

Exploring Viewers' Responses to Nine Reality TV Subgenres

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Reality TV is a genre that places nonactors in dramatic situations with unpredictable outcomes. The influx of reality TV dominating network and cable programming has been highly reflective in its expansion of formats, evident from the variety of narrative themes embedded in reality-based shows. Findings from this exploratory study ($N = 274$) reveal significant differences in the way college students affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally engage with reality TV. Specifically, identification, interactivity, enjoyment, perceived realism, and perceived competition across 9 reality TV subgenres: dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, hidden camera, talent, game show, docu-soap, sitcom, law enforcement, and court significantly differed. Data provide strong support that programs commonly defined as reality-based offer qualitatively distinct affective, cognitive, and behavioral experiences and gratifications for viewers.

Keywords: reality TV, reality programs, subgenres, TV formats, gratifications

The unscripted and inexpensive nature of reality TV programs continues to make them popular commodities in the entertainment industry (Essany, 2013; Ramdhany, 2012). Evidence supporting reality TV's appeal has been documented as a function of motives for self-importance (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004), mechanisms for escape (Javors, 2004), perceived realism (Potter, 1986), surveillance (Andrejevic, 2002), curiosity about the lives of others (Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003), audience interactivity (Griffen-Foley, 2004), romance and competition (Nabi, 2007), and habitual entertainment (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007), to name a few. Although scholars have provided ample support for reality TV's widespread interest, programs characterized as reality-based have commonly been defined as those showcasing nonactors in unscripted scenarios (Hill, 2005; Nabi et al., 2003) and claiming to portray reality

(Cavendar & Fishman, 1998). Shows such as *The Bachelor*, *Survivor*, *The Voice*, *Duck Dynasty*, *Love and Hip Hop*, and *The Real Housewives* have generally been regarded as a single and collective genre, assumed to convey homogeneous messages and themes (Kavka, 2012). However, with the consistent flood of reality-based programs on network and cable TV representing 56% of the top 10 TV shows in the 2010–2011 season (Nielsen Company, 2011), it is likely that the largely distinct narrative premises of such shows may elicit varying degrees of audience responses. Indeed, its increasing expansion of formats or *subgenres* makes this TV genre both complex and worthy of further investigation (Murray & Ouellette, 2009; Ouellette & Hay, 2008).

In their work, Murray and Ouellette (2009) classified reality shows across the following subgenres: dating, makeover/lifestyle, docu-soaps, court, gamedocs, and reality sitcoms, whereas Nabi, Stitt, Halford, and Finnerty (2006) categorized them in the context of romance, competition and game, crime, talent, informational, and reality drama. Taking into account the extensive range of reality-based programming in the current entertainment climate, the present research offers an exploratory look at whether these reality TV subgenres elicit a host of affective, cognitive, and behavioral experiences for viewers. Five primary audience

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responses—identification, interactivity, enjoyment, perceived realism, and perceived competition—are examined across nine subgenres of reality-based programming: dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, hidden camera, talent, game show, docusoap, sitcom, law enforcement, and court. These subcategories of reality TV have been readily documented on the basis of their contextual and narrative themes (Deery, 2004; Hill, 2005; Murray & Ouellette, 2009; Nabi et al., 2006; Ouellette & Hay, 2008). By taking into consideration the diverse nature of reality-based programs, we gain a theoretically richer understanding of how reality TV provides qualitatively unique entertainment experiences and gratifications on the basis of exposure to distinguished formats. Furthermore, this study raises the importance of acknowledging that reality TV programs should not be examined under a unidimensional lens and that future scholars should consider its multidimensional nature across affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains of audience involvement.

Reality TV as a Genre

One of the paramount issues raised by the emergence, development, and proliferation of reality-based programs is rooted in the conceptualization of the genre. On the basis of textual components (e.g., narrative, language, and production), reality-based programs have commonly been described as having certain fundamental characteristics—“non-professional actors, unscripted dialogue, surveillance footage, hand-held cameras, seeing events unfold as they are happening in front of the camera” (Hill, 2005, p. 41). Earlier conceptualizations of reality TV stemmed from its affordance of realistic representations in which programs are discriminated by their claim to portray reality (Cavendar & Fishman, 1998).

Whereas the depiction of reality helps to establish a generic boundary for the genre, other program features may be discounted. One of the challenges faced by researchers attempting to conceptualize reality TV is to determine the distinguishing features that permit membership into this genre. Conducting a multidimensional space analysis using reported categorizations of 48 TV programs, Nabi et al. (2003) defined shows in the reality-based programming category as those with

1) people portraying themselves (e.g., not actors or public figures performing roles), 2) filmed at least in part in their living or working environment rather than on a set, 3) without a script, 4) with events placed in a narrative context, and 5) for the primary purpose of viewer entertainment. (p. 304)

Findings indicated that the distribution of programs was largely explained by the degree of realism and suitability for prime time. Interestingly, the program classifications suggest that although a genre of reality-based TV exists in the mind-set of viewers, it may be complicated by its variety of subgenres.

Nine Subgenres of Reality TV

To date, reality TV's prevalence and popularity are reflected in its dramatic increase in specialized formats. Their salience in the entertainment market has sparked the interest of scholars attempting to construct a typology of these shows. Although reality TV provides audiences with access to the private lives of real people, these formats clearly have their own functionalities and potentially provide distinct media experiences for viewers. On the basis of extant literature from both interpretive and empirical research traditions (Deery, 2004; Hill, 2005; Murray & Ouellette, 2009; Nabi et al., 2006; Ouellette & Hay, 2008), the following reality TV subgenres have been documented as having unique contextual and narrative themes: dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, hidden camera, talent, game show, docusoap, sitcom, law enforcement, and court.

Dating and romance shows (e.g., *The Bachelor*) center on themes of love, often placing contestants in positions of vying for the heart of a single man or woman. Makeover and lifestyle programs (e.g., *Extreme Makeover*) showcase dramatic transformations of ordinary people as they undergo either simple procedures, such as fashion makeovers, or major life-altering plastic surgeries. Hidden camera shows (e.g., *Candid Camera*) feature staged situations in which hidden cameras capture random or chosen passersby who are unaware that they are being observed. Talent shows (e.g., *Dancing with the Stars*) are based on the search for talent and unique skills, often premised on finding the next superstar, singer, model, inventor, or designer. Game shows (e.g., *Survivor*) place characters in often enclosed environments and situations in

which their primary objective is to win a prize, either in the form of prestige or money. Docusoaps (e.g., *The Real World*) document the lives of real people and actual events and are somewhat comparable to daytime serials. Reality sitcoms (e.g., *My Life as a Sitcom*) are reality-based situation comedies. Law enforcement programs (e.g., *Cops*) highlight the consequences of criminal injustice by following police officers as they stake out criminals, use their authority to demand order, or request the public's help in searching for wanted perpetrators. Last, court shows (e.g., *Judge Judy*) feature actual courtroom cases in which a judge resolves a situation between two opposing parties.

Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Responses to Reality TV

In light of the diversity of narrative formats within the reality TV genre, it is reasonable to suggest that viewers' experiences with and perceptions of these subgenres may differ. Taking into account the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions underlying media gratifications (Nabi & Krcmar, 2004), this section details specific viewer responses that are most prominent and relevant to reality TV based on extant literature. Five audience responses are investigated: identification, interactivity, enjoyment, perceived realism, and perceived competence.

Identification

Media characters play an integral role in the public's experience with entertainment (Cohen, 2006; Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006; Zillmann, 2006). Identification is a psychological process through which viewers can emotionally and cognitively place themselves in the position of a character and vicariously participate in the character's experience (Cohen, 2014; Cole & Leets, 1999). The construct has also been examined in its wishful form, the extent to which a viewer desires to be like a character or behaves similarly to a character (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Hoffner, 1996; Moyer-Gusé, Chung, & Jain, 2011).

Reiss and Wiltz (2004) suggested that viewers often identify with characters who are like themselves and also fantasize about becoming a

celebrity on TV. Docusoaps showcase individuals who are simply reacting to their natural environment, capturing real-life events that are edited similarly to soap operas (Brenton & Cohen, 2004). Through such conventions, viewers are able to identify with characters as they are generally relatable to the average person. On the other hand, viewers who desire to be recognized or crave a sense of status may also be likely to watch reality TV. Smith and Wood (2003) suggested ways in which reality TV-induced consumerism is a form of identification such that people craft identities by purchasing merchandise and participating in fan communities. Furthermore, viewers may likely take on the social and political causes of those with whom they identify (e.g., Steve Irwin followers may engage in wildlife conservation; Bae, Brown, & Kang, 2010; Brown, 2010). Therefore, it can be argued that such forms of identification may vary depending on the narrative and characters that each subgenre features.

Interactivity

Holmes (2004) argued that the influx of reality-based TV bridges the roles of audience and producer. These shows let viewers cast votes and influence program outcomes, allowing a new participatory relationship to develop between viewers and reality TV contestants. In such a case, this behavioral aspect underlying one's media experience could largely contribute to the enjoyment of reality TV. Currently, this evolving participatory facet of reality-based programming, which provides audiences with a sense of agency in changing and discussing program content (Hall, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; McClain, 2011), is increasingly evident across a host of shows (e.g., *The Voice* and *Dancing with the Stars*). When people relate to what they conceptualize as *real*, they may be more inclined to invest themselves in the outcome of the show and feel that their votes matter. Reality TV indeed offers an avenue through which access to the real becomes a type of interactive affair (Smith & Wood, 2003).

In delineating the experience of viewing reality TV, interactivity not only applies to the TV medium. Avid reality TV enthusiasts use several means to achieve more-enhanced program participation, such as turning to the Internet to read, discuss, and post messages to

other avid fans (Andrejevic, 2002; Jenkins, 2006). Today, it is common for people to seek audition information via online sources, tweet their votes, and enter sweepstakes to win seats for live tapings. Reality TV fans can even seek out consumer products that visibly display their enthusiasm for and devotion to these shows. Dedicated viewers may also submit applications to be featured on these programs; such actions are clearly “interactive” in nature.

Enjoyment

Whereas identification and interactivity are common responses to reality TV, this genre of entertainment is also expected to facilitate viewer enjoyment (Hall, 2009; Nabi et al., 2006; Tsay-Vogel & Nabi, in press). Given that reality-based programs often place individuals in convoluted situations to capture spontaneous reactions, deriving enjoyment from exposure to these scenarios can be explained by a variety of mechanisms. A common response to media fare is the pleasure we gain from watching those whom we dislike suffer. In other words, witnessing unaffiliated characters or those whom we do not care for experience agony is naturally entertaining for human beings (Wolff, Smith, & Murray, 1934). Disposition theory further suggests that enjoyment is a function of viewers’ affective dispositions toward characters and the outcomes that these characters experience in the narrative (Raney & Bryant, 2002; Zillmann & Bryant, 1975, 1986). Thus, due to the variability in reality TV subgenres, the multiple personalities cast by producers, and the placement of characters in dramatic and often convoluted situations, it is possible that viewers will elicit different levels of enjoyment. The degree to which individuals perceive programs of a particular subgenre as exciting or pleasurable is perhaps a function of their favorability toward the people presented on these shows, as well as the expected fate of such characters.

Perceived Realism

Another pertinent concept, in addition to exploring differences in enjoyment across the reality TV formats, is perceived realism. The name of the genre itself claims the portrayal of some form of authenticity or “reality.” Perceived realism has been extensively studied,

particularly as it relates to TV viewing. Various theories have explained how individuals shape and develop perceptions of realism during exposure to TV programming (Busselle, 2003). For example, magic window theory posits that what is seen on TV is real in and of itself, whereas social realism theories suggest that viewers believe that mediated content resembles the real world. The self-disclosing nature of reality-based programs encourages audiences to feel that they are witnessing reality and that the characters are themselves “being watched” (Andrejevic, 2004). Reality-based formats that present characters looking directly at the camera through the use of confessionals (Aslama & Pantti, 2006; Dovey, 2000) further enhance the perceived realism of dramatic events. Lundy, Ruth, and Park (2008) suggested that reality TV serves as a vehicle to allow viewers the chance to experience the realities of others. In a sense, the perceived “other’s reality” is an opportunity for audiences to take part in something that is not entirely real or familiar in their everyday lives. Interestingly, research on social reality construction has suggested that perceived realism leads to a greater tendency to be influenced by program content (Busselle & Greenberg, 2000).

Perceived Competition

Another thematic element of reality-based programs is their emphasis on competition and interpersonal conflict (Nabi, 2007; Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). Many of these programs, particularly game and talent shows, are centered on strategic skills to win a reward or reach a goal at the end. These positive reinforcements can be monetary resources (e.g., a million dollars on *Survivor*), romance (e.g., winning a person’s heart on the *Bachelor*), and prestige (e.g., the title of *The Biggest Loser*), among others. Reiss and Wiltz (2004) found that those with higher motivations for vengeance were more likely to watch reality-based programs such as *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, *Temptation Island*, *The Mole*, and *The Real World*. Applying the sensitivity theory to their research, they suggested that the joy of vindication is a gratification that reality TV viewers experience due to its emphasis on struggle and conflict. The desire for vengeance is also closely associated with the enjoyment of competition in general (Reiss, 2000). Taking

into account that certain reality TV formats may be more goal- and conflict-oriented than others, it is possible that viewers will vary in their perceptions of competition across reality TV subgenres.

Research Questions

In light of the importance of studying the five facets of media responses—identification, interactivity, enjoyment, perceived realism, and perceived competition—to the nine reality-based subgenres, this study considers this primary research question:

Research Question 1: Do (a) identification, (b) interactivity, (c) enjoyment, (d) perceived realism, and (e) perceived competition differ across the nine subgenres of reality TV: dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, hidden camera, talent, game show, docusoap, sitcom, law enforcement, and court?

Additionally, extant literature documents a variety of positive reinforcements featured on reality TV that are associated with love, reward, fame, the notion of watching others exposed, and the idea of being observed by others (see Andrejevic, 2002, 2004; Nabi, 2007; Nabi et al., 2003, 2006; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007; Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). Grounded on the sensitivity theory (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004), the degree to which viewers are interested, sensitive, or attracted to these elements may influence the extent to which they derive enjoyment from these subgenres. Therefore, a second research question is addressed:

Research Question 2: Which of the following appeals—(a) love, (b) reward, (c) fame, (d) watching others exposed, and (e) being observed—predict enjoyment of the nine subgenres of reality TV: dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, hidden camera, talent, game show, docusoap, sitcom, law enforcement, and court?

Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 274 undergraduate students from a large northeastern university participated in

the study in exchange for extra credit in a course. Among the respondents in the convenience sample, 136 were males (50.4%) and 134 were females (49.6%), with a mean age of 20.5 years ($SD = 1.73$). In order to determine differences in the evaluations of the nine subgenres of reality TV—dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, hidden camera, talent, game show, docusoap, sitcom, law enforcement, and court—we administered an online questionnaire. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six counterbalanced versions of the questionnaire. They reported their evaluations of each reality TV category on the basis of their degree of identification, interactivity, enjoyment, perceived realism, and perceived competition; their level of appeal with respect to love, reward, fame, watching others exposed, and being observed; and their TV viewing habits.

Measures

TV viewing. Participants reported the average number of hours of general TV and reality TV viewing per week. In addition, for each of the reality TV subgenres, respondents indicated the number of shows they watch in that specific category in an average week. For each subgenre, examples of shows were provided: dating/romance (e.g., *The Bachelor* and *Temptation Island*), makeover/lifestyle (e.g., *Extreme Makeover* and *What Not to Wear*), hidden camera (e.g., *Punk'd* and *Scared Tactics*), talent (e.g., *American Idol* and *Pop Stars*), game show (e.g., *Survivor* and *Fear Factor*), docusoap (e.g., *The Real World* and *High School Reunion*), sitcom (e.g., *My Life as a Sitcom* and *Newlyweds*), law enforcement (e.g., *Cops* and *America's Most Wanted*), and court (e.g., *Judge Judy* and *People's Court*).

Responses to nine subgenres. Participants responded to a series of Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) that assessed identification, interactivity, enjoyment, perceived realism, and perceived competition for each of the respective subgenres on the basis of the sample programs listed above. Means and intercorrelations of the responses to the subgenres appear in Table 1.

Identification. To assess the degree to which participants identify with people in these

Table 1
Correlations Between the Five Primary Audience Responses ($N = 274$)

Response	1	2	3	4	5
1. Identification	—	.41***	.52***	.15*	.40***
2. Interactivity		—	.25***	.04	.20**
3. Enjoyment			—	.21**	.55***
4. Perceived realism				—	.02
5. Perceived competition					—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

programs, items informed by Godlewski and Perse (2010) and Cohen (2006) were included: “I am similar to people on these shows” and “I could put myself in the place of the people in these shows” ($r = .72$).

Interactivity. To measure the extent to which participants behaviorally interact with these programs, items informed by Holmes (2004) were included: “I have control over the content of these shows” and “I have auditioned for a role on these shows” ($r = .43$).

Enjoyment. To assess the degree to which participants derived pleasure from these programs, the following items were adapted from Krcmar and Renfro (2005) and Raney and Bryant (2002): “I find these shows exciting” and “I am curious to see what happens on these shows” ($r = .87$).

Perceived realism. To measure the extent to which participants viewed the programs as representing the real world, items informed by Potter (1986) and Shapiro and Chock (2003) were included: “People in these shows appear to be acting” and “These shows do not present life as it really is” ($r = .45$).

Perceived competition. To assess the degree to which participants evaluated the programs as emphasizing competition and strategy, items informed by Nabi (2007) and Reiss and Wiltz (2004) were included: “Strategy is involved in these shows” and “People on these shows have conflict” ($r = .43$).

Appeal. Items measuring appeal were assessed on Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*). Participants reported the degree to which the following five factors—fame, reward, love, being observed, and watching others on camera—appealed to them. Each of the factors constituted a single item. The selection of these appeal factors was informed

by previous research documenting the gratifications derived from viewing reality TV (see Andrejevic, 2002, 2004; Nabi, 2007; Nabi et al., 2003; Nabi, Stitt, Halford, & Finnerty, 2006; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007; Reiss & Wiltz, 2004).

Results

Sample Characteristics

Participants watched an average of 13.36 hours ($SD = 10.15$) of general TV per week and 3.52 hours ($SD = 3.72$) of reality TV per week. Data on the reality TV programs watched revealed the following on the basis of percentage of participants viewing at least one show within the subgenre: docusoap (35.2%), sitcom (22.7%), game show (18.0%), talent (17.9%), hidden camera (12.6%), makeover/lifestyle (11.2%), law enforcement (9.9%), dating/romance (5.2%), and court (2.7%). With regard to factors that appeal to them, participants rated love as the most appealing ($M = 8.35$, $SD = 2.34$), followed by reward ($M = 7.20$, $SD = 2.14$), fame ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 2.50$), watching others on camera ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 2.38$), and being observed ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 2.36$).

Responses to Reality TV Subgenres

To address Research Question 1, we conducted a series of repeated-measures analyses of variance employing a multivariate approach to examine differences in (a) identification, (b) interactivity, (c) enjoyment, (d) perceived realism, and (e) perceived competition across the nine reality TV subgenres. It is important to note that there were no differences on the basis of participants' TV viewing and the demographic variables reported. Furthermore, there were no differences across the counterbalanced formats.

Identification. The first analysis revealed significant differences in identification as a function of reality TV subgenres, Wilks' $\Lambda = .47$, $F(8, 263) = 36.84$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .53$. In order from highest to lowest in identification scores were docusoap, game show, hidden camera, talent, sitcom, dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, court, and law enforce-

ment.¹ Docusoaps were significantly higher in reported identification than all other subgenres, followed by game and hidden camera shows. Participants identified least with characters on law enforcement and court shows (see Table 2 for means).

Interactivity. The second analysis indicated significant differences in interactivity among the subgenres, Wilks' $\Lambda = .64$, $F(8, 246) = 16.98$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .36$. In order from highest to lowest in interactivity scores were talent, docusoap, dating/romance, game show, hidden camera, makeover/lifestyle, sitcom, law enforcement, and court. Talent shows were reported as being significantly more interactive than all other subgenres (see Table 3 for means).

Enjoyment. The third analysis revealed significant differences in enjoyment of the subgenres, Wilks' $\Lambda = .40$, $F(8, 264) = 50.52$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .61$. In order from highest to lowest in enjoyment scores were hidden camera, docusoap, game show, talent, sitcom, law enforcement, makeover/lifestyle, dating/romance, and court. Hidden camera, docusoap, and game shows were rated as significantly most enjoyable, whereas court shows were reported as least enjoyable (see Table 4 for means).

Perceived realism. The fourth analysis revealed significant differences in perceived realism of the subgenres, Wilks' $\Lambda = .44$, $F(8, 264) = 42.82$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .57$. In order from highest to lowest in perceived realism scores were law enforcement, makeover/lifestyle, hidden camera, court, talent, game show, docusoap, sitcom, and dating/romance. Law enforcement shows were perceived as significantly more realistic than all other subgenres, whereas dating/romance shows were perceived as least realistic (see Table 5 for means).

Perceived competition. The final analysis indicated significant differences in perceived competition of the nine subgenres, Wilks' $\Lambda = .40$, $F(8, 261) = 50.01$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .61$. In order from highest to lowest in perceived competition scores were game show, docusoap, talent, law enforcement, dating/romance, court, hidden camera, makeover/lifestyle, and sitcom. Game shows were perceived as significantly more competitive than all other subgenres, whereas makeover/lifestyle shows and sitcoms

were perceived as least competitive (see Table 6 for means).

Appeals Predicting Enjoyment of Reality TV Subgenres

To address Research Question 2, we employed multiple regression to determine which appeals—love, reward, fame, watching others exposed, and being observed—predicted enjoyment of each reality TV subgenre. The appeals of love and watching others on camera significantly predicted enjoyment of dating/romance, $F(5, 264) = 5.18$, $R^2 = .07$, $p < .001$; makeover/lifestyle, $F(5, 264) = 7.17$, $R^2 = .10$, $p < .001$; docusoap, $F(5, 264) = 14.35$, $R^2 = .20$, $p < .001$; and sitcom shows, $F(5, 264) = 7.66$, $R^2 = .11$, $p < .001$. The appeal of watching others on camera was the only predictor of the enjoyment of hidden camera, $F(5, 264) = 8.90$, $R^2 = .13$, $p < .001$; talent, $F(5, 264) = 5.30$, $R^2 = .09$, $p < .001$; and game shows, $F(5, 264) = 5.05$, $R^2 = .07$, $p < .001$. Finally, the appeal of love negatively predicted enjoyment of law enforcement shows, $F(5, 264) = 5.88$, $R^2 = .08$, $p < .001$, and court shows, $F(5, 264) = 2.49$, $R^2 = .03$, $p < .05$; see Table 7 for β coefficients).

Discussion

The present research uniquely supports differences in identification, interactivity, enjoyment, perceived realism, and perceived competition across nine reality TV subgenres. Furthermore, these audience responses were associated with each other regardless of subgenre. Last, the appeal of love and that of watching others on camera were positively associated with the enjoyment of particular reality formats.

The findings indicated that viewers most identified with characters in docusoaps. Given that identification is associated with an audience member's perceived similarity to a character (see Cohen, 2001), this finding may be a result of the strong tendency of docusoaps, such as *The Real World*, to feature characters in their late teens and early twenties, an age range that resembles that of our sample. It is also likely

¹Type III sum of squares were used in the repeated-measures analyses of variance, and thus the standard errors were reported instead of standard deviations.

Table 2
Identification with Characters in Reality TV Subgenres

	Docusoap	Game show	Hidden camera	Talent	Sitcom	Dating/romance	Makeover/lifestyle	Court	Law enforcement
<i>M</i>	2.58 _a	2.37 _b	2.34 _b	2.06 _{cd}	1.94 _{ce}	1.93 _{de}	1.87 _e	1.55 _f	1.52 _f
<i>SE</i>	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.05

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ at $p < .05$ using Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

that characters are somewhat idealized on docusoaps on the basis of attractiveness and social prowess, often becoming pseudocelebrities in the process. As a result, viewers may engage in wishful identification, and this immersion process could satiate their motivation for status, as was supported by Reiss and Wiltz (2004). In contrast, participants reported the lowest level of identification with those featured on law enforcement and court shows. These patterns of results are perhaps explained by the notion that people featured on these programs are often vilified, ridiculed, or mocked, making them unlikely targets for identification (Oliver, 1994).

In terms of behavioral involvement, our data revealed that interactivity was reported highest for talent shows and lowest for court shows, suggesting that viewers feel the greatest control over programs that are fundamentally premised on the search for extraordinary skills. This finding seems logical because audience interactivity is a central component of current reality-based talent programs. Viewers are often encouraged to vote for their favorite contestants, and the votes cast determine the final program outcome (Holmes, 2004). In addition, the premise of these programs and the reinforcement of rewards (e.g., a recording contract in the case of *The Voice* and *American Idol*) promote interactivity because these shows encourage viewers to audition for a chance at fame. Although audience participation existed before the emergence of reality TV (see Griffen-Foley, 2004), these shows inspire a unique form of mass participa-

tion. In light of the evolving media climate, the Internet further enriches reality TV viewers' experiences by giving them opportunities to visit TV websites and join and develop fan communities (Jenkins, 2006; McClain, 2011). On the other hand, viewers are not asked to determine the fate of characters on makeover/lifestyle, sitcom, law enforcement, and court shows. It is also unlikely that people would audition for several of these shows, particularly those within the law enforcement and court subgenres, because they generally focus on immoral behaviors. Therefore, it is reasonable that our data show that court shows are deemed the least interactive.

Although differences in identification and interactivity were found across subgenres, viewers also indicated varying levels of enjoyment. Participants most enjoyed watching programs within the hidden camera, game, and docusoap subgenres, whereas they least enjoyed court shows. This suggests that being able to observe the private lives of real people and situations in which individuals are not aware of being watched excites viewers (Andrejevic, 2002, 2004; Nabi et al., 2003, 2006). This anonymous glimpse into the "reality" of others may be perceived as pleasurable because viewers are able to engage in a voyeuristic experience. Elements of the average court show, on the other hand, can often be seen in other venues (e.g., news broadcasts) and thus may not elicit a novelty appeal. Moreover, court shows were rated as having low levels of identification and inter-

Table 3
Interactivity with Reality TV Subgenres

	Talent	Docusoap	Dating/romance	Game show	Hidden camera	Makeover/lifestyle	Sitcom	Law enforcement	Court
<i>M</i>	1.91 _a	1.55 _{bc}	1.51 _{cd}	1.51 _{bde}	1.50 _{cdf}	1.47 _{drg}	1.45 _{efgh}	1.44 _{gh}	1.41 _h
<i>SE</i>	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ at $p < .05$ using Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

Table 4
Enjoyment of Reality TV Subgenres

	Hidden camera	Docusoap	Game show	Talent	Sitcom	Law enforcement	Makeover/lifestyle	Dating/romance	Court
<i>M</i>	3.37 _a	3.35 _a	3.23 _a	3.03 _b	2.91 _b	2.63 _c	2.62 _c	2.55 _c	1.88 _d
<i>SE</i>	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.06

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ at $p < .05$ using Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

activity, both of which were associated with enjoyment. These explanations provide justification for why viewers reported greater enjoyment of docusoaps and hidden camera and game shows over court programs.

When assessing perceptions of realism, our research shows that law enforcement shows were perceived as most realistic and dating/romance shows were perceived as least realistic among the subgenres. A logical explanation is that the use of real footage provided by police and law enforcement surveillance cameras plays a substantial role in enhancing the authenticity of these programs. However, even though these depictions are perceived to be realistic, they differ substantially from reality by over-representing violent crimes and misrepresenting the racial profiles of suspects and police officers (see Oliver, 1994). From a cultivation perspective (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994), it is possible that over time, our perceptions of the police force and criminals will consequently converge with their portrayals on TV. In contrast, although unscripted dating/romance shows are heavily staged, contestants are placed in contrived situations where they, along with a host of other suitors, are vying for the heart of a single man or woman, a situation that is not common in real life. Thus, the plausibility of events and the nature of these relatively manufactured environmental conditions explain why dating/romance programs are perceived as least authentic.

Additionally, game shows were perceived as the most competitive among all other subgenres examined in the study. This finding is particularly interesting because game shows, such as *Survivor* and *The Amazing Race*, which are principally oriented around winning money, were evaluated as more competitive than were programs with objectives of winning less-tangible or financial outcomes (e.g., romance). Although a specific goal is consistently reinforced in game shows, other programs such as docusoaps and sitcoms do not place characters in positions of achieving a specific goal. Furthermore, contestants who are showcased in makeover/lifestyle programs are already preselected to undergo extreme fashion or surgical transformations, where the act of being selected to appear on the show occurs in the preproduction phase. Although the goal of being successful in the transformation process exists, strategy and conflict are not as applicable to makeover/lifestyle shows, because the accomplishment is largely in the hands of professional makeup artists, stylists, and plastic surgeons. These findings are generally consistent with previous research examining the competitiveness of specific reality programs (e.g., Nabi, 2007).

When synthesizing all the findings across subgenres, the most striking results show that although law enforcement, court, and makeover/lifestyle programs were reported as highly realistic, viewers exhibited low levels of identification and interactivity and experienced min-

Table 5
Perceived Realism of Reality TV Subgenres

	Law enforcement	Makeover/lifestyle	Hidden camera	Court	Talent	Game show	Docusoap	Sitcom	Dating/romance
<i>M</i>	3.56 _a	2.98 _b	2.88 _{bc}	2.86 _{bd}	2.79 _{cde}	2.71 _{ef}	2.63 _f	2.42 _g	2.21 _h
<i>SE</i>	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ at $p < .05$ using Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

Table 6
Perceived Competition of Reality TV Subgenres

	Game show	Docusoap	Talent	Law enforcement	Dating/romance	Court	Hidden camera	Makeover/lifestyle	Sitcom
<i>M</i>	3.78 _a	3.33 _b	3.29 _{bed}	3.21 _{bc}	3.20 _c	3.19 _{cd}	3.01 _e	2.68 _f	2.59 _f
<i>SE</i>	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.05

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ at $p < .05$ using Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

imal enjoyment from these shows. Thus, it is questionable whether perceived realism is driving viewers to enjoy reality-based programs. Rather, viewers may enjoy programs that are more unrealistic and dramatic as long as the story that is being conveyed is coherent (see Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). However, whereas hidden camera shows were rated as highly realistic, viewers also enjoyed these programs. Although these shows capture raw footage depicting people who are not aware that they are being watched (hence the realism explanation), the shows may engender greater enjoyment because character outcomes are less predictable.

Viewers also indicated that game shows were the most competitive among the subgenres and reported that these programs were some of the most enjoyable as well. Applying sensitivity theory, individuals may derive pleasure from feeling vindicated after witnessing conflict in reality programs (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). The notion of rewards may attract viewers to watch reality TV; however, enjoyment could be a function of the type of reward. It appears that programs oriented around monetary rewards are much more appealing and exciting to watch. This is evident in the findings that dating/romance shows, though rated as more compet-

itive than other subgenres, were also reported as the least enjoyable.

Enjoyment of the subgenres was also predicted by some of the appeal factors examined in this study. Specifically, the appeal of love and watching others increased enjoyment of dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, docusoap, and sitcom subgenres. Because these subgenres invite audiences to peek into the intimate lives of others, it is not surprising that viewers who generally like to observe other people enjoy watching these programs, supporting previous research on the role of voyeurism in reality TV viewing (see Nabi et al., 2006). Furthermore, these subgenres tend to focus on relationship issues that resonate with viewers who find love strongly appealing. On the other hand, hidden camera, talent, and game shows are less likely to portray characters' intimate relationships and instead focus on particular challenges or tasks (e.g., dealing with a prank or winning a prize). Therefore, it is not surprising that the appeal of watching others affects enjoyment of these programs, but the appeal of love does not. Somewhat more interesting is the finding that the appeal of love diminished enjoyment of law enforcement and court shows. Because these shows depict characters committing acts of vi-

Table 7
Appeal Factors Predicting Enjoyment of Reality TV Subgenres

Appeal	Dating/romance	Makeover/lifestyle	Hidden camera	Talent	Game show	Docusoap	Sitcom	Law enforcement	Court
Love	.23***	.22***	-.004	.11	.03	.26***	.14*	-.27***	-.15**
Watching others exposed	.18**	.24***	.32***	.18**	.26***	.41***	.36***	-.06	.09
Reward	-.04	-.07	.04	.03	.06	-.03	-.11	.07	.04
Being observed	.03	-.01	-.06	.01	.01	-.04	-.04	.10	.06
Fame	.02	.10	.13	.12	.02	-.02	-.03	.13	.04

Note. Values are standardized betas.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

olence, getting arrested, or being sued, these portrayals are potentially distressful to watch for those who find love appealing. Therefore, the impact of the appeals of love and watching others on viewers' enjoyment varies across subgenres.

Some limitations and directions for future research should be acknowledged. First, it is possible that our convenience sample of students is not generalizable to the true population of reality TV viewers. Future research may consider expanding the sample to include older adults to improve the external validity of the findings. Second, although our research supports variations in identification across the reality TV subgenres, it is possible that emotionally and cognitively taking on the perspectives of characters has implications for changes in viewers' attitudes, beliefs, and values. Because reality TV is edited to tell a story, producers have the capability to impact viewers' likelihood for identification, particularly by emphasizing and excluding specific narrative elements. Future research should consider how identification fosters changes in the audience, perhaps encouraging viewers to emulate the characters in these programs and alter their morals and opinions. Third, the items we used to assess interactivity are limited in that we did not consider other avenues of behavioral involvement. Future studies should investigate whether other components of interactivity, such as online message board participation, engagement in reality TV fantasy leagues, and voting through social media (e.g., Twitter) contribute to a viewers' sense of control over program content. Finally, enjoyment can be further deconstructed by examining a host of distinct positive responses. Whereas pleasure and diversion have been extensively studied as indicators of enjoyment (Zillmann & Bryant, 1994), more recent efforts have been made to consider gratifications such as deriving meaning from entertainment (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Therefore, future studies could examine other forms of positive responses to reality TV subgenres as scholars have found that lifestyle-transforming reality TV facilitates feelings of elevation more so than does game-based reality TV (Tsay-Vogel & Krakowiak, 2013).

Conclusion

The present research offers a clearer understanding of the variability in affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses to the nine reality TV subgenres under scrutiny—dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, hidden camera, talent, game show, docusoap, sitcom, law enforcement, and court. It is evident that reality TV is not merely a genre defined by homogeneous narrative characteristics but rather one with an increasing number of formats and themes that offer unique affective, cognitive, and behavioral experiences. Given the evolving media climate, this exploratory study takes an initial step to reveal distinctions in the evaluations and gratifications underlying contemporary reality TV formats.

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