

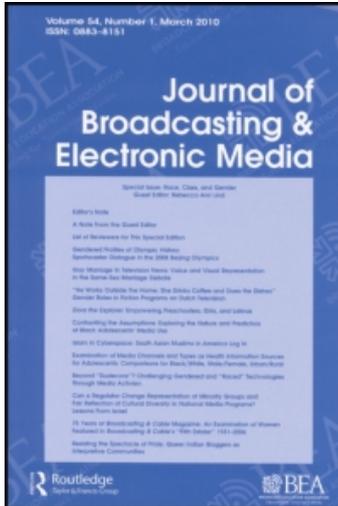
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### Publicized Intimacies on Reality Television: An Analysis of Voyeuristic Content and Its Contribution to the Appeal of Reality Programming

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# Publicized Intimacies on Reality Television: An Analysis of Voyeuristic Content and Its Contribution to the Appeal of Reality Programming

Lemi Baruh

*Given that reality television is not a cohesive genre, a better understanding of the frequently noted voyeuristic appeal of reality programs would require an analysis of content features that may contribute to their voyeuristic appeal. A survey administered to television viewers and a content analysis of reality programs support hypotheses regarding the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs in general, and suggest that scenes which adopt a "fly on the wall perspective," take place in private settings, contain nudity, and/or include gossip, contribute to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs.*

Accounts of the rising popularity of reality television cite voyeurism as an important reason for its success among viewers. Several studies suggest that television viewers themselves perceive reality programs to be both exhibitionistic and voyeuristic (Hill, 2005), and acknowledge that they are drawn to this voyeuristic component of reality programs (Johnson-Woods, 2002). Similarly, studies focusing on the psychological appeal of reality television provide preliminary empirical evidence regarding the positive association between the tendency to use media for voyeuristic purposes and the consumption of reality programs (Nabi, Biely, Morgan & Stitt; 2003; Nabi, Stitt, Halford & Finnerty, 2006; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007).

However, an important flaw in this assumption regarding the voyeuristic appeal of reality television is that not all reality programs are created equal. Reality television is a catchall phrase alluding to many different formats (Brenton & Cohen, 2003; Dovey, 2000). Hence, developing a coherent understanding of reality programs' voyeuristic appeal requires the identification of programming attributes that accommodate television viewers' voyeurism. In order to address this need, a content analysis and a survey were used in conjunction with each other to identify content

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features that may contribute to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs. First, informed by concepts related to accessibility of information and private behavior, the content analysis counted the presence of programming features that may add to a program's voyeuristic appeal. Then, the results from the content analysis were used to weight the survey data investigating the association between voyeurism and reality television consumption to identify the content features that contribute to a reality program's voyeuristic appeal.

## Voyeuristic Appeal of Reality TV

### Dimensions of Voyeuristic Tendencies

The construct of voyeurism adopted in this article differs from the conceptualization of voyeurism utilized in the psychiatric domain, which defines voyeurism as a psychopathological condition characterized by becoming sexually aroused from the covert observation of others while they have sex, or are nude (Freund, Watson & Rienzo, 1988). Rather than emphasizing sexual deviance, recent accounts of contemporary culture conceptualize voyeurism as a common (and not solely sexual) pleasure derived from access to private details (Metzl, 2004). Accordingly, partly because of electronic media, curious peeking into the private lives of others has become a defining characteristic of contemporary society (Calvert, 2004).

Despite growing interest in non-pathological voyeurism, there is very little research exploring its psychological dimensions (Rye & Meaney, 2007). The construct of voyeurism as a common form of guilty pleasure points to several important dimensions of a typical individual's voyeuristic tendencies. First, in contrast to the covert nature of pathological voyeurism, "normal" voyeurism is satisfied through more acceptable and consensual forms such as films, gossip news and/or webcams (Koskela, 2004; Ytreberg, 2002). Second, as evidenced by the high number of government and private sector employees browsing personal information just for sport—Sullivan (2008) labels this data voyeurism—the normal voyeur is opportunistic, and the act of looking or listening can be considered an end in itself. Third, not all forms of observation will be satisfactory: the appeal of voyeurism is the pleasure derived from learning about what is typically forbidden or private (Calvert, 2004; Metzl, 2004).

### The Appeal of Reality TV for the "Normal" Voyeur

A central tenet of the Uses and Gratifications perspective is that audience members actively engage in content selection in order to fulfill certain needs (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). If so, to the extent that non-pathological voyeurism is defined as an opportunistic tendency to derive pleasure from learning about others'

private details, the question is whether, and to what extent reality programs can accommodate this form of voyeurism.

Part of the answer to this question comes from the branding of reality programming as privacy invasive voyeur television (Calvert, 2004). Extant research suggests that genre labels may provide meaningful signals for viewers, influencing their preferences for specific television programs (Hall, 2007; Webster & Wakshlag, 1983). Considered from this perspective, reality programs promise (and partly deliver) the "thrill of seeing something intimate . . . and doing so remotely and without accountability" (Deery, 2004, p. 6). Deery's comment about remoteness of the gaze underlines another component of the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs: the panoptic mode of observation within which there is an informational asymmetry between the audience member and the program participant, who can't gaze back at the viewer. This panoptic mode and the perceived distance between the viewer and the target allow the viewer to enjoy the private and the stolen (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Long before reality television, starting in the 1900s, contemporary society witnessed the birth of the cinematic gaze through which viewers enjoy this panoptic mode of looking (Denzin, 1995). However, reality programs differ from cinema and other forms of content due to the aura of realism and spontaneity they invoke (Calvert, 2004; Ruddock, 2008). Despite producer interventions and viewers' awareness that participants often act for the camera, the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs differs from other genres because "viewer detection skills are exercised not on . . . celebrities . . . but on the 'real' people 'just like the viewers'" (Andrejevic, 2006, p. 401).

The voyeuristic appeal of gazing upon individuals who come from the audiences' ranks is also closely linked to the reciprocity of the voyeuristic needs of television viewers and the exhibitionism of the program participants (Groombridge, 2002). Accordingly, in an era of extensive surveillance, webcams, blogs and reality television allow individuals to engage in "empowering exhibitionism" to reclaim control over the dissemination of information about themselves (Koskela, 2004, p.199). The reciprocity of the relationship between the voyeur and the exhibitionist is not only because the exhibitionist needs an audience to be successful in reclaiming control over the information (Dholakia & Zwick, 2001), but is also due to the fact that the non-pathological voyeur, looking for safe ways to gaze, needs the exhibitionist. Then, what reality programs do is to provide this safe, legally sanctioned (albeit potentially less fulfilling than corporeal) venue for the voyeur to meet the exhibitor.

H<sub>1</sub>: The higher the voyeuristic tendency of an audience member, the more likely he/she will be to watch reality programs.

A valid concern regarding this conceptualization of "normal" voyeurism is that it is very similar to psychological drives (social curiosity) to learn about other individuals. For example, it has been shown that some people who are more likely to be curious about others will either engage in social comparison (Gibbons & Buunk,

1999), or regulate their own conduct (self-monitoring) by observing others (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984). Social comparison researchers suggest that the ultimate goal of social comparison is self-evaluation (White & Lehman, 2005). Similarly, high self-monitors have been found to be sensitive to the behavioral cues of other people primarily for the purposes of self-adjustment and validation (Snyder, 1974). Conceptually, then, these two orientations differ from voyeurism in their purposeful utilization of looking at others to satisfy social needs such as figuring out how one fares in comparison with others. With their focus on the experiences of individuals from viewers' ranks, reality programs may also be a source of information for social comparison and self-monitoring. If so, an important question that needs to be answered is whether voyeurism is distinct from such a tendency for social comparison and self-monitoring in terms of predicting the consumption of reality programs.

RQ<sub>1</sub>: After controlling for social comparison and self-monitoring, will voyeurism be positively associated with watching reality television?

### The Voyeuristic Appeal of Reality Content Features

Although genre labels may have an important influence on the programming choices that viewers make, these choices are more likely to depend on the content of specific programs as viewers get more acquainted with a genre (Hall, 2007). As suggested in the discussion above, an important dimension of non-pathological voyeurism is its reliance on "consumption of revealing images . . . at the expense of privacy" (Calvert, 2004, p. 2). Considered from this perspective, social norms regarding privacy and intimacy are a proper starting point for the identification of content features that may contribute to a reality program's voyeuristic appeal.

A common usage of the concept of privacy is to refer to private spaces (Post, 1989). The walls themselves act to separate the private from the public due to their symbolic function as a communication barrier (Goffman, 1963). On the other hand, like other forms of mediated experiences (Drotner, 2005; Meyrowitz, 1985), reality programs cross these normative barriers suggested by physical space and do so at varying levels (with, for example, *Big Brother* taking place inside a house, and the *Jerry Springer Show* taking place in an auditorium open to the public).

Clearly, the presence of television cameras and participants' consent to be recorded by these same cameras make each reality television set an essentially public setting. However, in evaluating audience-content interaction, the proper question is not whether the mediated experience replicates the actual one, but rather what relationship is implied by the mediated experience (Ruddock, 2008). For example, McGrath (2004) summarizes a gay bar show, during which a stripper, after dancing on stage, goes back to the changing room to take a shower while the bar patrons watch him on a live camera feed. Despite the patrons' awareness that their viewing was consensual (and staged), the voyeuristic enjoyment of the live camera feed was reportedly higher than the dance show on stage. Likewise, it is expected that

in reality shows, symbolic signs indicating that an interaction is taking place in a setting that implies a private rather than a public space will contribute to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs.

H<sub>2</sub>: Voyeurism will be associated with higher consumption of reality programs that depict interactions taking place in private settings.

McGrath's (2004) example with respect to the enjoyment of a live camera feed depicting a typically private space also points to the role the camera may play in situating the viewer vis-à-vis what's happening on screen. In this case, the camera was situated to adopt a "fly on the wall" perspective—a production technique that makes the extra-diegetic elements less visible, helping the viewers assume the role of an unobtrusive, distant observer (like a voyeur) (Biressi & Nunn, 2005; Jones, 2003). In contrast, when the camera's presence becomes more visible, the "fourth wall" between the viewer and the character on screen breaks, allowing the viewer to become more like a confidante interacting with the character (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985). In reality programs, breaking the fourth wall usually occurs through conventions such as voice-over descriptions from participants or video diaries within which a secluded participant directly addresses the viewers to tell their side of the story. If the "fly on the wall" perspective creates a distance between the viewer and the characters on screen, it may be more conducive to voyeuristic enjoyment of reality programs than conventions that break the fourth wall.

H<sub>3</sub>: Voyeurism will be associated with a higher consumption of those reality programs that more frequently adopt a "fly on the wall" perspective.

A conceptualization of privacy that relies solely on physical demarcations does not paint the whole picture with respect to content features that may accommodate the voyeuristic needs of viewers to have access to the private. An alternative way to think about social relations is to treat them as information systems that differ from each other in terms of the accessibility of social information, with certain behaviors being less accessible (with higher backstage bias) than others (Meyrowitz, 1985). As such, privacy is not only physical seclusion but also the ability to selectively determine which behaviors are shared with whom. This function of privacy is closely linked to establishment of intimate—shared and exclusive—relations (Westin, 1967).

Research on the psychology of intimate relations points to several self-expressive behaviors that individuals conventionally associate with intimacy and hence to what should be less frequently accessible. Starting with adolescence, the disclosure of personal details becomes an important behavioral dimension of establishing intimate friendships (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Accordingly, before disclosing personal details, individuals require the establishment of reciprocal trust (Lee, Im &

Taylor, 2008). A second form of disclosure that develops over time with intimate relationships is gossip—broadly defined as negative and positive talk about others in their absence (McNelles & Connolly, 1999). Not only are people less likely to gossip around people with whom they have not developed close ties—potentially because gossip may contain risky opinions—but also the act of gossiping may function as a signal that a special bond has been established (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). The third type of self-expression frequently associated with intimacy is the expression of emotions. The concept of display rules, for example, refers to individuals' attempts to manage (via attenuating or inhibiting) expressions of emotions. Especially for negative emotions, there is usually an unspoken rule that emotions are a private matter with backstage bias and should be accessible only to the right people (Ekman & Friesen, 1969).

It is important to note that social conventions related to the inaccessibility of these private behaviors (such as self-disclosure or gossip) require restraint both on the side of the source and the potential recipient. Individuals are said to be required to show restraint (modesty) in displaying such behavior because it may cast a negative light on them, or make them seem more vulnerable and/or promiscuous (Scheff & Retzinger, 2000). Similarly, for potential witnesses, the failure to recognize boundaries for backstage behaviors is associated with incivility (Goffman, 1963). On the other hand, reality programs may offer the opportunity for both sides to break these social expectations regarding intimacy: The participants choose disclosure instead of modesty, and the viewers choose not to look away, but rather gaze carefully when private moments are revealed. Hence, from the point of view of the viewers, the following is expected:

H<sub>4</sub>: Voyeurism will be associated with a higher consumption of reality programs in which participants more frequently disclose personal information.

H<sub>5</sub>: Voyeurism will be associated with a higher consumption of reality programs in which participants engage in gossip.

H<sub>6</sub>: Voyeurism will be associated with a higher consumption of reality programs in which participants exhibit private emotions.

In addition to self-disclosure, gossip, and the expression of emotions, sexual behavior and nudity are also situations with backstage bias that reality programs make accessible to the viewers. If so, voyeuristic pleasure derived from reality programs should similarly be higher for programs that contain more nudity or sexual behavior.

H<sub>7</sub>: Voyeurism will be associated with a higher consumption of reality programs exhibiting sexual behavior.

H<sub>8</sub>: Voyeurism will be associated with a higher consumption of reality programs exhibiting nudity.

## Method

In order to test the aforementioned hypotheses, this study utilized a content analysis of 15 reality programs in conjunction with a cross-sectional survey that measured exposure to the content-analyzed reality programs and respondents' voyeuristic tendencies.

### Survey Instrument

*Sample and Procedures.* Reality programming consumption data for this article comes from a cross-sectional survey about media use completed in January 2006. An e-mail invitation was sent to 3437 potential participants in the US who had previously joined an online panel to take surveys in exchange for financial incentives. Out of 3437 who received the invitation to participate in the survey, 550 respondents completed the survey (a 16% response rate). Respondents' mean age was 46, and slightly more than half were female (55%). Of the respondents, 32% had some college experience, 29% had a college degree, and 19% had a high school degree. A large majority of the respondents were White (86%), followed by African Americans (6%).

In addition to demographic characteristics, three sets of variables from the survey are pertinent to the hypotheses presented here. First, the survey contained four variables measuring the frequency with which respondents watched television during weekdays, weeknights, weekend days and weekend nights (ranging from 0 to 7 hours, or more). The median for television watching was between 1 to 2 hours for weekdays, and 2 to 3 hours for weeknights, weekend days and weekend nights, resulting in approximately 4 to 5 hours of television per day. In order to measure reality television consumption, the respondents were asked to rate on a scale ranging from *never* (0) to *more than once a week* (6) the frequency with which they watched 28 television programs, 15 reality programs (also content analyzed), and 13 diverter programs from other genres. Using a selection with probability in proportion to size sampling method (programs with higher household shares were more likely to be sampled), the reality programs to be included in the survey were selected from a list of reality programs aired in major U.S. broadcast networks in prime-time from June to December 2005. An overall reality television exposure score was computed by summing the frequency of exposure scores of each reality program. The resulting index of exposure scores had a *median* of 10 ( $M = 10.6$ ,  $SD = 10.4$ ).

Second, the survey measured the voyeuristic tendencies of the respondents. Table 1 provides a list of the items used to measure voyeuristic orientation by asking respondents about how they would react if they accidentally came across opportunities to peek into others' lives [immediately stop looking/listening/reading (1) to try to see/hear/read all they could (7)]. These items were then summed to form a highly reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ ) voyeurism scale with a *median* of 20 ( $M = 22.4$ ,  $SD = 11.2$ ).

**Table 1**  
**Voyeurism Scale**

Scale Items	Median Score
If you realized that you could see inside the bedroom of your neighbors because they forgot to close their curtains.	2
If you were to overhear your next door neighbors discussing their sexual lives.	2
If you were to read a message that was sent to somebody else.	3
If you were part of a conversation where your friends were gossiping about the sexual life of a person you're familiar with.	3
You realized that instead of giving you your own photograph prints, the photo lab gave you a set of photographs showing a couple skinny-dipping in a pool.	3
While shopping in a clothing store, you see a gap through which you can see inside a dressing room.	1
If you were to overhear a husband and wife discussing problems that they are having with their kids and/or other family members.	2
If you were to witness someone having an emotional breakdown and displaying extreme anger or sadness.	3

Finally, in order to control for the tendency to gather social information for purposes of social comparison and/or self-monitoring, partial scales using three items from Gibbons and Buunk's (1999) Social Comparison scale ( $M = 12.7$ ,  $SD = 3.9$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ , e.g., "I always pay attention to how I do things compared to how others do things") and Lennox and Wolfe's (1984) Self-Monitoring scale ( $M = 14.3$ ,  $SD = 3.5$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ , e.g., "My powers of intuition are good when it comes to understanding others' emotions and motives") were used.

*Content Analysis.* The content analysis was performed on 15 reality programs for which exposure data was collected in the survey. Because the analysis focused on moving images, the unitization of the sampled programs needed to maintain a balance between providing coders with sufficient information about a scene's context and ensuring that the coding units would not contain a lot of information (Krippendorff, 2004).

For each content-analyzed program, all episodes aired at prime-time between June 15 and December 15, 2005 (two weeks before the deployment of the survey) were recorded. Once recorded, each program was divided into approximately 5-minute long intervals, which would also be used as contextual units that coders could use to understand what happens before and after a specific scene. The

duration of these 5-minute intervals were allowed to slightly deviate from 5 minutes to ensure that every scene within the interval had its natural beginning and end. Then, six of the 5-minute intervals were randomly selected to create a composite episode for each program. At that point, each composite episode was divided into scenes to be used as the units of analysis. Each instance of change in time, space, or participants taking a major role in a given interaction, was coded as a new scene. The reliability of this unitization process, checked by coders' agreement on the timestamp of changes, was very good (Krippendorff's  $\alpha = .92$ ).

For the content analysis, two coders were first shown the 5-minute intervals as the contextual unit, and then were presented, in a sequential order, the scenes they would code. Table 2 provides a list of the content analysis variables and their

**Table 2**  
**Content Analysis Variables**

Variable	Level of Measurement	Krippendorff's Alpha <sup>a</sup>
Private v. public setting	Nominal	.92
Fly on the wall	Nominal	.94
Personal information		
Financial status	Ordinal	N/A <sup>b</sup>
Occupation	Ordinal	.80
Education	Ordinal	.98
Drug use	Ordinal	N/A
Alcohol use	Ordinal	.85
Physical health	Ordinal	.88
Mental health	Ordinal	.86
Religious beliefs	Ordinal	N/A
Political orientation	Ordinal	N/A
Sexual lives	Ordinal	.89
Negative emotions	Nominal	.87
Non-negative emotions	Nominal	.78
Gossip: Positive talk about others in absence	Nominal	.81
Gossip: Negative talk about others in absence	Nominal	.79
Casual touching/kissing	Nominal	.67
Intimate kissing/touching	Nominal	1.00
Sexual intercourse	Nominal	N/A
Full nudity: Visibility of sexual organs	Nominal	.88
Partial nudity: Visibility of undergarments	Nominal	.80

<sup>a</sup>N for reliability = 216. <sup>b</sup>N/A: Reliability statistics not calculated because of lack of variation for units coded to calculate intercoder reliability.

intercoder reliability (Krippendorff's  $\alpha$ ) calculated using 216 (out of 2151 scenes within the sampled 5-minute intervals) units coded for content analysis.

The content analysis instrument was divided into three sections. The first section focused on the physical privateness of the setting by distinguishing between private or semi-private spaces (e.g., inside one's house, board rooms), limited public spaces (open to a limited group of people, e.g., restaurants, waiting rooms), and public spaces (open to all individuals, e.g., parks, streets) ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Excluded from the analysis of spatial privacy were narrations during which video collages of different settings with various privacy levels were shown. This section also contained a variable measuring the presence of the "fly on the wall" perspective. For this variable, the coders were asked to categorize each scene in terms of whether the characters on the screen directly addressed the viewers (e.g., through video diaries), or did not acknowledge the viewers' existence ("fly on the wall") ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

The second section of the content analysis measured the extent to which participants reveal certain types of personal information. For this section, a list of information items retrieved from Wacks (1989) was organized into 10 main categories listed in Table 2. Using a 7-point scale [*absent* (0), *somewhat present* (1–5) and *very much present* (6)], each scene was coded in terms of the presence of each type of personal information. Because neither of the coders found any incidence of these types of information revealed in the 261 units used for reliability calculations, reliability was not calculated for information about *financial status*, *drug use*, *religious beliefs* and *political beliefs*. The reliabilities of the remaining six personal information variables were all above  $\alpha$  of .8. For later analyses, these personal information variables were recoded as *absent* (0) and *present* (1–6 = 1). Then, for each reality program, an overall *count of personal information per scene* was computed by taking an average of the content analyzed scenes. Because a scene can contain more than one piece of information, the resulting count per scene can exceed one.

The third section of the content analysis instrument focused on the incidence of expression of emotions, gossip, sexual behavior (intercourse, casual touching/kissing, and intimate touching/kissing) and nudity. Coders rated each scene for the *presence* (1) or *absence* (0) of each these content features. Both negative (e.g., sadness,  $\alpha = .87$ ) and non-negative (e.g., happiness, excitement,  $\alpha = .78$ ) emotions were above the minimum required reliability of  $\alpha = .70$  (Lombard, Synder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). Both negative ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and positive ( $\alpha = .81$ ), talk about others in their absence (gossip), were above the required levels of reliability. In line with the conceptualization of gossip provided above, positive and negative talk about others in their absence were summed together to form a gossip variable. Reliability was not calculated for sexual intercourse because the coded scenes contained no variation; the reliability for casual touching/kissing ( $\alpha = .66$ ) was not sufficient. Finally, full ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and partial ( $\alpha = .80$ ) nudity had desirable levels of reliability. Due to a relatively low level of occurrence of full nudity, for later analyses, these two variables were combined to form a partial/full nudity variable.

## Weighting Exposure by Content Features

In order to test hypotheses regarding the content features that contribute to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs, the correlations between the unweighted score of exposure to reality programming and voyeurism were contrasted with the correlations between voyeurism and exposure scores weighted by each content feature. For each respondent, the exposure score weighted by a content feature (e.g., gossip) was obtained by multiplying the percent of scenes containing that content feature in a given program (e.g., *Amazing Race*) by the respondent's exposure score to that program (for personal information, the weighting was done using a count of personal information per scene). After computing the weighted exposure scores, the correlations between voyeurism and unweighted exposure scores, and voyeurism and weighted exposure scores were contrasted using Steiger's *Z* procedure. This procedure, although not as widely used as other procedures like Hotelling's *T* (Hotelling, 1940), was preferred because it was a more conservative test with lower Type 1 error (Meng, Rosenthal & Rubin, 1992; Steiger, 2004). In the resulting contrasts, a higher correlation between voyeurism and an exposure score weighted by a content feature than between voyeurism and the unweighted exposure score would confirm that specific content feature's contribution to voyeuristic appeal of a reality program.

## Results

### Part 1: Reality Television Consumption and Voyeurism

As predicted by the first hypothesis, voyeurism was positively related to reality television exposure ( $r = .24, p < .001$ ). Exposure to reality programs was also positively related to social comparison ( $r = .14, p < .01$ ), self-monitoring ( $r = .20, p < .001$ ), and hours of television viewing ( $r = .26, p < .001$ ). Partial correlations run to address the first research question revealed that the relationship between voyeurism and exposure to reality programs remained significant after controlling for social comparison, self-monitoring, and hours of television viewing ( $r = .21, p < .001$ ).

Because Hypotheses 2 to 8 pertain to reality television content features that may contribute to their voyeuristic appeal, the remainder of the results section will first summarize the results of the content analysis (Part 2), and provide the Results of the correlation contrasts used for hypotheses tests (Part 3).

### Part 2: Content Features

For the 2151 scenes analyzed, the average scene duration was 14.60 seconds. *The Amazing Race* had the shortest average scene duration (7 seconds), and *Cops*

had the longest (32 seconds). In terms of the “spatial privacy” of the interactions, the analysis distinguished between scenes taking place in public spaces, limited public spaces, and private/semi-private spaces. On average, 28% of the scenes were classified as taking place in typically less accessible private or semi-private settings. *Nanny 911* (52%) and *Big Brother* (49%) can be singled out as programs taking place primarily within private/semi-private spaces. On the other hand, *Cops* stood out as the only show that was predominantly taking place in public spaces (68%) (Table 3). On average, 60% of the scenes analyzed adopted a “fly on the wall” perspective within which television viewers are treated as invisible observers. *The Amazing Race* (91%) and *Cops* (88%) stood out as programs that primarily adopted this style.

The last column of Table 3 displays the count of personal information per scene. The average number of items of personal information per scene was .42 ( $SD = .29$ ). Not reported on the table, the content analysis also showed that the most frequently revealed type of information was information regarding occupation: On average 23% of the scenes contained information about occupation ( $SD = 23\%$ ). However, this percentage is inflated because in shows like *Cops*, almost every scene contains information about occupation (97%). Other than information about occupational status, information about the sexual lives of the participants (average = 6%) and information about participants’ physical health (average = 5%) were the most frequently appearing types of information.

Table 4 summarizes the content analysis results regarding the presence of display of negative emotions, non-negative (positive and neutral) emotions, gossip (positive and negative combined), casual touching/kissing, intimate touching/kissing, and partial/full nudity. No occurrence of sexual intercourse was observed.

On average, 25% of the scenes contained negative emotions and a significantly higher percentage of the scenes (40%) contained non-negative emotions ( $p < .05$ ). *Nanny 911* had the highest percent of negative emotions (42%), followed by *Cops* (35%) and *Big Brother* (33%). On average, only 8% of the scenes contained conversations that could be classified as gossip with *Cops* (32%) and *Big Brother* (28%) standing out as the two programs with the highest occurrence of gossip. Less than 5% of the scenes contained casual touching/kissing, intimate touching/kissing, or partial/full nudity, with *Big Brother* (16%) and *Average Joe* (15%) having the highest occurrence of partial/full nudity.

Having briefly summarized the results of the content analysis of the reality programs, Part 3 will focus on hypotheses tests regarding which content features analyzed contribute to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs.

### Part 3: Voyeuristic Appeal of Content Features

Table 5 lists the correlations between voyeurism, weighted exposure scores and unweighted exposure scores, required to contrast weighted and unweighted exposure scores’ relationship with voyeurism. The first column provides the correlations

**Table 3**  
**Scene Characteristics, Spatial and Informational Privacy**

	Scene Length (seconds)	Percent of Scenes using "Fly on the Wall"	Percent of Scenes in Public Spaces	Percent of Scenes in Limited Public Spaces	Percent of Scenes in Private Semi-Private Spaces	Personal Information Count per Scene
<i>Amazing Race</i>	7	91%	28%	30%	33%	.14
<i>America's Most Wanted</i>	14	27%	7%	10%	10%	.63
<i>America's Next Top Model</i>	10	65%	11%	20%	35%	.35
<i>Average Joe</i>	11	48%	14%	13%	22%	.69
<i>Beauty and the Geek</i>	12	55%	20%	6%	30%	.47
<i>Big Brother</i>	14	50%	0%	2%	49%	.29
<i>Biggest Loser</i>	13	70%	13%	35%	23%	.20
<i>Cops</i>	32	88%	68%	0%	19%	1.18
<i>Dancing with the Stars</i>	21	62%	0%	47%	15%	.20
<i>Extreme Makeover: H.E.</i>	11	44%	12%	9%	29%	.28
<i>Nanny 911</i>	9	54%	2%	1%	52%	.34
<i>Survivor</i>	16	60%	21%	25%	16%	.15
<i>The Apprentice</i>	14	72%	4%	35%	33%	.39
<i>Three Wishes</i>	11	41%	2%	19%	20%	.49
<i>Tommy Lee Goes to Col.</i>	24	73%	11%	35%	28%	.67
Mean	14.60	60%	14%	19%	28%	.42
SD	6.50	17%	17%	15%	12%	.29

**Table 4**  
**Private/Exclusive Behavior (Percent of Scenes)**

	Negative Emotions	Non-negative Emotions	Gossip	Casual Touching-Kissing	Intimate Touching-Kissing	Partial/Full Nudity
<i>Amazing Race</i>	12%	51%	6%	0%	0%	0%
<i>America's Most Wanted</i>	23%	7%	0%	2%	0%	0%
<i>America's Next Top Model</i>	24%	39%	3%	3%	0%	12%
<i>Average Joe</i>	19%	40%	7%	12%	5%	15%
<i>Beauty and the Geek</i>	32%	46%	7%	7%	7%	1%
<i>Big Brother</i>	33%	41%	28%	6%	6%	16%
<i>Biggest Loser</i>	31%	54%	0%	8%	1%	6%
<i>Cops</i>	35%	7%	32%	0%	0%	4%
<i>Dancing with the Stars</i>	20%	51%	0%	1%	0%	4%
<i>Extreme Makeover: H.E.</i>	7%	63%	0%	5%	0%	0%
<i>Nanny 911</i>	42%	27%	6%	3%	0%	0%
<i>Survivor</i>	26%	46%	16%	0%	0%	6%
<i>The Apprentice</i>	27%	32%	13%	0%	0%	1%
<i>Three Wishes</i>	18%	51%	1%	0%	0%	0%
<i>Tommy Lee Goes to College</i>	21%	40%	5%	3%	0%	0%
<i>Mean</i>	25%	39.5%	8%	3%	1%	4%
<i>SD</i>	9%	15.83%	10%	3%	2%	6%

**Table 5**  
**Unweighted and Weighted Correlations**

	Unweighted Exposure Score	Voyeurism
Unweighted exposure score	1	.24
Weighted exposure score		
% Scenes w/viewers not primary recipients	.99	.26
% Scenes in private/semi private spaces	.99	.25
% Scenes in public space	.86	.24
% Scenes in limited public space	.87	.19
Count of personal information per scene	.93	.24
% scene with gossip	.89	.28
% Scenes with negative emotions	.99	.25
% Scenes with non-negative emotions	.97	.23
% Scenes containing casual kiss/touch	.91	.23
% Scenes containing intimate kiss/touch	.75	.25
% Scenes containing nudity	.90	.28

between the unweighted exposure score and the weighted reality television viewing measures, varying between  $r = .75$  and  $r = .99$  ( $p < .001$ , 2-tailed). The second column lists the correlations between voyeurism and measures of exposure, varying between  $r = .19$  and  $r = .28$  ( $p < .001$ , 2-tailed).

Contrasts between weighted and unweighted exposure measures' relationship with voyeurism are presented in Table 6. In line with the prediction of the second hypothesis that the adoption of a "fly on the wall" perspective would contribute to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs, the correlation between the exposure score weighted by percentage of scenes adopting a "fly on the wall" perspective and voyeurism was significantly stronger than the correlation between the unweighted exposure score and voyeurism (difference =  $.017$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The third hypothesis predicted that reality programs portraying private spaces more frequently would have a higher voyeuristic appeal. This hypothesis was also supported by the correlation contrasts between weighted and unweighted correlations. First, the correlation between voyeurism and the exposure weighted by percentage of scenes taking place in private/semi-private spaces was significantly stronger than the correlation between the unweighted exposure score and voyeurism (difference =  $.015$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Second, neither the scenes taking place in public space, nor the scenes taking place in limited public space contributed to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs. The correlation between voyeurism and the exposure score weighted by scenes taking place in limited public space was weaker than the correlation between unweighted exposure and voyeurism (difference =  $-.045$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 6**  
**Weighted vs. Unweighted Measures for Relationship with Voyeurism**

Exposure Weighted by ...	Difference (Weighted- Unweighted)	Steiger's Z
% Scenes containing fly on the wall perspective	<b>.017</b>	<b>3.47***</b>
% Scenes in private/semi private spaces	<b>.015</b>	<b>2.10*</b>
% Scenes in public space	-.003	-.14
% Scenes in limited public space	<b>-.045</b>	<b>-2.19*</b>
Count of personal information per scene	.001	.10
% Scene containing gossip	<b>.037</b>	<b>2.01*</b>
% Scenes containing negative emotions	.009	.96
% Scenes containing non-negative emotions	-.012	-1.22
% Scenes containing casual kissing/touching	-.010	-.57
% Scenes containing intimate kissing/touching	.009	.31
% Scenes containing partial/full nudity	<b>.044</b>	<b>2.41*</b>

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  (2-tailed).

The fourth hypothesis predicting that disclosure of personal information would add to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs was not supported: A contrast between the unweighted reality programming exposure score and the exposure score weighted by the count of personal information per scene exhibited no significant differences in terms of their correlations with voyeurism. On the other hand, the prediction of Hypothesis 5 that the occurrence of scenes containing gossip would add to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs was supported by the contrasts (difference = .037,  $p < .05$ ). Neither Hypothesis 6, predicting that the presence of displays of emotions would add to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs, nor Hypothesis 7, predicting that the presence of sexual behavior would add to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs, was supported by the correlation contrasts. Finally, correlation contrasts between the exposure score weighted by percentage of scenes containing nudity and the unweighted exposure, supported the final hypothesis that presence of nudity contributes to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs (difference = .044,  $p < .05$ ).

A composite weighting of exposure to reality programs was created using four content features that correlation contrasts have shown to contribute to reality programs' voyeuristic appeal: the percentage of scenes using "fly on the wall," the percentage of scenes in semi-private or private settings, the percentage of scenes containing gossip and the percent of scenes containing nudity.

Table 7 summarizes a regression that treats this composite weighted exposure score as the dependent variable. Accordingly, younger individuals, females and those who watch more television were more likely to watch reality television. Also,

**Table 7**  
**OLS Regression Predicting Weighted Exposure to Reality TV**

	B	( $\beta$ )
Constant	172.88	
Age	-2,985	-.20***
Education	-7,092	-.07
Female	67,520	.14**
Race (Nonwhite)	-18,239	-.02
Television viewing	16,842	.24***
Voyeurism	4,101	.19***
Social comparison	2,906	.05
Self-monitoring	6,765	.10*

Note:  $N = 542$ ,  $R^2 = .21$ ,  $p < .001$ , Minimum Tolerance = .79.  
 \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

voyeurism ( $B = 4,101$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and sensitivity to the expressions of others ( $B = 6,765$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were positively related to the composite-weighted exposure to reality programs.

## Discussion

Voyeuristic appeal has often been cited as an explanation for the recent rise in the popularity of reality programming. However, little attention has been paid to investigating programming features that may contribute to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs. To address this problem, this study adopted an integrative approach by content analyzing reality programs, and then using the content analysis results in conjunction with a survey to identify the content features contributing to the voyeuristic appeal of reality programs. Rarely utilized previously, such an integrative approach has the benefit of drawing first order correspondence between content features and audience response to these features (Neuendorf, 2002).

The components of this dual methodology had some limitations. First, the cross-sectional data came from an opt-in sample of online participants, and had a 16% response rate. Another problem pertains to the exposure measure utilized for the study. The reality programming exposure measure asked the respondents to think back 6 months to provide estimates of programming consumption, producing potentially unreliable results. In such cases, ordinal measures, such as the one employed in this survey, asking for estimates of typical consumption frequency tend to provide relatively reliable results (Potts, Belden & Reese, 2008). The resulting index of exposure to reality programs was obtained by aggregating these ordinal variables.

This procedure, although frequently utilized for creating programming exposure indices (e.g., Potts et al., 2008; Segrin & Nabi, 2002), is more suitable for metric measurements.

In addition, some of the content analysis variables may have overestimated the presence of certain content features. For example, for the show *Cops*, information about occupation (police), and talk about others (while discussing police cases), were potentially inflated due to the program's theme. Furthermore, contextual units longer than 5 minutes could have provided more information to the coders, increasing reliability. However, the intercoder reliability was generally at desirable levels, suggesting that the contextual units were sufficient.

Despite these limitations, this study makes several important contributions to the study of audiences in general and the consumption of reality programming in particular. Empirical evidence from extant research provides inconsistent results with respect to the relationship between voyeurism and reality programming consumption. This is partly due to differences in the conceptualization and operationalization of voyeurism. For example, in a recent article, Papacharissi & Mendelson (2007) adopted a measure of voyeurism that emphasized sexual gratification that viewers may derive from consuming reality programs. However, a different conceptualization of voyeurism defines it not as a sexual deviance but as a commonly occurring fascination with access to private details of people's lives (Calvert, 2004; Metz, 2004). As a potential motivation for watching reality television—a mainstream form of programming that is not considerably more sexual than other mainstream formats—this form of common voyeurism may be more fitting than pathological voyeurism; and the findings from this study provide the first detailed empirical analysis of this relationship between non-pathological voyeurism and the consumption of the reality television genre. The article also provides important evidence that voyeurism is independent from other types of social curiosity that may be related to the consumption of reality television.

Furthermore, starting with a criticism of current research which usually fails to acknowledge that reality programming is not a coherent genre, the content analysis, in conjunction with the survey, helps identify several key programming features that contribute to its appeal for individuals with a higher tendency to engage in non-pathological voyeurism: Use of a "fly on the wall" perspective, scenes taking place in private settings, scenes containing gossip, and scenes containing some nudity. These findings are important not only in terms of their potential to guide future discussions about reality programming but also in terms of contributing to research on Uses and Gratifications by establishing a considerably strong link between content features and psychological motivations to consume a specific television program.

In addition to addressing some widely raised questions regarding the relationship between voyeurism and consumption of reality programs, this study also provides an invaluable opportunity to test a scale that measures a more "mundane" form of voyeurism that is highly prevalent in our daily lives. Although there has been wide interest in this form of non-pathological voyeurism, little attention has been paid

to conceptualizing what it entails and how it can be measured. In this respect, by introducing a voyeurism scale, the findings from this article fill an important gap that can aid current debates regarding voyeuristic culture (Calvert, 2004; Metz, 2004). Clearly, future work will be needed to evaluate the voyeurism scale in terms of its validity, and eliminate potential response set bias stemming from the use of a unidirectional scale. However, the voyeurism scale has the potential to be utilized for studying not only reality programming consumption but also use of different types of media and/or formats such as gossip magazines, webcams and social network sites.

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