteness, their maleness or their middle-class status.

For some participants, this was especially problematic with reality shows, because their claim to reflect reality implies that the stereotypes portrayed within are reflective of the reality of women, people of colour or people of a lower socio-economic class in general. Other participants rejected reality television’s claim to reality and instead argued that scripted television was perceived as more reflective

of a middle-class reality and therefore the stereotypes it portrayed within were more insidious and threatening. Tara, a 30-year-old woman, said:

I find shows like ABC, NBC, CBS sitcoms take certain prototypes of what it means to be a female, male, 16, and maybe stereotype it. I find that to be a lot more harmful and a lot more trashy than these reality TV shows. Because I think that the reality TV shows, you watch them but you don't see them as a mirror of your own mind, whereas these sitcoms are supposed to mirror the middle-class experience.

Many participants shared Tara's sentiment that the stereotypes portrayed on trashy television shows have a negative effect on viewers and society in general. Though most of the participants emphasized that they were able to discern between stereotypes on television and human complexity in real life, many expressed the belief that other viewers, especially young viewers, were absorbing and accepting the stereotypes uncritically and unquestioningly. "I know that it's terrible and I know that they're displaying behaviors which are negative and which don't help anybody in the situation and by doing this they promote that in society and it normalizes these behaviors and it makes people think, 'Well I see this all the time, it's okay for me to react like this,'" (Christina, 21). In other words, Christina was concerned that trash TV has a direct influence on its viewers' behavior and perception of what are considered socially acceptable or normal responses to conflict. James (21) and Aidan (22) were even concerned that popular lowbrow comedy, such as *The Big Bang Theory*, was eroding its viewers' sense of humor and teaching people to consume uncritical and obvious humor, instead of more nuanced high-concept shows like *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. A few of the participants even admitted that they were more likely to stereotype people based on the trash TV they have watched recently, such as Jack (33), who said that he

looks at people whose dress and mannerisms remind him of talk show participants and assumes they are similarly promiscuous or “trashy.” Overall, according to the students interviewed, trash TV not only portrays and perpetuates harmful stereotypes based on gender, race and class, but also reinforces those stereotypes in the minds of less critical viewers. This reflects a sentiment that they were atypical trash TV viewers who could separate themselves from the screen, whereas “typical” viewers, especially of a lower level of education, could not impose critical distance between themselves and the screen and were subsumed by the representations and politics of trash TV. Participants could therefore derive a sense of superiority by imagining the uncritical reception of other viewers and comparing it to their own complex and critical reception. Ironically, this attitude perpetuates the stigma against viewers of trash TV that participants actively work to avoid.

Along the same vein, most of the participants were very interested in seeing more diversity in the representation of different identities on television. For many, diverse and well-written portrayals of women, people of colour and members of the LGBTQ community were one of the main hallmarks of a good television show. Sabrina (24) makes this point when she talks about some of her favourite TV shows:

There's so much representation of various sexualities, there's a strong trans woman playing a trans character, there's various races, and I really liked that. It's like, sign me up, I want to at least check this out because I enjoyed how much representation there is. And I also make it a point to watch *Agent Carter* live, because I like that there is a main female role like that.

For progressive, educated viewers, the representation of marginalized identities in media affects real-life socio-political power relations. This is a reversal of the pedagogical power of television that participants assigned to trashy shows that rely

on stereotypes: if viewers can be taught to accept stereotypes through the representations they see on television, perhaps they can be taught to question and reject stereotypes through the same mechanism. Therefore, seeking out and supporting media products with positive, complicated and diverse characters that transcend stereotypes is seen by participants as a political act that challenges the primacy of masculinity, heteronormativity and whiteness in media.

Notably, while queer identities were rarely identified by participants as being stereotyped on trash TV, participants did mention wanting to see more positive queer representation on the TV shows that they watch. By contrast, while participants pointed out that people of a lower socio-economic class were often stereotyped on television, they did not express a desire to see more diversity in class representation on television. These gaps in the ways in which participants discussed power and the representation of marginalized identities will be explored below.

Gender and Trash TV: Women Behaving Badly

Many of the participants established a particularly strong link between trash TV and femininity, both in terms of the (target and imagined) audience and in terms of the people represented on-screen:

I'm quite aware of the fact that I really only like hate watching things that circulate around women. I don't watch *The Bachelorette*, I don't care, so predominantly female based reality TV shows are my soft spot. [...] It's women behaving badly. (Carol, 29)

I also think that trash is often—the negative connotation that it carries—can often be feminized. So I immediately think of [*Keeping Up With*] *the Kardashians*, but I don't see the men in the family and I don't even think they have much screen time. But I also think of the women in *Jersey Shore* more so than anything else. And *Honey Boo Boo*. (Priya, 24)

I definitely see women as the subordinate, males are definitely dominant in terms of powerful, specifically *Jersey Shore* in terms of women tend to get more drunk, more sloppy, and they get that kind of trashy, I don't want to say whore, but depending on the actions that's portrayed by the woman it can be seen as that or just very promiscuous. (Jesseca, 24)

Definitely female. I guess the stay-at-home mom. Because usually these shows run between 10 and 3, because you know the kids are at school, you don't want to run this stuff while they're at home. (Jack, 33, on how he imagines the typical talk show viewer)

While some participants indicated that they pictured fans of trash TV as male or provided a gender-neutral definition, the majority gendered trash TV audiences as female. Further, many discussed the trashiness of reality television and talk shows in terms of the trashiness of the female guests and cast members in particular. Women on these shows were most often described as promiscuous, superficial and fake. Some participants identified or defined themselves in opposition to female cast members and guests described as trashy, reassuring themselves that they (or the women they associate with) embody a more progressive or moral femininity. Weber (2011) explores the transformation of Kate Gosselin of *Kate Plus 8* (formerly *Jon & Kate Plus 8*) from American sweetheart to monstrous mother and “super bitch from hell” in the public consciousness and media discourse surrounding the reality star. Weber argues that Kate Gosselin was brought low by her fame seeking, which was framed as undeserved and unbecoming for a mother. In other words, the women portrayed on reality television are often seen as laying claim to a publicity and celebrity that they have not earned—they are castigated for monetizing and publicizing their private lives and taking up space in the public sphere with nonsense and drama.

The shows that participants cited most often as examples of trash TV were *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* and *Jersey Shore*, and while both shows have male cast members, most of the comments made about the shows discussed the female cast: Kim, Khloe and Kourtney Kardashian and Kris Jenner from *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* and Nicole “Snooki” Polizzi and Jennifer “JWoww” Farley from *Jersey Shore*. The Kardashians, in particular, represent a femininity that is obsessed with consumerism, plastic surgery and exposing their private lives for fame and money according to participants. This is seen not only as a moral failure, but also as a bad example for women and girls. Jessica (24) illustrates this with regards to the Kardashians by saying: “I don't like how they make other women feel. I don't like some of their values and I don't think they send a good message out to women.” Similarly, Keshia (25) castigates the Kardashians for not doing more with the platform that they are given: “These females are given this platform and they're not utilizing it to the best of their abilities. Instead of promoting womanhood or respect for themselves and things like that—because they are a huge influence, especially on young females.” Skeggs and Wood (2008) argue that reality television holds a pedagogic power over its viewers—by taking on the position of middle-class expertise it disciplines viewers into adopting middle-class morals and aesthetics, and the consumptive practices that go along with them. Similarly, some participants argued that reality shows teach female viewers to hate their bodies, to be promiscuous and superficial, and to emulate reality celebrities like the Kardashian women. In this way, reality television is positioned as degrading not only to the

people who participate in it, but also to its viewership, which is worse off for having consumed it.

However, some participants contested the idea that reality stars, and the Kardashians in particular, are necessarily unintelligent or even bad role models. “I knew that she was a business person. I didn't walk into it with the idea that Kim Kardashian is a slut because she has a sex tape [...]. I knew walking into the show that she was an intelligent and strategic woman,” says Priya (24), contesting the idea that just because Kim Kardashian commodifies her private life and her body, her celebrity is undeserved. Similarly, when discussing whether or not she considered herself a fan of Kim Kardashian, Nikki (21) said: “She sells stories about herself to the tabloids, which is stupid, but she still makes money. You're trashing yourself as bad publicity and you're still making money. So I'm a fan of that because you're a businesswoman.” For these participants, the Kardashian women's decision to participate in their own objectification and “trashing” via celebrity culture and tabloid media was seen as a way of taking back control over their images and making a profit from a system that is already exploitative. In other words, the idea that Kim Kardashian is able to negotiate a successful multi-media career out of her own humiliation and sexual objectification through the release of her sex tape in 2007 was, to these participants, a form of post-feminist subversion worthy of a certain level of admiration. Palmer (2011) writes that self-branding has increasingly become an important skill for workers in the 21st century to master in order to set themselves apart from the competition. In fact, many reality shows take on the task of teaching their viewers how to brand themselves through self-transformation, skill

development and consumerism. In this way, Kim Kardashian's rise to fame and mastery of her public image is a great example of self-branding gone right.

In addition, some participants criticized the idea that television shows aimed at women were inherently considered trashier than shows aimed at men:

These DC, Marvel shows, nobody judges people for watching those, because those are male-centric shows [...] and I think that those shows are the same type of thing—fantasy escapism, certain stereotypes and binaries are created and no one judges people for flocking to these shows, but there's this shame associated with watching more female-centred shows. (Tara, 30)

Similarly, Priya said, "Although superheroes can be associated with being juvenile, I feel like trash TV is associated with a feminine kind of lack of intelligence." These women do not contest the idea that trash TV is feminized, which Gamson (1998), Grindstaff (2002), and Skeggs and Wood (2008) establish by connecting the modern genres of reality TV and talk shows to the soap operas and confessional magazines of the early- to mid-twentieth century. Rather, Priya and Tara take issue with the perception that feminized television genres are less intellectually valuable than masculinized genres, like sports and superhero shows, which operate similarly to the affective functions of wish fulfillment, melodrama and conflict. For Priya and Tara, trash TV is not necessarily harmful to viewers, because both identify as critical viewers, who are able to separate their world-view from the television they consume. Rather, the discourse surrounding trash TV is the problem, because it devalues entertainment genres aimed at women and paints female viewers as superficial, unintelligent and uncritical.

Overall, gender was the identity category that was linked most directly to trash TV viewership by participants. Though participants disagreed on whether

trash TV degrades women or whether criticism of trash TV viewership was actually more problematic, the responses indicate that trash TV and gender intersect in multiple and complex ways for the perception of viewers and cast members.

Race and Trash TV: Reflection and Representation

Like gender, many participants expressed a desire to see more diverse and well-developed characters of colour on television. Many perceived the representations of people of colour on television, and particularly reality TV, as either stereotypical and uncomplicated, or wholly lacking:

I feel like there is definitely not enough representation of minorities. Just now black people have started to get into the picture, especially with the whole Oscar-Grammy deal, but even then seeing minorities such as Indians. When have you seen an Indian actor, or a South-Asian, or just an Asian actor? Not saying that it's not out there but it's hard to find. I find that there's a misrepresentation of those races. They play specific roles that reinforce certain stereotypes of certain cultures and ethnicities. (Jesseca, 24)

That's why even though I watch every single franchise of the *Real Housewives*, I can't watch *Atlanta*, because I feel that there's too much of a stake in watching black women behaving badly as someone who's white. Like, that's where I draw the line. I would feel way too implicated in that but I will watch rich white women behaving badly and that's fine. Go for it. (Carol, 29)

I'm not going to lie, I particularly tune in just to watch the black folk who show up on there. Like, you guys are stupid, come on. You make us look really bad, the fact that you're going on this show and you couldn't use your common sense to realize that the person that's sitting on the other side of the screen or your text messages don't really care. (Nikki, 21)

For some of the white participants, watching reality shows centred on black people was uncomfortable, because it made them feel complicit in the stereotypes on-screen and the marginalization of people of colour through the mediatization of those stereotypes. For this reason, they tended to avoid those shows, rather than to

watch them critically or ironically, like they would watch similar shows focused on a primarily white cast. This refusal to watch is an interesting reversal of the sensation of being compelled to watch that some participants reported when discussing shows like *Jersey Shore* or *Dr. Phil*, where the draw is typically interpersonal conflict, drama and over-the-top behavior, or “the train wreck,” as several participants put it. In this case, the discomfort of watching something that they identify as exploitative or stereotypical of a socially marginalized group they do not belong to trumps the curiosity or fascination that other similar shows inspire.

Some of the black participants, on the other hand, took a certain pleasure in watching shows centred on primarily black casts, like *Real Housewives of Atlanta* and *Love and Hip-Hop*. While many mentioned feeling frustrated by the stereotypical portrayals of the cast, like Nikki, who described the cast on *RHOA* as having “ghetto mentalities,” they also noticed ways in which the shows subverted stereotypes about black people, and black women, in particular. For example, the women on *RHOA* have careers and are represented as rich and glamorous, which Nikki says is a subversion of the image of black women as poverty-stricken single mothers that she sees in many media portrayals. She also discusses how the women on *RHOA* influence the wider public sphere by coining popular phrases or Internet memes that have a reach far wider than the viewership of the show. Nevertheless, several black participants also believed that reality shows centred on primarily black casts reflect negatively on black people in general and perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Bell-Jordan’s (2008) study of the representation of race on three different reality shows demonstrates that racial stereotypes and differences are often played up for

drama and tension on these shows. Further, racism is decontextualized as a systemic issue and framed as interpersonal conflict between cast members, erasing the way it marginalizes people of colour beyond the show's framework. The ambivalence of black participants to watching reality shows centred on black casts reflects their complicated position as critical viewers in a mediascape that has such a lack of racial diversity—while they crave seeing themselves represented in the media that they consume, they are also frustrated by the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and uncomplicated portrayals that they do encounter.

Some participants indicated that they see the portrayal on reality television of races and ethnicities different from their own as reflective of reality, rather than stereotypical: “I think the issues of what happens on *Maury* and *Jerry Springer* just run rampant in the black community,” said Jack (33), referring mainly to issues like infidelity, promiscuity, absentee parents and paternity tests that are the bread and butter of confrontational shows like *Jerry Springer* and *Maury*. Jack, who is not black, was an avid fan of talk shows and discussed watching them frequently to make fun of the guests or for the shock factor of the drama on stage. While he recognized many of the staged elements of the shows and the ways in which the drama is manufactured or amped up by producers, he also saw the representation of black people on these shows as somewhat reflective of reality, rather than staged and playing on stereotypes. Similarly, Jesseca (24), who is not Italian-Canadian, saw the representation of Italian-Americans on *Jersey Shore* as reflective of their ethnicity and community, rather than based on stereotypes. This supports the fears of participants who indicated that they think stereotypical portrayals of marginalized

groups, and people of colour in particular, on reality television and talk shows is detrimental to the way they are perceived outside of the framework of the show.

Class and Trash TV: Exploitation and Lack of Education

Participants primarily discussed class in terms of the educational and economic background of the people who appear on talk shows and reality television, as well as the exploitation of people of a lower socio-economic class that they perceive on these shows:

I won't watch a show where the person is dependent on that show for their own welfare. I won't watch anything on TLC because I feel like TLC exploits, because they're saying "Oh, look at how different they are," but the difference isn't necessarily something you aspire towards, whereas the TV shows that I do watch, they're almost aspirational but not really, because who can aspire to that kind of life, but they know what they're doing and if they needed to get out of the contract they wouldn't be financially harmed by it. (Tara, 30)

It's awful and and it's classist and ableist and all of these bad things but people often associate lots of Southern United States accents with being uneducated and uneducation equals trash, like when you watch things like *Dance Moms* you're like, "Oh god, these people are dumb." Or you see that on *Maury*. *Maury* is like classic for that, where they have the people with the uneducated sounding accents. (Gwendolyn, 25)

And *Judge Judy* too. [...] I was like, who are these people? There are people who are like "You owe me 1 000 dollars you stole from me for drugs and I need that money to fix up my..." (Sean, 29)

Many participants discussed their discomfort at watching reality shows that document the lives of people of a lower socio-economic class, such as *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* and *16 and Pregnant*, as well as talk shows in which such people are featured, because they felt that the genre was exploitative and took advantage of its cast's lack of cultural knowledge and resources. Indeed, there was a strong link between low levels of education and class background, as perceived by participants

describing the people who appear on trash TV shows. Grindstaff's (2002) ethnography of talk shows supports this by revealing that many guests come for the promise of a free trip. Sometimes they are brought on to the show under false pretenses. They do not have the media training of professional celebrities or the means to access legal or media advice. Skeggs and Wood (2008) similarly find that reality shows often use working class cast members' lack of cultural knowledge and cultural resources, like professional education or a familiarity with the conventions and etiquette that are expected in particular situations, in order to display their failure to pass for middle class. Participants who called reality shows exploitative understood this play on the failure to pass for middle class as an unfair power imbalance in favour of producers and networks, which they sometimes felt complicit in if they watched. For this reason, some noted that they felt no guilt in watching reality shows centred on rich people, like the *Real Housewives* franchises and *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, but they could not comfortably watch shows centred on people of a lower socio-economic class.

On the other hand, for some participants, watching reality shows centred on rich people was a source of frustration because they could not relate to their lifestyle and their class background:

It's not relatable to a lot of people's lives. All the people that are watching TV are the working class, are the middle class. You don't see rich people sitting down watching *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* because they're busy making money, doing things, being productive. So I think watching reality TV shows like that is an unproductive thing to do. It's not educational, it doesn't inform you about anything. (Keshia, 25)

For these participants, the extravagant lifestyles and consumerism displayed on these types of reality shows contribute to the sense of unreality that viewers

experience. In this way, participants watching shows surrounding rich people were more likely to think of them as fake, scripted or contrived in some way, rather than a reflection of the real lives of the celebrities on-screen. On the other hand, for some participants, the glamour of these shows was a major draw over shows focusing on people of a lower socio-economic class: “An MTV show about teens in the South, I don't know, I didn't find it very interesting, so there's definitely some glamour element for me that's kind of really important” (Carol, 29). Overall, participants had different reactions and ways of engaging with reality shows depending on whether they were focused on casts of rich people or people who could be perceived as lower- or working-class.

Additionally, the above statement by Keshia also reveals class assumptions about who is watching trash TV. Several other participants also mentioned that they believe the audience of talk shows and reality shows is made up primarily of working- and middle-class viewers. Some assumed that upper-class viewers had better things to do or were just not interested in trash TV. In general, participants considered trash TV an unproductive use of time and they tended to associate being upper class with being productive and consuming media in a productive or educational way, while they described trash TV as uninformative and not educational. Moreover, many participants indicated that they either perceived fans of trash TV as uneducated and incapable of assuming a critical distance from the shows, or that that was the stereotype that most readily came to mind when they pictured fans of trashy TV shows:

Caitlin (28): I think what first comes to mind is like shows that are marketed towards trashy people or something, that sort of demographic.

Carol (29): Lowest common denominator.

Caitlin: Yeah, so I think of soaps for example, and there's a perception of who might be watching this. Though I watch soaps sometimes growing up, or just certain types of reality shows, like *Cops* or something, sort of shows that aren't smart quote-unquote. [...] Maybe people who don't have a critical or ironic distance or who aren't hate watching, so fans would be people who are not educated. That's the stereotype, maybe that you need an education to somehow have a critical lens on these things, which is obviously not true, but maybe that's the stereotype of people who just consume, the cultural dupes.

Indeed, the stigma of trash TV often bleeds out from the televised casts and onto the audience. This is especially obvious on talk shows, where the televised studio audience plays an important role in the framing of the show and the guests through reaction shots, jeers, cheers and audience questions (Grindstaff, 2002). Gamson (1998) concludes that the talk show audience often has as much influence on the course of the debate on-stage as the host, because it is representative of the common people and holds the authority of “common sense,” which is more valued in affective formats like talk shows than professional expertise. To capitalize on the audience’s privileged position as representative of “regular people” and to create more drama, talk show producers often encourage the audience to act out affective responses that have traditionally been associated with working- and lower-class audiences—talking back to the stage, booing, getting in arguments with the guests, etc. This positions the audience on talk shows as emotional rather than rational, engaged rather than distant and duped rather than critical. Similarly, Andrejevic (2004) finds that critics of reality television describe audiences as uncritical, immoral and perverse. The general assumption is that audiences, and especially fans, of trash TV consume it without challenging or deconstructing the format’s discourses.

Finally, it was interesting to note that while participants discussed the ways in which trash TV perpetuates stereotypes about people of a lower socio-economic class, they did not express an interest in seeing more diversity or complexity in the representation of classes on television. This could be due to the decreasing visibility of class, as detailed by Wood and Skeggs (2011)—what it means to be working- or lower-class as opposed to middle-class is increasingly becoming unclear as people move away from identifying in terms of their economic and cultural class. It is possible that participants did not perceive the importance or need for more grounded and realistic representations of classes, like they did with the other identity categories in this chapter.

Sexuality and Trash TV: “Drop your pants, let me put your dick in my mouth”

Although some participants expressed a desire to see more diversity in the representation of non-heterosexual people on television (illustrated by Priya’s statement below), most did not mention LGBTQ sexualities when discussing trash TV and stereotyping. The focus of discussion on the topic of sexuality was promiscuity in the context of heterosexual relationships.

I've only come across one episode that had a trans person on it. [...] I have to admit that I really liked that they were willing to—actually, no, they shouldn't be applauded for allowing that person to speak of their journey in the same way that they would allow other people, but at the same time I was really happy watching it to see that their trans identity wasn't censored. (Priya, 24, discussing *Top Chef*, a popular cooking competition show)

It doesn't stimulate the mind at all. As a matter of fact, it desensitizes the mind, because now if you ask anyone who was watching *Jersey Shore* from the ages of 13 and they're probably by now 18-19, they will tell you that casual sex is nothing and they have no problem giving a blowjob. Girls, they'll say, “I have no problem giving a blowjob.” You want to know

why? Because TV made it easy for girls to go and say, “Drop your pants, let me put your dick in my mouth.” (Nikki, 21)

Participants were much less likely to discuss stereotyping of LGBTQ identities on trash TV than they were to discuss other identity categories. However, they did seek out more diverse representations of sexualities in the TV shows they consumed. Gamson (1998) addresses the representation of sexuality on talk shows and finds that though portrayals may be stereotypical or contested by anti-gay guests and audience members, talk shows have served as an important avenue for increasing the visibility of LGBTQ people in the media. However, Kavka (2008) argues that queer identities are depoliticized on reality television because the format has such an individualizing effect on its participants. Reality television thus cannot advance the visibility of queer identities, because it does not present queer cast members as representative of their identity but rather as individuals separated from their political and social context—it is tokenizing, rather than diversifying. Moreover, because LGBTQ characters are tokenized on formats like reality television, they tend to be the only members of a non-heterosexual identity on the cast.⁵ Therefore, I propose that queerness is a less visible identity category on reality television than gender, class and race, and that participants omitted it from their discussion of stereotypes on television, not because queer cast members are not stereotyped, but because they are not framed as representatives for their sexual identity.

⁵ While there are shows that focus on queer casts, like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *RuPaul's Drag Race*, no participants indicated that they had watched these shows.

Participants were much more likely to discuss sexuality in terms of heterosexual promiscuity, and particularly in policing excessive female sexuality: “I analyze it from a Christian point of view, like ‘Oh lord, she's going to hell for that.’ I'll say things like that, or it makes you cringe when you see one girl sleeping with five of the cast mates, like on *Jersey Shore*” (Nikki, 21). This could be because reality shows are much more likely to display heteronormative sexual relationships than queer sexual relationships—some shows even rely on the display of sexual affect and promiscuity to generate shock and titillate viewers. However, for participants, non-monogamy and promiscuity generated a sense of disgust or moral outrage. Nikki, in particular, believed that the portrayal of promiscuity on reality television normalizes it for young female viewers and leads to early and non-monogamous sexual experimentation. Jack (33) echoed her sentiments by comparing scripted shows focused on marriage and family and talk shows focused on promiscuity and sex:

I think you want to be on the good shows and you don't want to be on the trash TV shows. And the values are way different, on these scripted shows, it's about marriage and family, it's something that you long for, rather than the trash talk shows, which is something you scold. So it's almost like a good/bad element, where trash TV is bad, everything you shouldn't do and on these scripted shows, it's everything you should do.

Reality television and talk shows display non-monogamy and the “failure of hetero-intimacy” as something to shock and produce an affective response in the audience through its breach of what is considered “normal” in heterosexual relationships (Kavka, 2008, p. 138). The entertainment factor comes from viewing the transgression of monogamous heterosexuality. However, as Andrejevic (2004) writes, the viewer's position as voyeur to these titillating and “abnormal” relations

does not lead to their social normalization. As expressed by participants like Nikki and Jack, the ways in which trash TV portrays non-monogamous heterosexuality actually further marginalizes it and casts it as aberrant and “bad.” In this way, and through the tokenization of queer cast members, reality television and talk show formats support heteronormativity and the media primacy of monogamous heterosexuality.

Conclusion

Overall, participants expressed frustration with the stereotypical portrayals of women, people of colour and people of a lower socio-economic class on reality television. They also indicated that they crave more diverse and complex representations of women, people of colour and queer people in the television that they consume. The interviews reveal that participants see trash TV, and television in general, as holding the pedagogic power to either reinforce or challenge media stereotypes about race, gender, class and sexuality. Television is thus perceived as constructive of public discourse and the socio-political realities in which marginalized people exist as citizens, workers and individuals.

Chapter Three: Fandom, Anti-Fandom and Affect: Pleasure, Frustration and Boredom

You remember back in the good old days when there were snark communities and you'd take a bad fanfic and post it on Livejournal and publicly mock it and sometimes in the best-case scenarios, the author would find it and start like a fucking pit fight in the comments? Those were the days. You don't get that anymore. (Carolyn, 26)

The politics of fandom and anti-fandom revolve around affective involvement: what is the right balance of involvement and detachment, and what is the affective state of a viewer when he or she is engaging with a particular media product. This became apparent in interviewing participants like Carolyn, who participated frequently in online fan communities and detailed how she based her judgments of fans she perceived as overinvolved and overinvested in shows that she hate watches. Carolyn not only hate watches *Glee*, which, according to her failed to deliver on its promise of diversity and innovative storytelling, but she also takes pleasure in mocking fans for their overinvestment and lack of critical viewership with other anti-fans online. Johnson (2007) writes that even within fan communities, fans who are perceived as overinvested in the text and unable to regard it from a critical distance are mocked by other, more critical fans, as well as by the show's producers sometimes. The ability to separate oneself from the fan object and to be critical of it is regarded as a sign of intelligent, complex viewership, whereas the inability to impose critical distance between self and text marks the fan as easily satisfied, incapable of complex readings and ultimately having lowbrow taste.

As discussed previously, television viewers often use critical distance and an ironic interpretation of the text to position themselves as savvy viewers as opposed to cultural dupes. Savvy viewers understand and accept the constructedness and “unreality” of reality television, as well as the marginalizing discourses and logics that circulate within and structure the relationships portrayed by the show (Andrejevic, 2004). Their critical and ironic viewership allows them to consume such texts while portraying themselves as outside them, unfooled by them. Participants who were critical of the shows they hate watched took pains to make clear that they were aware of the artifice of the shows they were consuming and that their viewership was not participatory or engaged, but rather ironic and disengaged. Indeed, Cloud (2010) writes that ironic viewership allows critical viewers of reality television to take pleasure in the fantasy constructed by shows like *The Bachelor* without having to see themselves as the kinds of people who are fooled by this fantasy.

In fact, participants had a strong conception of the kinds of people, who are duped by trash TV. They most commonly described fans of trash TV as uneducated, lower- or middle-class and having lowbrow taste. In fact, audience research has found that talk shows and reality shows have a wide and diverse audience with varying levels of education (Gamson, 1998; Grindstaff, 2002; Hermes, 2005; Skeggs & Wood, 2008). Participants often described the imagined fan as female, especially stay-at-home mothers and “people that have nothing better to do than just watch TV all day” (James, 21). Further, participants imagined trash TV fans as superficial, obsessed with looks and celebrity culture and wanting to be like the celebrities on

reality television. Overall, participants differentiated between their own negotiated engagement with the shows they hate watched and their perception of the engagement of fans. Participants engaged with trash TV in a variety of ironic or critical ways—they could take pleasure in mocking the shows and the casts, or watch to relax and not think, or even watch in order to be critical of the discourses and representations on trash TV. However, many participants indicated that people who would describe themselves as genuine fans are incapable of such negotiated readings, but rather consume the text unquestioningly and at face value:

Glee, I think tried to tackle relevant issues and all that crap and people took it seriously, which is why I refuse to take it seriously. Because realistically it was a terrible TV show. *Gossip Girl* never really pretended to be anything that it wasn't and you could sit there and just be like "Yeah, I watch trashy TV. What of it?" Whereas with *Glee*, it was almost embarrassing admitting I was a fan because that would imply that I drank the Kool-Aid of that show, which I'm not ready to do. (Carolyn, 26)

Carolyn's refusal to identify herself as a fan of *Glee* belies the fear that the television shows one consumes will construct the self as an uncritical dupe in the eyes of one's peers and social contacts. Therefore, critical fandom and anti-fandom are marked by the intellectual or ironic distance that viewers are able to impose between themselves and the text they are consuming. They are not constructed as viewers by the text so much as the text is reconstructed by their critical interpretation and refusal to accept it at face value. Conversely, to be a fan of trash TV is to be uncritical and unable to distance oneself from the text. Instead, the text of trash TV constructs fans who engage too closely as unquestioning consumers with the unsophisticated tastes to match the trash they are watching.

However, viewers who are hate watching or watching as anti-fans are not free from affective involvement with the text. In interviewing my participants, I identified three main affective states through which hate watchers experience the texts they are consuming: pleasure, frustration and boredom. Some participants experienced trash TV through one dominant affective state, but most felt a mixture of all three at different times, or sometimes at the same time. I define pleasure as experiences that amuse, satisfy or otherwise entertain participants. Frustration corresponds to feelings of anger, conflict between the participant's values and those of the text, or disappointment when a text fails to deliver on a promise or expectation. Boredom is not so much a strong affective state as a state of lack of affect, where participants truly do not connect emotionally or engage with the material they are watching. Rather, they watch precisely for the lack of affect generated, because they are in a vulnerable or taxed state—they may be sick, depressed, stressed or overworked, and engaging with thought-provoking material is less appealing than disengaging through “mindless” consumption.

Pleasure

If I watch *Dr. Phil* because it's a train wreck, I want to see it go down. I want to see that preview at the beginning where they're like, "Today, this person's clinically insane, but they think they're a rockstar!" I want to see him tell them this, I want to see them freak out and then they bring the parents on and they're gonna freak out, I want to see this. (Sean, 29)

There's a shock value [to *Hoarders*] that's actually real. You can't set up that sort of situation. So it's actually real when they go into these people's homes that are just covered in trash. Like how could something get this way? It's kind of funny to watch. They'll talk about missing cats and they'll find a fossilized cat under garbage and that's kind of funny to me even though it's really bad. It's so bad that it makes me chuckle. (Aidan, 22)

A major source of pleasure for viewers of trash TV is the unexpected and unscripted excess of emotion and contravention of traditional social etiquette that is on display. Grindstaff (2002) calls a moment like the one described by Sean—the moment where talk show guests “freak out” and lose control over their emotions on stage—the money shot. She likens the voyeuristic pleasure of observing talk show guests’ emotional outbursts and emotional releases—grief, aggression, or shock—to the pleasure of watching the moment of climax in pornography, where the male actor similarly loses control on-camera and experiences a sexual release. Participants craved the raw realism of those moments where talk show guests gave in to their emotions, or where audience members asked questions that seemed “off-script” and genuine, even if they were confrontational. Similarly, as illustrated by Aidan’s statement, they took pleasure in those moments of shocking realism on reality shows, like *Hoarders*, which they perceived as less likely to be scripted and faked than shows like *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. Kavka (2008) writes that reality television renders even moments of extreme shock routine; shows like *Fear Factor* may feature extreme stunts, but the audience has been taught to expect a safe denouement through repetition. Therefore, viewers turn to emotional shock, confrontation and social transgression for the voyeuristic thrill of seeing something truly unexpected.

For many participants, television served as a bonding tool between family and friends:

I don't really experience the thrill and shock value of watching trash or hate watching something unless I'm with someone else. If I'm watching by myself it's kind of sad, but if I'm watching it with someone else, I'm able to enjoy the experiences and make a collective joke out of something

that everyone's laughing at or something ironic or something that you can point out the bad production value. (James, 21)

Jersey Shore, I used to watch it a lot. That's something I used to watch with my brother, something we used to bond over, and then with my friends. It's interesting but at the same time we would make fun of it, because it was just a stupid show. (Iman, 21)

Some participants recounted watching soap operas with multiple generations of women in their families and still being fond of those shows, while others watched with siblings or other relatives of a similar age. For Sabrina's (24) family, television was an important tool for bonding and togetherness—she recounted that they watch the same shows together, discuss them critically and make them a central part of their shared humor. Similarly, for many of the participants interviewed, hate watching was a social activity and they drew pleasure from the shared experience of mocking a show with other people and building jokes collaboratively or having an audience for their observations. Participants like Cecyl (33) and Jack (33) recounted organizing social events or gatherings with friends around the shows they hate watched. For these participants, television plays a part in bonding rituals—it serves as a topic of discussion and a reason to get together with friends or relatives, but not necessarily as the central object of the gathering. In fact, some participants indicated that they would not hate watch alone, as the pleasure of sharing the experience with other people was their main reason for engaging in hate watching in the first place.

Tied in with the pleasure of watching socially and having an audience for one's observation is the sense of satisfaction that some participants felt in pointing out ways in which the shows they hate watched were bad or lowbrow: "There's a little bit of something satisfying in recognizing that you can point out that this isn't a

good story” (Mara, 23). Similarly, Aidan (22) and James (21), who hate watched together, were particularly interested in mocking shows with low production values and pointing out elements like shoddy set construction, bad acting or poorly-executed camera transitions. They enjoyed the sense of savviness or expertise they derived from recognizing and critiquing poorly produced television. In their focus groups with working- and middle-class viewers of reality television, Skeggs and Wood (2008) found that the middle-class viewers in particular were interested in challenging the expertise of the shows they were watching with their own. Similarly, participants derived intellectual pleasure out of critiquing the material through their own expertise about television production, even when that expertise was derived purely from having consumed “good” television. In other words, recognizing “bad” television and differentiating it from “good” television allows participants to recognize and acknowledge their own cultural expertise and intellectual superiority over the text they are consuming. This self-recognition can further be used to paint the self socially as a savvy, sophisticated viewer when it is performed through the shared experience of watching and critiquing televisual texts with one’s friends or family.

Cloud’s (2010) cyber-ethnography of discussion forums devoted to *The Bachelor* reveals that many fans engage with the text ironically, taking pleasure in their own oppositional reading. She finds that shows like *The Bachelor* are aware of those ironic readings and inscribe them into the text in order to draw in savvy, ironic viewers and keep them engaged. Viewers’ ironic reading allows them to take pleasure in trash TV while also taking pleasure in the recognition of their own

savviness and cultural expertise. Indeed, some participants indicated that they take pleasure in shows that play along with anti-fans' ironic reading of the text:

Ironic pleasure for me is watching it and knowing it's terrible. It's better if the show is sort of aware it's terrible too and is willing to play along with that, but if it takes itself too seriously, if it tries to send a message like *Glee* did, then it's not as much fun anymore. [...] You know it's bad and the show is sort of snickering along with you and you have that sort of camaraderie. Like, with *America's Next Top Model*, I'm sure the fans are sitting there going "Ha this is pretty dumb." And the show knows that, it sort of caters to that. (Carolyn, 26)

Ironic fans and anti-fans enjoy the feeling of being acknowledged by the show and having their oppositional readings validated within the text. The acknowledgement serves as proof that the show recognizes their intellectual superiority over the televisual text and its presumed audience, as well as reassurance that the marginalizing discourses that may construct the show are not to be taken seriously, and therefore the show can be consumed guilt-free. On the other hand, as Cloud points out, shows that build ironic readings into the text also neutralize their ability to be subversive and to challenge the dominant reading presented within. Catering to anti-fans using the "irony bribe" reassures them that, though they may feel uncomfortable with stereotypes and marginalizing discourses within the text, they do not need to take it seriously or think too hard about it because it is ultimately a joke that everyone is in on. Therefore, texts that acknowledge and appropriate oppositional readings may successfully wrest interpretive power from critical viewers and anti-fans in the long run.

Finally, participants also derived pleasure from comparing themselves and their lives to the casts and guests on trash TV. Some felt better about themselves through the sense of superiority they experienced through the comparison: "All

these people are so messed up. I'm so much more normal than they are. I'm not in this weird anger relationship, I'm not in this house with twelve other people being watched constantly. I'm so much more normal than that" (Christina, 21). Other participants took pleasure in the fantasy of living like the casts on reality shows premised on partying or extravagance, such as *Jersey Shore* or *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*: "I always thought if I was the Bachelor or Bachelorette, I would love to be that one person that everybody's fighting for. I wouldn't want to be the one fighting, but I'd be the one, so it's always a fantasy" (Jesseca, 24). Identifying with or against the people featured on trash TV thus serves as an essential element of the pleasure hate watchers experience.

Frustration

Most of the interviewed participants indicated that hate watching was simultaneously pleasurable and frustrating to them in a variety of ways. The mix of pleasure and frustration they experienced was at the source of the tension many participants felt around their hate watching:

If it was something like watching *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, I wouldn't feel the same guilt as say, I watched an episode of *True Life* yesterday, which was like, "I'm having my cousin's baby," and there were so many socio-economic implications and I felt very bad for getting entertainment out of that. With watching *The Bachelor*, as someone who feels very fulfilled in my relationship, watching the desperation, I feel really guilty, because I do feel that these women, they keep them in a room deprived from contact and basically make this man into a prize and it's awful. And I feel horrible, but I love it, it's so entertaining. And I feel guilty for that. (Carol, 29)

I started getting invested in the relationships that were going on. And the show [*Glee*] is really good at sort of giving me tidbits to keep me interested and fed me little tidbits of "Tune in next episode and perhaps there will be a storyline that actually features the black girl being more than just the black girl." And it never came to fruition. By that time, it was

too late and I just kept watching it and I just kept hating it. I would finish the episode and I would just be online, being absolutely furious about it. I would watch it and I would not derive any enjoyment from it. I'd be so angry. And then I would go online and I would spend hours finding other people who were as angry as I was. (Carolyn, 26)

Many participants, like Carol, felt conflicted about watching trash TV, because they derived enjoyment and entertainment from watching it while also perceiving marginalizing or exploitative elements in the shows. Hermes (2005) writes that anti-fans may feel frustrated by television texts where they do not see their own political or social opinions reflected. This was true for many participants who watched shows like *Dr. Phil*, which offer expert advice on topics like interpersonal relationships or mental and physical health, that contradict participants' own expertise or views on how these matters should be handled.

Further, many participants felt a sense of complicity or guilt-by-association when they consumed programs that they identified as marginalizing or exploitative, especially ones centred on lower-class casts. Cloud's (2010) concept of the irony bribe posits that reality shows may inscribe or encourage ironic readings through the text, allowing progressive viewers to consume discourses about gender, race, class and sexuality to which they would normally be opposed while reassuring them that they do not have to feel guilty because they do not have to take the show seriously. Participants who discussed their feelings of guilt indicated that they were still aware of the stereotypes or negative representations of marginalized identity groups that these shows may perpetuate. This was especially frustrating to participants who indicated that they identify as feminists—they felt that their feminism was compromised by their consumption of trash TV. Their frustration

came from the tension they experienced between the pleasure of watching trash TV and the guilt of consuming a media product that opposed their deeply held political and social views.

Another way in which viewers' enjoyment of a show could turn to frustration occurs when shows fail to deliver on a promise or expectation, or simply change course away from a viewer's preferences. Carolyn discussed being drawn into watching *Glee* because of her love of musical theatre, as well as the show's promise of a diverse cast with strong roles for people of colour. However, the show failed to meet Carolyn's expectations because characters of colour were sidelined, rather than given character arcs as important as those of the white characters. She kept watching, because she was already emotionally engaged by the show's characters and premise, but her consumption turned into hate watching. This was also the case for a number of participants who found themselves transitioning from fandom to anti-fandom of a particular show, usually in scripted, rather than reality television, because the storyline took a turn they did not like, or because the writing became weaker or more melodramatic as the series progressed. For these fans-turned-anti-fans, frustration emerges out of their pre-existing engagement with the show—their emotional entanglement with the show stands in direct contrast to the emotional detachment that most hate watchers of trash TV experience. In other words, viewers who never expect a show to be good can never be disappointed by it and can therefore enjoy it ironically for its failure to be good. Viewers who expect a show to deliver on a promise or to be good, on the other hand, can feel let down and frustrated by the show's failure. They are unable to detach themselves and enjoy the

show's failure, so their hate watching takes on tones of anger and bitterness instead. They may stick around, hoping that the show will improve or return to what they once loved about it, or simply because they feel too invested in the show and want to see how it ends.

Another source of frustration for hate watchers and viewers of trash TV comes from the sense of shame they feel from engaging in an activity that they perceive as unproductive or a "waste of time":

If I go to some person who's aware of the show and they're of a professional standing and I say I was watching *Bad Girls Club*, I'm pretty sure they're going to open their eyes and go "Why? Why would a woman of your caliber, a woman of your profession sit and watch something so low? So time consuming that has nothing to do with your profession?" (Nikki, 21)

Many participants expressed the idea that watching trash TV was bad or a waste of time, because it is not a productive or educational activity. Some were frustrated with themselves for consuming something that does not contribute to their self-development by educating them, making them exercise their critical thinking skills, or contributing to their cultural capital by building their expertise in cultural products that are valued for middle-class, educated people. For others, it was a more directly economic consideration. Indeed, some participants were frustrated that the time they wasted watching trash TV was time they could have spent making money, and that the producers or casts of trash TV were simultaneously profiting from their wasted time: "I'm not learning anything from Nene Leakes cussing out Cynthia for not being a part of her fashion show. That doesn't add anything to my life, that adds no money to my pocket but more to theirs" (Nikki, 21). This frustration at wasting time that could have been spent on productive labour or self-improvement belies

the ways in which participants perceive themselves as economic entities within the labour market. Tied in with this frustration is a puritanical commitment to productive citizenship and distaste for frivolity and entertainment for its own sake. In other words, productive labour and self-improvement increase a person's economic or cultural value: their wealth or their status as skilled workers. By contrast, a person's television consumption only increases his or her value in the labour market if it increases his or her cultural capital.

To this end, participants felt the need to consume the kinds of television shows that match their educational and class identities:

I guess I know my kind of person isn't supposed to be watching, I'm not the targeted audience for this kind of show, but I'm going to watch it anyway. But I always associate [ironic watching] in terms of an educated person watching trashy TV. I've never associated it with an uneducated person watching British humor. (Christina, 21)

Christina associated British humor with highbrow, multi-layered entertainment that requires a high cultural capital to interpret and enjoy. She contrasted British humor with reality television, which she perceived as not requiring deep reading or interpretation. In their analysis of comedy taste and level of education, Claessens and Dhoest (2010) found that viewers with a higher level of education express a preference for programs they perceive as more highbrow, ironic and multilayered, even when that preference does not match their viewing habits. They argue that viewers with a high cultural capital may use their stated taste in comedy to distinguish themselves as critical, sophisticated viewers, even though they consume lowbrow and middlebrow programs at a higher rate. Indeed, several participants

expressed the feeling that the trash TV they consumed was below them or incongruent with their level of education and professional aspirations.

Further, some participants believed that people of a higher socio-economic class than them did not engage with trash TV at all, because they were more productive. Kavka (2008) writes that people with a higher cultural class, particularly those engaged in academic work, are prone to feeling shame at their own television consumption, especially of more affective, low-information genres like trash TV, because they assume that their peers are not watching those kinds of shows. Shame at one's trash TV consumption may also come from the popular moralizing discourses surrounding the genre, wherein trash TV is painted as valueless, voyeuristic, and debasing, and its viewers are imagined as lacking empathy and craving the suffering of others (Andrejevic, 2004). In this way, some participants believed that their consumption of trash TV actually degraded their value as agents within the labour market, as well as members of their own cultural class. Some, like Caitlin (28), James (21) and Aidan (22), even worried that trash TV consumption could have an eroding effect on their and other viewers' intellectualism and ability to be critical, discerning viewers. In brief, participants viewed their television consumption, their cultural capital and their status as productive and valuable members of the labour market as linked and mutually constructive.

Boredom

Many participants stressed the mindlessness of consuming trash TV, especially reality shows like *Cake Boss* or *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, which

follow the same cast but do not use a strict narrative structure like competition-based shows. Participants found these shows boring and repetitive, yet very easy to watch, precisely because they do not require a high level of intellectual engagement or viewer commitment:

With a lot of trashy dumbed down shows you can just sit back and watch, you don't have to really think, as opposed to something with say a complex narrative or a lot of characters, a lot of intersecting storylines. Those ones you actually have to pay attention to and think about what's going on. (Sean, 29)

In terms of hate watching and trash TV shows, I think the reason why people watch in the first place is just because it's a time passer or just to escape their own mind and their daily hardships and stuff like that. (Keshia, 25)

Andrejevic (2004) argues that boredom is an inherent part of the “realness” of reality television. On shows where audiences have the ability to control the show through processes like elimination voting, viewers tend to rally against and vote out cast members who come across as inauthentic or too aware of the contrivance of the show. However, viewers also tended to lose interest in shows once all of the “drama-causing” contestants were purged. On the other hand, many of my participants expressed frustration with the unreality and the contrivance of reality television, especially shows that they perceived as scripted or too heavily influenced by producers. In other words, reality shows must achieve a delicate and complex balance: if they veer too close to being scripted and polished in post-production in order to generate storylines and drama, they risk frustrating viewers who crave reality, but if they eschew drama and reflect reality too closely, they risk becoming boring and losing viewer engagement completely.

Most participants reported a low level of affective or intellectual engagement with the shows they identified as trash TV—they rarely watched these shows regularly or with undivided interest, and they often described the experience as “mindless” or “turning off your brain.” Instead, many participants consumed trash TV as a convenient time-filler, background noise or conversation starter, precisely because they could watch with minimal engagement or involvement. On the other hand, some participants also mentioned that they find it much easier to recall storylines on reality shows than more involvement-heavy prestige television, which puts to question their claim to disengagement. This claim to be disengaged viewers can also be part of the distancing discourse of hate watching, allowing anti-fans to maintain a disinterested veneer so they do not have to admit that they are affectively involved with the text. Ultimately, though participants reported feeling frustration and boredom at the repetitiveness, lack of storylines and banality of trashy genres like reality television and talk shows, these same elements also sometimes drew them to watch trash TV over other, more involvement-heavy genres, like highbrow, multi-layered comedies or serialized dramas.

In fact, many participants discussed turning to trash TV and hate watching during times of their lives when they felt emotionally or intellectually taxed and overwhelmed: sickness, depression, workplace stress or end-of-term exams, for example:

Maybe the reason that I feel like [television is] trashy or bad is that I watch it in times of stress or depression when I'm like, "I can only watch TV right now. I need to watch *Broad City* again, every day." (Caitlin, 28)

While I was sick, I binge-watched the first three seasons and I could not figure out why I was doing it because I got two episodes in and was

already tired of the repeated fecal humor and the nonsense being spouted, but then I proceeded to watch two and a half more seasons of it. (Cecyl, 33)

With other shows that I watch you have to pay attention to the plot or whatever, and this one you can watch and just turn off your brain and you don't have to pay so much attention. You can do other things while watching it and it's nice to just not have to think for a little bit. (Tara, 30)

Trash TV's narrative simplicity, lack of multiple layers of meaning, familiar tropes and stereotypes, and social status as a valueless form of entertainment frees up viewers to consume it and derive pleasure or comfort from it, without having to engage with it and exert any mental effort to read or interpret it. Though participants often stressed their frustration with trash TV and the marginalizing discourses, bad writing and lack of intellectual value they perceive in the genre, many also discussed their early childhood experiences with trash TV, as well as soap operas. Some, like Carol (29) and Jack (33), grew up with working single parents where television served as a "babysitter." Carol describes her relationship with television in this period as, something to occupy the emptiness and keep her entertained while her mother worked. Others, like Sean (29) and Gwendolyn (25), grew up watching soap operas with multiple generations of women in their families, and they drew comfort from the melodramatic storytelling, which they relate to their consumption of trash TV. Finally, participants like Cecyl (33) and Sincerity (20) grew up with parental figures, who watched a great amount of trash TV and associated the practice strongly with those people. Though these participants distanced themselves from trash TV through their critical and ironic viewership and anti-fandom, they nevertheless derived comfort and pleasure from the familiarity and intellectual simplicity of trash TV.

Finally, some participants used their hate watching as a way of adding value and negating the boredom they experienced when watching trash TV by themselves:

When you're with a friend you're able to make silly comments that just add overall, because if you are alone and watching it then it gets really boring and just eats your brain. But if you're with a friend, you're able to laugh at something bad and you're able to just say stuff out loud and just keep the energy flowing. Because a lot of bad television just puts me to sleep. (Aidan, 22)

Aidan and James (21) hate watched together in person, as well as with a group of online friends through Skype. They purposefully sought out content they identified as badly produced or trashy in order to mock it. They both stressed that they did not enjoy watching trash TV alone and found it boring. For them, watching as a group added the necessary value, entertainment, humor and intellectual engagement that they could not get out of watching trash TV alone. The group discussion that their hate watching generated further added an element of the unexpected that is often lacking in genres like reality television (Kavka, 2008). In other words, hate watching with a friend or relative transforms the viewing experience from one of boredom and disengagement to one of critical and ironic engagement, social bonding and unexpectedness.

Conclusion

Viewers' level of engagement with a trash TV text and their affective reaction to the text are intimately linked and mutually constructive. Viewers who are disengaged from the text they are consuming are more likely to feel boredom and a lack of affective or intellectual involvement, while viewers who engage too closely with the texts they hate watch may end up feeling frustrated and disappointed in their expectations. Nevertheless, pleasure, frustration and boredom are all affective

states that hate watchers may slip in and out of while engaging with trash TV. Critical ironic distance is one tool viewers use to distance themselves from the texts they are hate watching in order to take pleasure in them and reconstruct them according to their needs, rather than feel upset or let down by them and be constructed by their consumption of them. Viewers find themselves in the middle of a struggle for meaning, stuck between their own interpretation of the texts they are consuming and the social construction of fans of trashy TV shows. Adopting the position of anti-fans—critical of the text, yet unwilling to take it seriously—allows educated viewers to free themselves from the social corrosion of trash TV and to take pleasure or comfort in their consumption.

Conclusion

I think that hate watching involves watching something that you know other people have predisposed judgements about. It involves watching something or listening to something while having in the back of your mind that this is not good TV, this is not what smart people do. (Priya, 24)

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the desire to be seen and to see oneself as a critical, savvy viewer is at the heart of hate watching trash TV. Far from being inconsequential, trash TV and television in general hold important meanings about power, perception and the social representation of marginalized identities. Participants see in the television that they consumed the pedagogic power to reinforce or challenge stereotypes about race, class, gender and sexuality. Though they worry about the social impact that trash TV has on its audience and on public discourse, they continue to consume it for the affective states and pleasures it generates to them as viewers. In many ways, this tension is reconciled or negotiated by the distance that participants are able to impose between themselves and the trash TV text by employing the posture of hate watching and anti-fandom. They primarily achieve this distance by differentiating themselves from fan discourse and by taking pleasure and satisfaction in recognizing their own cultural expertise and superiority through their oppositional readings of the text.

A simple way through which participants distance themselves from their consumption of trash TV is by casting it in the past and emphasizing the reasons that they stopped watching:

Bad Girls Club, I used to watch that a lot growing up. I stopped watching it because it just got too stupid, but it's just a bunch of girls in a house and

they go clubbing, partying. It's just the drama that was inside that's so interesting (Iman, 21).

Additionally, they often stress the fact that they watch distractedly or while doing other things. These discursive cues establish participants' low level of engagement and lack of emotional and intellectual involvement with the text. After all, to be over-engaged and overinvolved is to be a fan and to risk allowing the text to construct the self as an uncritical and unsophisticated consumer.

There is pleasure in reading televisual texts against the grain and inhabiting the role of anti-fandom: "It's fun to watch [while] recognizing that it's not smart" and "there is something that reasserts your smartness" (Mara, 23). The ability to differentiate between "good" TV and "bad" TV and to point out the elements of production or writing that make it so allows hate watchers to recognize and revel in their own expertise and good taste. They are able to affirm their cultural capital and impose their authority over the televisual text without having to relinquish their consumption of it. This dynamic between viewer and text is outward and inward facing: viewers take pleasure in affirming their expertise to themselves, as well as to their peers and fellow viewers. In addition, their recognition of the text's low cultural value allows them to reassert that they are not the target audience, which imposes further distance between them and the text, but also between the text's politics and marginalizing discourses and the educated, middle-class viewer.

Despite this discursive distance, participants still feel that talking about their consumption of trash TV is not socially acceptable, especially with people they perceive as holding a higher social or professional position. They worry about how they will be perceived if they are found to be watching trash TV by someone who is

not in on the irony, so they limit their discussion of their consumption to certain people only. It is interesting to contrast the voyeuristic pleasure they derive from watching trash TV and judging the people who appear on it with their fear of being watched and judged for their consumption. Moreover, many participants perceive hate watching and trash TV consumption as unproductive, valueless activities. They believe that people of a higher social class reject trash TV, and they equate this rejection with being more productive and more oriented towards self-improvement and educational media. In other words, participants feel pressured to frame their consumption of trash TV as something other than pure enjoyment or fandom, lest it degrades or reflects poorly on their social image. Often, they only felt safe in admitting their engagement with hate watching to other anti-fans of trash TV, who are similarly engaged with the genre and can therefore relate to the pleasures and frustrations that drive hate watching.

Nevertheless, hate watching is also a very social activity for those participants who had established a group of like-minded anti-fans. The pleasure of structuring jokes collectively around the televisual text, sharing a viewership experience and having an audience for one's critical observations is a major driving force in participants' hate watching habits. Participants bond with peers and family members over trash TV, use it as a conversation piece around which they can structure social activities and consume it for its newsworthiness and value in enabling them to relate to their peers through a shared popular culture. Carol (29) indicated that she missed her social circle of anti-fans when she moved to Europe and socialized primarily with people who did not understand the ironic pleasure she

derived from watching trash TV. The pleasure of hate watching and ironic viewership is diminished if the activity is not understood as ironic by others, because the hate watcher then risks being misunderstood as a fan despite the discursive distance he or she has established between him- or herself and the text. Therefore, hate watchers seek external validation for their ironic or oppositional reading of the text, both from peers and sometimes from the text itself, in order to feel reassured that their consumption does not destabilize their image as savvy, critical viewers and progressive media consumers.

Participants were divided on their perception of the social rejection of trash TV as valueless and a waste of time. On the one hand, some, like Priya (24) and Carol (29), believe that it is pretentious to reject trash TV and to malign its viewers as uncritical. They approach their ironic consumption of trash TV as playful stress-relief and an opportunity to flex their critical thinking skills without taking the material too seriously, and they extend this understanding of their own consumption to other viewers and anti-fans. On the other hand, participants like Caitlin (28), Aidan (22) and James (21) reject television, and lowbrow or popular television in particular, as valueless, anti-intellectual and degrading to its viewers. They use their rejection of popular television and their preference for prestige television or highbrow, multilayered comedy as a way of demarcating themselves as more critical, cultured viewers:

Aidan [on stereotypes of trash TV viewers]: Low intelligence. Usually really bad sense of humour. I'll watch *Big Bang Theory* and a character will be like "Ooooh bazinga" and everyone will laugh and I'll just sit there. They'll just really laugh at anything.

James: I feel like it's the same when we go to the movies and we're watching a really popular movie, me and Aidan won't laugh at every

single joke but most of the audience will and we kind of second guess it.

For these participants, the popularity of a media text serves as an indicator of its intellectual and aesthetic value—a popular media text is assumed to appeal to the lowest common denominator and therefore hold less intellectual and aesthetic value for a viewer’s cultural capital. By contrast, highbrow media texts with a smaller audience can be assumed to be more culturally valuable because the audience needs to have a higher cultural capital and level of education to decode the text, understand the intertextual references it contains and read it at its multiple layers of meaning.

Overall, participants crave television that reflects their own lived realities. Though they consume reality shows and talk shows that portray economic extremes (the ultra-rich, like the Kardashians, along with lower-class families, like the *Honey Boo Boo* clan), they cannot see their realities reflected in these shows and therefore cannot connect to their casts on an empathic level. Instead, they see themselves reflected on scripted shows centred on working- and middle-class characters. The pleasure they derive from “unreal” reality shows is more escapist—it allows them to participate in a fantasy of extravagance, or to feel better about their own circumstances by comparison. In other words, they consume reality television to dis-identify with the people and characters that it portrays, and to access mediated difference, rather than reflection of self.

Participants also value more diverse and complex representations of marginalized identities on television in general. They consume programs they perceive as progressive not just because they enjoy them, but also as a political

action in opposition to media and social marginalization of women, people of colour and members of the LGBTQ community. They see in television the pedagogic power to reinforce and to challenge stereotypes and marginalizing discourses and they treat their consumption and non-consumption as political actions in shaping public discourse through the mediascape at large. In this way, participants envision televisual texts that nourish the mind and render viewers better, more empathetic, progressive and informed citizens. In opposition, they see trash TV as television that can be mindlessly consumed for the affective states it produces in its viewers and the needs and fantasies it fulfills. In short, “good” television engages its viewers intellectually, while “bad” television allows its viewers to disengage and consume without investment in the text.

Yet I found that participants were capable of simultaneous modes of consumption: engaged and disengaged, serious and ironic, critical and uncritical. They are able to switch their affective involvement between genres as it suits them as viewers. They negotiate their readings of the texts they consume and their engagement with different genres depending on their needs and desires. Though the tension produced by their consumption of trash TV and the negative social image of fans of trash TV is a source of frustration and shame, participants can leverage their class privilege and their cultural capital to reconstruct the texts they consume and to position themselves as savvy, critical viewers through the discourse of hate watching.

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Appendix: Participant Details

Participant	Gender	Age	Level of education	Notes
Penny	F	19	Undergraduate: incomplete	
Sincerity	F	20	Undergraduate: incomplete	
Brianne	F	20	Undergraduate: incomplete	
Otto	M	20	Undergraduate: incomplete	
Iman	F	21	Undergraduate: incomplete	
Nikki	F	21	Undergraduate: incomplete	
Christina	F	21	Undergraduate: incomplete	
James	M	21	Undergraduate: incomplete	
Aidan	M	22	High school: complete	Interviewed with James, per James' request as they hate watched together
Chris	M	23	Undergraduate: incomplete	
Mara	F	23	Master's: incomplete	
Amanda	F	24	Master's: incomplete	
Jessica	F	24	Master's: incomplete	
Jesseca	F	24	Undergraduate: incomplete	
Priya	F	24	Master's: incomplete	
Sabrina	F	24	Master's: incomplete	
Gwendolyn	F	25	Master's: incomplete	
Keshia	F	25	Undergraduate: incomplete	
Carolyn	F	26	JD: complete	
Caitlin	F	28	Master's: incomplete	
Carol	F	29	PhD: incomplete	

Sean	M	29	Master's: incomplete
Tara	F	30	PhD: incomplete
Jack	M	33	Undergraduate: incomplete
Cecyl	M	33	PhD: incomplete