Reality-Based Television Programming and the Psychology of Its Appeal

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Despite the general presence of reality-based television programming for more than a decade and its recent increasing popularity, the extant literature on the phenomenon is limited. In Study 1, we considered how the viewing public constructs the so-called genre of reality-based TV. Multidimensional space analysis based on the Q-sort responses of 38 city residents indicated reality-based TV shows (a) are largely distinct from most major programming genres, although they do not form a particularly cohesive genre of their own, and (b) are viewed as only moderately real. In Study 2, we evaluated the lay hypothesis that reality-based TV is popular because it appeals to the voyeuristic nature of the U.S. population. We also considered other gratifications received from viewership as well as personality traits that might predict reality-based TV consumption. The results of a survey of 252 city residents suggested that (a) the role of voyeurism in the appeal of reality-based television is questionable, (b) regular viewers receive different and more varied gratifications from their viewing than do periodic viewers, and (c) impulsivity seeking and need for cognition do not predict overall reality-based TV viewing, although they might predict viewing of particular programs. Future research directions proposed include investigating dimensions that might distinguish different breeds of reality-based programming and studying the more specific cognitive and emotional elements that contribute to the "genre's" appeal.

At the turn of the millennium, the media landscape was marked by a proliferation of so-called reality-based television programming such as *Survivor, Big Brother, Making the Band, Fear Factor, Temptation Island*, and *Blind Date*. These shows

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joined the smattering of more long-standing reality-based shows such as *Cops, Real World*, and *A Wedding Story*. Despite the general presence of reality-based television programming for more than a decade and its increasing popularity (51.7 million viewers watched the season finale of *Survivor I*; Nielsen Media Research, 2000), the extant literature on this burgeoning television genre is limited, lacking even a clear definition of the phenomenon. Thus, in this article, we work toward defining reality-based television, explore some possible explanations for why viewers find such programming so appealing, and consider individual characteristics that might distinguish regular from periodic consumers of reality-based shows.

Although people might have a sense of the programming that falls into the category of "reality-based" television, no clear industry standard or definition of the genre exists. As a result, definitions seem to err on the side of inclusiveness. For example, Cavender and Fishman (1998) argued that reality television is distinguished by programs that "claim to present reality" (p. 3). Similarly, Potter et al. (1997) developed a broad reality-programming typology that included local and national news, broadcast news magazines, talk and interview shows, and nonfiction narrative programs. However, such broad boundaries might preclude focus on the phenomenon of interest. That is, although the quality of realism is interesting and important, this feature alone does not appear sufficient to define a genre. After all, a person could argue that news programming is strongly rooted in real events and thus is reality based, as are evening dramas based on true crime stories (e.g., *Law and Order*) or movies that dramatize celebrities' lives. If there is a new genre of "reality-based TV," there are likely other distinguishing program features, apart from realism, that determine membership.

After considering the qualities of television programs that seem representative of the burgeoning genre, we offer the following definition of *reality-based television programming*: programs that film real people as they live out events (contrived or otherwise) in their lives, as these events occur. Such programming is characterized by several elements: (a) people portraying themselves (i.e., not actors or public figures performing roles), (b) filmed at least in part in their living or working environment rather than on a set, (c) without a script, (d) with events placed in a narrative context, (e) for the primary purpose of viewer entertainment. This definition excludes programs captured by other genres, such as news programming, talk shows, and documentaries, as well as programs featuring reenactments (e.g., *America's Most Wanted*) and simple video clips not placed in a narrative context (e.g., *America's Funniest Home Videos*). Still included are a range of programs that evidence wide variation in characteristics. For example, both *Cops* and *Survivor* fall within the parameters of our definition of reality-based TV, even

though the former program features different police officers in every episode who perform job-related duties whereas the latter features a group of people competing for prize money in a contrived living environment presided over by a paid host. Further, although reality-based programs might share elements with other program types (e.g., fictional dramas, game shows), these features are incidental to those identified in our definition.

This rather focused, conservative definition offers a starting point for our research into the genre. To assess how well this conceptual definition comports with viewer understanding of the genre, we sought in Study 1 to determine whether the public considers reality-based TV as a programming genre separate from others and to determine to which genres it is most similar.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

One hundred twelve Tucson, Arizona residents awaiting jury duty completed a grouping task in which they were asked to organize 48 television programs (presented in alphabetical order) into groups on the basis of similarity, using whatever criteria they deemed appropriate.[1] To minimize error in the analyses, we included only the responses of individuals who were familiar with at least 45 (94%) of the 48 programs and at least five of the six reality-based shows.[2] On the basis of this standard, 38 surveys were included in the analyses—a suitable number for the Q methodology used, which is typically based on small sample sizes (see McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Fifty percent of the individuals in the final sample were male, and 50% were female. Their average age was 43 years ($SD = 12.68$), and 80% were White; 11%, Hispanic; 3%, African American; and 2%, Native American. Persons included in the analysis did not differ in gender distribution from those excluded, but the final sample included fewer Whites (68% vs. 87%, $p < .05$), individuals who were generally younger (38 years vs. 46 years, $p < .01$), and persons who watched more hours of television per day (4.15 hr vs. 2.89 hr, $p < .01$).[3] On average, respondents created about 11 groups from the 48 programs.

The program list included shows representing comedies (e.g., *Friends, Everybody Loves Raymond*); dramas (e.g., *ER, Touched by an Angel*); soap operas (e.g., *Days of Our Lives*); morning, afternoon, and late-night talk shows (e.g., *Today Show, The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Tonight Show With Jay Leno*); news magazine programs (e.g., *Dateline*); entertainment news shows (e.g., *Entertainment*

Tonight); game shows (e.g., *Wheel of Fortune*); court TV shows (e.g., *Judge Judy*); reenactment programs (e.g., *America's Most Wanted*); and video clip-based programs (e.g., *World's Wildest Police Videos*). Also included were six programs that fit our definition of reality-based programming (i.e., *Blind Date, Cops, The Mole, Real World, Survivor*, and *Temptation Island*).[4] Programs were selected according to popularity within their respective genres. Respondents were instructed to group shows by writing related program names (in their view) together on the lined pages following the program list. If unfamiliar with a program, respondents were asked to circle the name and to not sort it. They were further instructed to use each program only once. Participants were also told that most people create 6 to 12 groups but to create as many or as few as necessary to capture the similarities and differences that they perceived.

Results

The sorting data were converted to dissimilarity scores (see Rosenberg, Nelson, & Vivekananthan, 1968) that were then used to create a multidimensional scaling configuration (with the software program SPSS 11.0) using a Euclidean distance metric. The stress plot was used to determine the appropriate number of dimensions for describing the data. The stress plot indicated a sharp decrease in improvement in S stress between the second and third dimensions ($s_1 = .423$, $s_2 = .271$, $s_3 = .247$), which suggested a two-dimensional solution is most appropriate. The variance accounted for also indicated the two-dimensional solution to be an acceptable fit of the data ($R^2 = .88$); the three-dimensional solution added only 4% to the variance explained.

To aid in the interpretation of the dimensions—a largely subjective process (McKeown & Thomas, 1988)—we followed procedures similar to those used by Roskos-Ewoldsen (1997). We started by identifying 15 possible dimensions along which the shows might vary and asked 30 undergraduates to rate 26 of the television programs along each dimension, using 11-point scales (see Table 1 for dimensions rated). We included shows that had unique locations in the multidimensional space (MDS), omitting those that were redundant with a related show (e.g., three soap operas occupied virtually the same space). A series of multiple regressions were performed, with the coordinates of each program in the MDS as the predictor variables and the mean ratings for each dimension as the dependent measures. Two criteria were used to identify likely dimensions: (a) high multiple Rs to indicate that the rated dimensions are well associated with the MDS dimensions, and (b) a low correlation between the two dimensions to indicate that they are relatively orthogonal. Given competing explanations with comparable fits, we selected those that seemed to offer the most reasonable explanation on the basis of

TABLE 1
Multiple Correlations for the Ratings of the Television Programs

Rating Scale for Each Program	Multiple Correlation
1. Fictional	.87***
2. Real	.82***
3. Fiction–Real	.85***
4. Informative	.67***
5. Suited for Prime Time	.64**
6. Mindless	.63**
7. Intelligent–Mindless	.61**
8. Engaging	.60**
9. Intelligent	.59**
10. Scripted	.56*
11. Arousing	.55*
12. Socially Acceptable to Watch	.54*
13. Appealing to a General Audience	.46
14. Targeted to Particular Audiences	.45
15. Dramatic	.44
16. Easy to Relate to Personalities	.32
17. Funny	.24

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

our read of the MDS. Of note, for opposing dimensions that were strongly nega-
tively correlated (fiction–real $r = -.94$; intelligent–mindless $r = -.97$), we created
fiction–real and intelligent–mindless scales by subtracting the latter variable from
the former within each pair.

On the basis of these analyses, we concluded that the first dimension is clearly
fiction–real (see Tables 1 and 2). The second dimension appears to represent how
suited the programs are for prime time because this dimension has the highest
multiple R after fiction–real (and informative, which because it strongly corre-
lates with fiction–real was taken out of consideration), is most distinct from
Dimension 1, and seems to reasonably explain the program's distribution along
the second dimension. Although each of three other qualities—arousing, socially
acceptable to watch, and appealing to a general audience—offers a reasonable
alternative interpretation of Dimension 2, we believe these program characteris-
tics contribute to judgments of prime-time suitability; thus, we concluded that the
broader category best serves the interpretive process.

TABLE 2
Correlations Among Possible Multidimensional Space Dimensions

Dimension	FR	IM	INF	PT	E	A	S	AW	GA	T	D	ER	FU
Fiction–Real (FR)	—	**−.71**	**−.79**	−.33	**−.49**	−.32	**.56**	**−.45**	**−.39**	**.66**	**.50**	−.09	.34
Intelligent–Mindless (IM)		—	**.93**	**.62**	**.75**	**.49**	−.01	**.79**	**.66**	−.25	**−.41**	.36	**−.44**
Informative (INF)			—	**.49**	**.70**	**.49**	−.05	**.70**	**.61**	−.27	**−.45**	.28	**−.42**
Suited for Prime Time (PT)				—	**.88**	**.83**	.20	**.84**	**.86**	.12	−.19	**.64**	.12
Engaging (E)					—	**.91**	.08	**.94**	**.92**	.09	−.32	**.79**	.12
Arousing (A)						—	.11	**.81**	**.89**	.25	−.14	**.79**	.32
Scripted (S)							—	.18	.13	**.48**	.13	.11	.04
Socially Acceptable to Watch (AW)								—	**.92**	−.01	**−.41**	**.75**	.11
Generally Appealing (GA)									—	.08	−.31	**.81**	.24
Targeted (T)										—	**.54**	.25	.19
Dramatic (D)											—	−.24	−.22
Easy to Relate (ER)												—	**.52**
Funny (FU)													—

Note. Correlations in boldface are significant at $p < .05$.

As Figure 1 indicates, programs within commonly accepted genres (i.e., situation comedies, dramas, soap operas, afternoon and late-night talk shows, and evening news magazine programs) occupied comparable space in the MDS distinct from programs of other genres. More muddied is the distinction among morning news magazine shows, entertainment news programming, court TV shows, video-based shows, game shows, and what we predetermined to be reality-based programming. Although these program types fell within proximity along Dimension 1, they were scattered along Dimension 2. Two of the reality-based shows—*Survivor* and *Temptation Island*—were judged to be as suited for prime time (i.e., arousing, socially acceptable to watch, generally appealing) as *Jeopardy, Wheel of Fortune*, and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. Considered somewhat less suited for prime time were *Cops, America's Dumbest Criminals, World's Wildest Police Videos*, and *Love Connection,* followed by *The Mole, Blind Date, The Dating Game, America's Funniest Home Videos*, and *America's Most Wanted (AMW).* Of the reality-based programs initially identified, *Real World* was judged least suited for prime time, falling near the entertainment news shows, morning news magazine programs, and court TV programs.
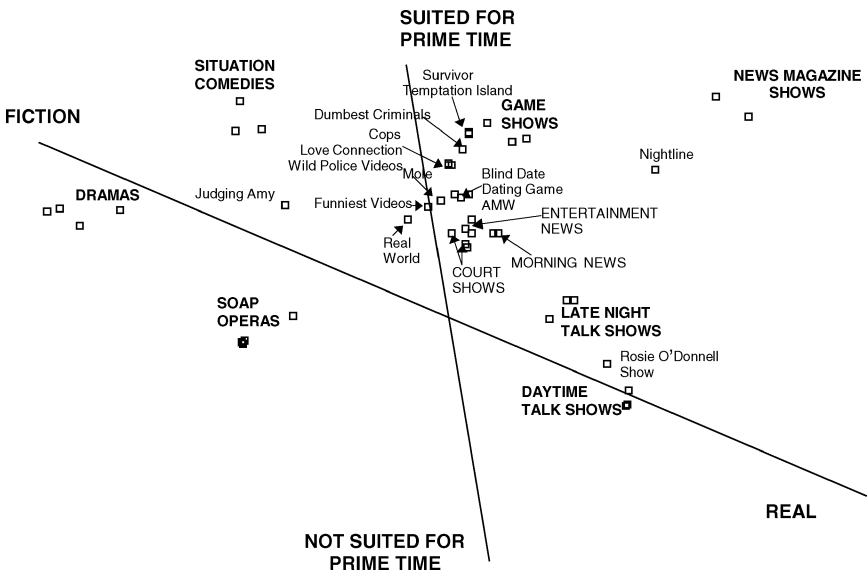

Figure 1.   Multidimensional space configuration of television programs.

Discussion

The MDS results offer two useful insights into reality-based programming. First, cohesion along one dimension (fiction–real) but not the other (suitability for prime time) suggests that a genre of reality-based television is coalescing in the public consciousness but is not yet secured. Perhaps the generous application of the phrase *reality based* has left viewers unsure of the defining characteristics of programs appropriately suited to the genre. Alternatively, perhaps the inclusion of so many other forms of programming in the Q-sort task precluded respondents from considering the more fine-grained distinctions among programs that might be categorized as reality based. Either way, reality-based programming, such as it is, clearly includes a more diverse selection of programs than do more established genres.

Second, this variety not withstanding, the MDS results do indicate one clear commonality among reality-based programs. Given their clustering along the middle of the fiction–real dimension, the genre seems to include programs that are not seen as particularly real. These shows are certainly considered more realistic than fictionalized accounts of life events in dramas, situation comedies, and soap operas, but they are not as true to life as talk shows or news magazine programs. Thus, on one hand, definitions that group these latter program types with the new breed of reality-based shows are likely overinclusive. On the other hand, our definition of reality-based programming might be particularly conservative because the lay public's conception did not appear to exclude reenactment and video clip-based programs. However, again, if the Q-sort task had included only reality-based programs, perhaps more refined dimensions would have been revealed. As is, the programs we selected appeared to capture a range of reality-based programming along Dimension 2 and thus would serve as an appropriate sample for investigating the appeal of reality-based programming—a topic not yet addressed in the extant literature. Given that past research has focused exclusively on the effects of crime-based programming from limited theoretical perspectives (e.g., M. Fishman & Cavender, 1998), we review this literature briefly before offering a gratifications approach to the study of reality-based television.

EFFECTS OF REALITY-BASED TELEVISION

Extant research offers two approaches to the study of reality-based television. One line of research draws largely from cultivation theory (e.g., Gerbner, 1969; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994), demonstrating interest in what is portrayed as reality and how this might differ from the real environment, such as

the overrepresentation of violent crime (e.g., Kooistra, Mahoney, & Westervelt, 1998; Oliver, 1994; Potter et al., 1997), crimes cleared (e.g., Kooistra et al., 1998; Oliver, 1994), and non-Whites as offenders and Whites as law enforcement officers (e.g., Kooistra et al., 1998; Oliver, 1994). In a direct test of the cultivation hypothesis, Oliver and Armstrong (1998) reported that Whites who watched more reality crime TV were more likely to report higher crime prevalence estimates.

In a second, related approach, the construction of these programs is considered from a cultural, qualitative perspective focusing on the ideological perspectives conveyed about law and order, societal threats, and audience empowerment (Cavender, 1998; J. Fishman, 1999). For example, Cavender and Bond-Maupin (1993) argued that these programs make use of storytelling conventions to encourage empathy with an unsuspecting victim who falls prey to evil, which, in turn, primes the notion that no place is safe. Cavender and Bond-Maupin further indicated that reality-based crime shows such as *America's Most Wanted* and *Unsolved Mysteries* depict crime in ways similar to those used in fictionalized crime shows, which reinforces existing cultural stereotypes about criminals and victims (see also Cavender, Bond-Maupin, & Jurik, 1999).

Although these studies nicely describe reality-based crime TV and its potential effects, no currently available research places these programs in a larger context to address why these and other reality-based programs have become so popular. That is, what is the appeal of this type of programming, to whom, and why? When these questions are addressed, not only is our understanding of an interesting media phenomenon enhanced, but the features relevant to reality-based classification may be clarified, which can, in turn, contribute to our understanding of the developing genre.

The most useful theoretical paradigm for this inquiry is the *uses and gratifications perspective*, the underlying assumption of which is that a media channel cannot influence an individual unless that person has some use for the medium or its particular message (e.g., Katz, 1959; Rubin & Rubin, 1985). The uses and gratifications framework has evolved to include five primary tenets (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1985). First, an individual's behavior is purposive, goal directed, and motivated. Second, people select and use media to satisfy biological, psychological, and social needs. Third, individuals are influenced by various social and psychological factors when selecting among communication alternatives. Fourth, media consumers are aware of their needs and whether or not these needs are being satisfied by a particular medium. Fifth, different media compete with one another for attention, selection, and use. In sum, uses and gratifications theory states that individuals are aware of their needs, evaluate various channels and content, assess functional alternatives,

and select the media or interpersonal channel that they believe will provide the gratifications they seek.

We found no academic literature addressing the gratifications sought or fulfilled by reality-based programming; however, two lay hypotheses were prevalent in the popular press. First, reality-based TV appeals to the increasingly voyeuristic nature of the U.S. population. Second, its appeal is a function of its novelty: as it offers both the element of surprise and accessibility to real people (or mediated versions of them; Poniewozik, 2000). In considering the voyeurism hypothesis, we note that in the strict sense voyeurism involves watching an unknowing victim for sexual gratification (MacNamara & Sagarin, 1977; Posner & Silbaugh, 1996). As such, voyeurism is a sexual pathology worthy of medical treatment or a sexual crime warranting punishment. However, in its colloquial usage, voyeurism, or secretly peeking in on others for personal enjoyment, is considered more a harmless yet guilty pleasure. Although labeling reality-based television programming as *voyeur TV* might be convenient, doing so might unjustly denigrate the genre. Therefore, it is important to determine if viewers are watching for voyeuristic (i.e., untoward) purposes or for less salacious reasons (e.g., to feel connected to others, to be surprised, to gain personal insight). Thus, we ask the following research question:

RQ1: Do consumers of reality-based television programming receive voyeuristic pleasure from their viewing?

Regarding novelty, because programs such as *Cops* and *Real World* have been produced for more than a decade, the notion that this format is novel is inaccurate. Even their supposedly unique features (e.g., unscripted, real people) are found in other types of programming (e.g., sports programming, game shows). Thus, we wondered whether viewers consider reality-based programming to be novel and, further, what its most appealing features might be.

RQ2: Do viewers of reality-based television programming consider the format novel?

Finally, uses and gratifications theory provides a host of potential gratifications that could be attained by meeting the broad psychological and social needs identified by Katz et al. (1974), including those related to diversion (e.g., escapism), personal relationships (e.g., social utility), personal identity (e.g., reality exploration), and surveillance (e.g., news gathering; Katz et al., 1974; Levy & Windahl, 1984; Rubin, 1994; Rubin & Perse, 1987). Applying this paradigm to

program (rather than media) selection, and having no past research to offer further guidance, we pose the following general research question:

RQ3: What gratifications do regular consumers of reality-based television programming receive from their viewership?

We were further interested in any individual differences that might be associated with reality-based television viewership. Although demographic differences were explored, we were particularly interested in personality traits that might predict enjoyment of reality-based programming. Limited relevant past research exists. Oliver and Armstrong (1995) found authoritarianism, punitiveness about crime, and racial prejudice to predict enjoyment and viewing of reality-crime dramas (e.g., *Cops, America's Most Wanted, FBI: Untold Story*; see also Oliver, 1996). However, we were interested in which traits might be associated with attraction to the more general qualities of reality-based TV, particularly its unscripted nature. Because of the unscripted, unpredictable, and somewhat spontaneous nature of reality-based TV, we hypothesized that individuals with higher levels of impulsivity (i.e., acting first, thinking later; Ferguson, Valenti, & Melwani, 1991) would be more likely to be regular viewers of these programs. We also hypothesized that persons who are high in need for cognition (NFC), or those who enjoy thinking about complex problems (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), might be less stimulated by the action orientation of these shows and thus be less likely to be regular consumers of reality-based TV.

Hypothesis 1: Impulsivity will positively correlate with reality-based TV consumption.

Hypothesis 2: Need for cognition will negatively correlate with reality-based TV consumption.

Because Study 1 results indicated that the genre of reality-based programming is not particularly well defined in viewers' minds—incorporating programs that vary in content and structure—research addressing the preceding questions treads difficult terrain. Focus on a very cohesive group of programs limits generalizability. Conversely, too broad a grouping might mask important differences among subsets of programs within the reality-based genre. Thus, in our research, we focused on programs that occupied related space along the realism dimension and shared features consistent with our definition of the genre but that also varied in their apparent suitability for prime-time exposure. In this way, we may generalize

to the extent the programs share related features (e.g., moderate realism) but also explore differences based on more specific program qualities as they might relate to the second dimension identified in Study 1.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants and Procedure

Our sample included 252 Tucson, Arizona, residents who had appeared for jury duty. Overall, the mean age of persons in the sample was 41.58 years (SD = 13.89), and 54% were female and 46%, male. Seventy-nine percent reported being White; 15%, Hispanic; 4%, African American; and 1%, Native American. In terms of education, 2% had less than a high school degree, 15% had graduated from high school, 41% had some college education, 24% had a college degree, and 15% had an advanced degree.

The study was introduced as research about television use. Respondents were asked to complete a survey in which they were asked about their overall television-viewing patterns, their exposure to several reality-based television programs, and their assessments of a particular reality-based program to which they had been exposed as either a regular viewer or a casual viewer (measures described next). Demographic and personality measures were also included.

Measures

Because of limits on survey length imposed in the venue where the data were collected, partial scales were often used.[5] A pilot study involving 118 undergraduates assisted us in developing items to use to assess constructs unique to this study (e.g., voyeurism) and helped us to ensure that the items selected from complete scales still formed unidimensional, reliable measures. Unless otherwise noted, all measures were based on 5-point Likert-type scales.

Two television-viewing-related measures were included for use as possible control variables. *Daily television viewing* was measured by asking respondents to indicate how many hours of television they watched during each of four time periods (6 a.m. to noon, noon to 6 p.m., 6 p.m. to midnight, midnight to 6 a.m.) during the average weekday and weekend day. These data were combined (we weighted the "average weekday" questions by a factor of five and the "average weekend day" questions by a factor of two) and averaged to create an "average TV viewing hours/day" measure.

Focusing on *reality-based television viewing*, we asked respondents, first, if they had *ever seen,* and, second, if they were *regular viewers* of seven reality-based television programs popular at the time of data collection: *Survivor, Real World, A Wedding Story, Temptation Island, The Mole, Blind Date*, and *Cops*. Respondents who indicated that they regularly viewed at least one of the seven reality-based programs were classified as regular reality-based TV viewers.[6] The amount of reality-based TV viewing was based on a sum of the number of programs regularly viewed, which created a variable ranging from 0 to 5. Of note, respondents who regularly viewed one or more reality-based programs were then asked to select *one* reality-based program that they watch regularly, to identify it, and to answer the remaining survey questions with that program in mind. Those who did not report regular viewing of a reality-based program were asked to select from the list one show that they had seen, even once, and to complete the survey with that program in mind.

So that we could answer Research Questions 1 to 3, both open- and closed-ended measures of uses and gratifications were included. We began by asking respondents why they watch the reality-based programming that they do, including what they like and dislike about it. They were then asked why they think reality-based programming is so popular. The first author developed a coding scheme based on a sample of the responses. This scheme was refined on the basis of the results of practice coding performed by an undergraduate research assistant. The refined coding document was then used by two other undergraduate assistants to identify, first, the number of codable units, and, second, the reasons for liking, disliking, and popularity of reality-based programming in general. Coding reliability for the first 25 responses resulted in some changes to the coding document and clarification of coding rules, after which each coder coded all remaining responses. Reliability was calculated on the basis of all responses not used for initial reliability tests and was acceptable for both unit coding ($\kappa = .80–.86$) and content coding ($\kappa = .82–.97$). All differences were resolved through discussion. Each category in the coding scheme (see Table 3) became a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not a respondent mentioned it in his or her response.

Next, several closed-ended measures tapped into the four broad psychological and social needs identified by Katz et al. (1974). Two measures were included to help us assess uses related to *personal relationships. Parasocial relationships* developed from reality-based television viewing were assessed with six items adapted from Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985), which formed a single-factor, internally consistent measure ($\alpha = .85$; e.g., "I think the people on that show could be friends of mine"). *Social utility* of reality-based television viewing was measured with items adapted from Rubin (1983), which formed a single-factor, reliable measure ($\alpha = .84$; e.g., "It's something I do with friends").

TABLE 3
Uses and Gratifications of Reality-Based TV, Mentioned in Open-Ended Responses

Why Do You Watch?	Viewers[a]		Why So Popular?	Viewers[a]		Dislikes?	Viewers[a]	
	% Reg. (*n* = 99)	% Casual (*n* = 83)		% Reg. (*n* = 95)	% Casual (*n* = 91)		% Reg. (*n* = 76)	% Casual (*n* = 45)
Entertaining	38[+]	27	Unscripted/real	28*	14	Contrived/not real	40	42
Suspenseful	26*	13	Bored	19	19	Misleading in editing	29**	9
Unscripted/Real	24	17	Suspenseful	12	19	Conflict/negativity	18[+]	32
Interpersonal Interactions	12*	4	It's different	12	12	Just silly/stupid	18	13
Bored	11	18	Voyeurism	11	7	People on shows	11	5
Others Watching It	10	17	Relate to those on show	8	8	Gets old quick	4	9
Learn Something	10	12	Entertaining	8	8	Voyeurism	2	8
Curiosity	10***	32	Fad	7	10	Overrated	0	4
It's Different	9	5	Feel better about self	6	7			
Voyeurism	9[+]	2	Viewer stupidity	4***	20			
Relate to Characters	7[+]	2	Interpersonal interactions	4*	0			
			Learn something	3	2			
			Curiosity	2	6			
			Want to be on show	1	4			
			Others watching it	0	1			

[a]Differences between regular viewers and casual viewers are indicated by [+]*p* < .10, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Two gratifications related to *personal identity* were examined: self-awareness and downward social comparison. Four items were used to assess *self-awareness* enhancement as a function of watching reality-based television, which formed a single-factor, internally consistent measure ($\alpha = .84$). Sample items included "I feel like I've learned something about myself by watching the show" and "Because of watching the show, I'm encouraged to try things I haven't tried before." Three items were used to assess whether people watch because doing so makes them feel better about their own lives. Of these items, only two correlated strongly and were combined to form a measure of *downward social comparison* ($r = .53$): "I feel better about myself after watching the people on that show" and "My problems don't seem so bad after I see what happens in the lives of the people on that show."

Three uses or gratifications related to *diversion* were assessed: boredom, escapism, and entertainment value. Viewing due to *boredom* was captured by three items ($\alpha = .86$) adapted from Rubin (1983; e.g., "To pass the time away, especially when I'm bored"). Viewing due to *escapism* was measured with two items ($r = .79$, $p < .001$): "So I can forget about school, work, or other things" and "So I can have something to just take my mind off of things." Three items were used to assess perceived show *entertainment value* and were combined to form a single-factor, internally consistent measure ($\alpha = .91$): "I watch the show because it is … entertaining, exciting, dramatic" (Rubin, 1983).

To measure uses related to *surveillance*, we borrowed four items from Abelman, Atkin, and Rand (1997) and Rubin (1983) to assess *information* that could be gained from watching reality-based programming ($\alpha = .89$). Sample items included "I watch the show I named … so I can learn about some of the problems other people have," "… so I can learn about what other people are really like," and "… so I can learn about what could happen to me."

Six items were included to help us assess *voyeurism*, or how much respondents enjoy getting a surreptitious peek into other people's private lives. These items formed a single-factor, reliable scale ($\alpha = .79$). Sample items included "When I watch that show, I feel like I'm getting a peek into other people's lives," "When I watch that show, I get to see a side of people that I wouldn't normally get to see," and "I enjoy watching the show because you never know what you might see." Because the thrill of voyeurism might be enhanced by the perception that people being filmed are not acting much differently than they would in real life, we included three items to help us assess *behavior monitoring*. Of these three, only two correlated well and thus were combined ($r = .53$, $p < .001$): "The people on the show aren't very aware of being filmed" and "The people on the show aren't acting much different than they would if the cameras weren't there."

So that we could assess Research Question 2, three items were included to help us tap into *novelty.* Although they provided a single-factor solution, their reliability was modest ($\alpha = .64$). Sample items included "There is no other show on TV that is like the show I selected" and "I've seen other shows on TV that are very similar to the show I selected" (recoded). Respondents who regularly watch reality-based programming were also asked if they watched such programming for any of five reasons: It is unscripted, it allows you to see real people rather than actors, it involves self-disclosure, the people on the show have a lot at stake, and it offers insight into everyday living. They were also asked to rate on a 7-point scale how "real" they found reality TV to be. Because each of these items taps into unique elements of the genre, we analyzed each separately.

Finally, to test Hypotheses 1 and 2, we included 10 items from Ferguson et al.'s (1991) *risk-taking* measure to help us tap into impulsive and adventurous risk taking. Of these 10 items, 4 formed a single-factor, reliable index measure of impulsivity ($\alpha = .85$), including "I often get into a jam because I do things without thinking" and "I generally do and say things without stopping to think." Six items from Cacioppo and Petty's (1982) NFC scale were also included so that we could measure how much respondents enjoyed expending cognitive effort (e.g., "Thinking is not my idea of fun" and "I would prefer complex to simple problems"; $\alpha = .75$).

Analyses

Our analyses are based largely on the results of *t* tests, analyses of variance (ANOVAs), and correlations. One-sample *t* tests make comparisons to the scale midpoints. Tukey post hoc comparisons are reported for all post hoc analyses. Differences based on sex, age, and race were explored and are noted when found to be significant at $p < .05$. If differences related to these variables are not mentioned, none were found. Of note, sample sizes for some analyses were closer to 200 than to 250 because a number of casual viewers of reality-based television did not complete many of the gratifications items.

Results

Exposure to Reality Television

Ninety-two percent of respondents reported having seen at least one of the seven reality-based programs listed in our survey, and 47% reported being regular viewers of at least one of these programs. Of our respondents, 24% were regular viewers of *Cops*; 20%*, Survivor*; 12%*, Temptation Island*; 11%*, Blind Date*; 10%*, Real World*; 5%*, The Mole*; 4%*, A Wedding Story*; and 3%*, Big Brother*. In our

sample and consistent with Oliver and Armstrong's (1995) findings, we found that younger people and persons with less formal education were more likely to be regular viewers of reality programming, $r(246) = -.28$, $p < .001$, $n = 248$; $r(252) = -.17$, $p < .001$, $n = 252$. However, sex and race did not have a significant impact on reality-television viewing ($p > .20$ and $p > .10$, respectively). As might be expected, regular viewers of reality-based TV tended to watch more television overall ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 2.57$ vs. $M = 3.52$, $SD = 2.98$), $t(248) = -3.11$, $p < .01$.

RQ1: Voyeuristic Pleasure From Viewing Reality-Based Television Programming

Both open- and closed-ended data were used to determine whether viewers are attracted to reality-based TV with the hope of exposure to provocative material. According to the open-ended data (see Table 3), only 9% of regular viewers and 2% of casual viewers indicated they watch for reasons that might be construed as voyeurism (e.g., curiosity about others' lives). Further, only 11% of regular viewers and 7% of casual viewers indicated that they think other people watch for voyeuristic reasons. Thus, the open-ended responses do not support voyeurism as a strong motivation for watching reality-based TV, particularly because the category was defined predominantly by curiosity rather than prurient interest.

The closed-ended results suggest a slightly different, although not inconsistent, picture. Recall that voyeurism implies that an individual hopes to see something forbidden from an unsuspecting target. Thus, for reality-based TV to be equated with voyeur TV, respondents should report that they enjoy watching others *and* that they believe that what they see is unmonitored. Regular viewers ($n = 111$) agreed that they enjoy getting a peek into other people's lives ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .59$), one-sample $t(110) = 12.42$, $p < .001$. However, they mildly *disagreed* that reality-based TV participants are not acting much differently than they would if the cameras were not there ($M = 2.76$, $SD = .93$), one-sample $t(110) = -2.71$, $p < .01$. Similarly, respondents did not believe that reality-based TV is particularly "real" ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.50$), one-sample $t(102) = -1.25$, ns, based on a 7-point scale. Of note, women were no more likely to enjoy "getting a peek" than were men, nor did age or race affect "voyeuristic" enjoyment. Whereas sex and age did not have an impact on perceptions of reality, Whites were less likely than non-Whites to perceive these programs as real, $r(190) = -.27$, $p < 001$.

In sum, these findings suggest that respondents believe that people on reality-based shows are at least somewhat aware of being watched and that the behavior evidenced might be affected. Thus, any "voyeuristic" pleasure associated with reality-based television viewing is likely modified by awareness of performers' complicity and self-monitoring behaviors. More likely, the enjoyment of watching real

people on TV is broader than the appeal of possibly seeing illicit activity, certain to be censored even if it were to occur. We elaborate on this point in the discussion.

RQ2: Novelty of Reality-Based Television Programming

According to the open-ended data (see Table 3), only 9% of regular viewers and 5% of casual viewers indicated they watch reality-based TV because it is different. Further, only 12% of both regular viewers and casual viewers indicated that they think other people watch because the programs are unique. Yet, closed-ended responses indicated that regular viewers ($n = 111$) agreed that reality-based television programming is unique ($M = 3.56, SD = .77$), one-sample $t(110) = 7.61, p < .001$. This finding held stronger for younger viewers, $r(103) = -.19, p = .05$.

As for programming qualities, regular viewers reported that they do enjoy watching real people rather than actors ($M = 3.96, SD = .69$), one-sample $t(108) = 14.51, p < .001$; that they like the unscripted nature of the programming ($M = 3.87, SD = .84$), one-sample $t(108) = 10.83, p < .001$; that they enjoy the self-disclosure in the shows ($M = 3.52, SD = .85$), one-sample $t(108) = 6.46, p < .001$; that people on the shows have something at stake ($M = 3.34, SD = 1.01$), one-sample $t(108) = 3.50, p < .001$; and that the shows offer insight into everyday life ($M = 3.21, SD = .97$), one-sample $t(107) = 2.29, p < .05$. Of note, compared with women, men were more likely to enjoy the unscripted quality, "at-stake" nature, and insight offered by these programs ($rs = -.25$ to $- .27, p < .05$).

Thus, reality-based TV, although not necessarily new, is seen as novel by individuals who watch it and enjoy its defining characteristics. However, other reasons figure more prominently in viewers' motivations for watching. We now turn to these.

RQ 3: Uses and Gratifications From Viewing Reality-Based Television Programming

Research Question 3 questioned the psychological needs met by watching reality-based television. In Table 3, we present the results of the open-ended analyses, which suggest that regular viewers watch mainly because they are entertained, find the programs suspenseful, and enjoy their unscripted nature. In contrast, casual viewers are more likely to watch out of curiosity and for entertainment value. Of note, although liking the "real" quality of the programming, respondents disliked reality-based TV mostly because it appears contrived, that is, not in fact real. For regular viewers, misleading editing (a likely indicator of contrived) was also bothersome. For casual viewers, the amount of conflict and negativity was most problematic.

The results of the closed-ended measures were largely consistent with the open-ended responses (see Table 4). Regular viewers ($n = 111$) watch reality-based

TABLE 4

Assessments of Reality-Based TV Programming by Regular Viewers and
Casual Viewers

Assessments	Viewer Type	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*r*
Reality-Based TV Assessments					
Voyeurism	Regular	3.69***	.59	111	.38***
	Casual	3.14	.63	105	
Behavior monitoring	Regular	2.76***	.93	111	.19**
	Casual	2.35	.87	105	
Novelty	Regular	3.56***	.77	111	.32***
	Casual	3.04	.80	106	
Personal Relationships					
Parasocial	Regular	2.99***	.69	109	.41***
	Casual	2.34	.72	102	
Social utility	Regular	2.54***	.86	109	.27***
	Casual	1.98	.79	100	
Personal Identity					
Self-Awareness	Regular	3.20***	.71**	109	.29***
	Casual	2.63	.87	100	
Social Comparison	Regular	3.00	.85	111	.10
	Casual	2.84	.84	105	
Diversion					
Entertaining	Regular	3.95***	.61***	109	.48***
	Casual	2.96	1.05	100	
Bored	Regular	2.84***	.95	109	−.33***
	Casual	3.45	.98	100	
Escape	Regular	2.65	.95	109	.01
	Casual	2.53	1.00	100	
Surveillance					
Information value	Regular	2.70***	.90	109	.26***
	Casual	2.15	.98	100	

Note. All means are based on 5-point scales. All correlations control for age, sex, and TV viewing per day.

**$p < .01$. ***$p \leq .001$.

programming primarily because they find it entertaining; they further enjoy getting a peek into others' lives and the self-awareness they acquire through viewing (all three scores significantly different from one another, $p < .001$, and all significantly higher than the scale midpoint, $p < .001$). The pleasure of downward social comparison and parasocial relationships is also appealing, although moderately so (both scores significantly lower than that for self-awareness, $p < .05$, and no different from the scale midpoint). Finally, regular viewers mildly disagreed that they watch because they are bored, to escape, to gain useful information, or for the social utility such viewing might provide. As noted previously, regular viewers perceive reality-based TV as only moderately real (score no different from the midpoint on the 7-point scale). This result is comparable to the findings in Study 1, in which the scores for most of these programs hovered around the midpoint of the fiction–real dimension.

In comparison, casual viewers of reality-based television programming watch primarily because they are bored and secondarily to get a peek into others' lives, both scores of which were significantly higher than the scale midpoint ($p < .001$ and $p < .05$, respectively). Such viewers also watch because they find doing so entertaining, although only moderately so. Casual viewers somewhat disagreed that they watch reality-based TV for downward social comparison ($p = .06$), for enhancement of self-awareness ($p < .001$), for escape ($p < .001$), and for parasocial relationships ($p < .001$). They particularly disagreed that they watch for social utility purposes and for potential information gain (see Table 4). They further disagreed, on the 7-point scale, that reality-based TV is real ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.49$, $p < .001$).

Regular viewers versus casual viewers.   If we compare regular viewers and casual viewers across assessments and gratifications, significant differences exist across all categories except downward social comparison and escapism (see Table 4). These findings support the uses and gratifications perspective in that compared with casual viewers, regular viewers receive stronger and more varied gratifications from their viewing. Overall, they found the voyeurism, novelty, and entertainment aspects of the programming appealing, they were somewhat driven by personal identity and relational motives, and they were least drawn by any potential social utility or informational aspects.

Gratifications received based on individual differences or personality traits.   Across the entire sample, few significant differences in gratifications received were found on the basis of sex, age, or race. Overall, men were more likely to report forming parasocial relationships, $r(199) = -.14$, $p < .05$, and being more entertained by reality-based programming, $r(199) = -.19$, $p < .01$.

Women were slightly more likely to engage in downward social comparisons, $r(199) = .13, p = .07$. These associations were found for regular viewers and casual viewers separately, although the reduced sample sizes in the analyses rendered the results not significant ($p > .05$). Further, older viewers engaged in more social comparison, $r(199) = .14, p < .05$, whereas younger viewers reported becoming more self-aware, $r(199) = -.14, p = .06$, and being more entertained by the programming, $r(199) = -.21, p < .01$. Closer analysis indicated all three findings were mostly attributed to the casual, not regular, viewers. Finally, overall, non-Whites might have gained more information from reality-based programming, $r(199) = -.13, p = .07$, although, again, this finding was mainly attributed to casual viewers. Particularly interesting, regular viewers who were White seemed to identify with persons represented on these programs, $r(103) = .17, p = .08$, whereas casual viewers who were White seemed to identify less, $r(89) = -.22, p < .05$.

Considering personality traits, NFC was not significantly associated with any gratifications received from reality-based TV viewership. After demographics were controlled for, impulsivity was associated with stronger motivations relating to diversion (excitement, $r = .17, p < .05$; escapism, $r = .15, p < .05$), personal identity (social comparison, $r = .15, p = .05$; self-awareness, $r = .10, p < .20$), surveillance ($r = .16, p < .05$), voyeurism ($r = .18, p < .05$), and to a lesser extent personal relationships (parasocial relationships, $r = .10, p < .20$).

Survivor versus Cops.   We had sufficient sample sizes to compare gratifications received by viewers of *Survivor* with those received by viewers of *Cops* ($n = 39$ and $n = 40$, respectively). Although both shows arguably belong to the same programming genre, their structural and content differences are unsurprisingly associated with differences in gratifications received. Viewers of *Survivor* reported receiving more gratifications based on personal relationships (i.e., social utility, $p < .001$, $r = -.42$; parasocial relationships, $p < .001$, $r = -.40$) and personal identity–self-awareness ($p < .01$, $r = -.22$) than viewers of *Cops* did, whereas viewers of *Cops* reported more personal identity–social comparison ($p < .05$, $r = .17$), information seeking ($p = .06$, $r = .16$), and boredom alleviation ($p < .05$, $r = .21$) than did *Survivor* viewers.

Hypotheses 1 and 2: Impulsivity, Need for Cognition, and Reality-Based TV Viewing

Hypotheses 1 and 2 suggested that impulsivity would positively correlate with, and NFC would negatively correlate with, amount of reality-based TV consumption. Initially, impulsivity was positively associated, $r(234) = .14, p < .05$, and

NFC was negatively associated with reality-based TV viewing, $r(234) = -.12$, $p = .06$. However, after we controlled for age, sex, and education level, these coefficients were reduced to nonsignificance ($r = .07$ and $r = -.08$; both $p > .20$; $n = 224$). Of note, impulsivity maintained a small but significant association with regular viewership of *Cops*, $r(222) = .14$, $p < .05$, and, to a lesser extent, *Survivor*, $r(222) = .12$, $p = .07$, whereas NFC was positively associated with viewing *A Wedding Story*, $r(222) = .15$, $p < .05$. Controlling for amount of television viewing did not meaningfully alter these findings. Thus, little support was shown for the hypotheses that impulsivity and NFC relate to reality television viewership in general, but some support that they relate to specific program consumption was found. This finding is consistent with a conclusion from Study 1 that perhaps the characteristic of "reality based" is not the critical characteristic in attracting viewership.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The goal of this research was to begin to understand the general phenomenon of reality-based TV—what it is, how it differs from other types of programs, and who watches it and why. In sum, results across both somewhat exploratory studies suggest that in the minds of viewers, reality-based TV is a vaguely defined genre containing programs that are viewed at best as only moderately real. Several forms appear to exist, including crime, game show and adventure, and relationship-based programs that have different formats (e.g., recurring vs. nonrecurring "characters," live vs. reeanactment footage). Yet despite their differences, these shows share some qualities associated with their moderately realistic status that are interesting to explore.

On a general level, reality-based programs, regardless of individual variation, have been characterized as voyeur TV. Our closed-ended data offer some indication that viewers watch reality-based television for what appear to be voyeuristic reasons. However, although respondents might enjoy "getting a peek" into others' lives, no clear evidence of salacious motivation exists. That is, for several reasons we question whether *voyeurism* is the proper term for capturing viewing motivation. First, viewers watch with some knowledge that the targets are generally aware of, and even complicit in, their viewing. Second, constraints on network television content preclude the broadcast of explicit sexual material, which limits the potential of fulfilling a voyeur's sense of illicit pleasure. Third, the open-ended data indicate that people watch—and they think others watch—not to see sexual behavior per se but because they like to watch interpersonal interactions and because they are curious about other people's lives. Fourth, the closed-ended

data indicate regular viewers watch for motivations based on personal identity—self-awareness in particular—which seems inconsistent with the motives of voyeurs.

This is not to say that people do not watch for prurient interest. Surely some viewers might watch particular programs for that reason (e.g., *Temptation Island*). However, this motivation is unlikely unique to reality-based television. That is, people might watch fiction-based programming (e.g., soap operas) or other genres (e.g., talk shows, news magazine shows) for similar reasons. Yet, by applying the label *voyeurism* to reality-based TV specifically, researchers might overlook the possible benefits that consumption of these programs might generate. That is, we believe it is important to distinguish viewership based on salacious interest derived from the exploitation of others from that based on a certain interest or curiosity in other people that might, in turn, promote self-reflection and perhaps even empathy. Further exploration into the nature of people's interest in viewing others (e.g., for downward social comparison or for personal insight) would help to parse out viewers' potentially voyeuristic desires from other, perhaps less prurient interests. Comparisons of voyeuristic pleasure generated from watching fiction-based shows versus reality-based programming would also help us to assess where, if anyplace, the term *voyeur TV* is most appropriately applied.

The closed-ended data somewhat supported the lay hypothesis that reality television overall is perceived as relatively unique, particularly by regular viewers. Further, regular viewers enjoy its unique qualities, such as its unscripted nature and watching real people. However, as with voyeurism, we might ask if these supposedly unique qualities of reality-based TV are in fact unique. That is, sports shows are unscripted, game shows involve real people, talk shows and soap operas involve self-disclosure, and the news and most dramatic programming involve stories of people with something at stake. Further, newer fiction-based programs might be considered novel. For example, the TV drama *24*, in which each episode represents real-time events in the life of a fictional counterterrorism agent, has been hailed as novel. Thus, although reality-based TV is considered unique, it might not be for any particular qualities so much as the combination of already familiar qualities in ways that create the suspense and drama that are the hallmark of other successful programs.

As expected on the basis of uses and gratifications theory, the range of gratifications obtained by regular viewers of reality-based programming exceeds that of casual viewers. Regular viewers are driven by the need to be entertained, whereas casual viewers hope to alleviate boredom. However, somewhat unsatisfying is the lack of elaboration on the notion of entertainment. That is, *why* are viewers

entertained? Uses and gratifications theory appears to offer little guidance beyond the general cognitive assessment of enjoyment. Nevertheless, understanding what viewers mean by *entertainment* would be an important advance. On the basis of the open- and closed-ended data, we might infer that viewers enjoy the programs because of their unique elements (e.g., real people and unscripted nature) and the pleasure received by watching personal dynamics, both for what the viewers learn about others and for what they learn about themselves. This level of understanding is more satisfying than the somewhat vague categories offered by the uses and gratifications paradigm. Thus, in the future, researchers might consider exploring the more specific cognitive appraisals and emotional gratifications that might ultimately underlie the more general assessment of "entertaining." Doing so would not only help us to better understand reality-based, as well as fiction-based, TV, but also enhance theory by elaborating on the emotional needs that might drive the more general social and psychological needs specified by Katz et al. (1974).

Our research also uncovered some notable individual differences. We expected the unscripted nature of reality-based TV to appeal to persons with more spontaneous personalities and less to individuals who enjoy thinking through complex problems. Although we did not find overall support for these hypotheses, we did find that these traits were associated with viewership of particular programs and that impulsivity was associated with a greater range of viewing-based gratifications. These results suggest a resonance between a specific personality trait and a key feature of the genre as we have defined it. This finding is compatible with Oliver and Armstrong's (1995) finding that authoritarianism is associated with greater enjoyment of reality-based crime programming, although our result is applicable to reality-based programs more generally.

Despite these generalizations, important differences must be recognized. The lack of clear cohesion among so-called reality programs in the MDS coupled with both the different gratifications received from viewing *Cops* versus *Survivor* and the different traits associated with viewership of particular programs suggests potentially important differences among these programs that must not be overlooked. Of course, any programming with different content, whether fiction or reality based, will attract different audiences to different effects. A nagging question is whether key dimensions exist other than reality and prime-time suitability that are not yet identified but can explain differences in gratifications received and other possible effects. Perhaps an additional Q-sort focusing exclusively on the moderately real programs will reveal dimensions masked by the broader approach of Study 1. Once these features are identified (e.g., reenactment vs. real time), research on their effects can be undertaken.

In sum, the term *reality based TV* appears to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it allows researchers to focus on the programs that have unique elements relative to fictional programming. On the other hand, it could easily lead scholars to overgeneralize and thus overlook how these programs might differ from one another while sharing important qualities with programs in other genres. From a consumer's perspective, this label might also contribute to unrealistic expectations that what he or she might see is representative of reality when this might not be the case (see Oliver, 1994). Although our research suggests that consumers do not believe the programs are real, they likely find the shows more real than other types of programming (see Oliver & Armstrong, 1998). The consequences of this perception has been an important theme in past research that should be pursued as research on reality-based programming progresses.

Finally, we want to stress again that by focusing on reality-based TV as voyeur TV, we might do the genre a disservice because this label virtually precludes the perception and study of the potential positive outcomes of viewership, including learning about oneself and the world at large. Thus, we would encourage researchers to explore in the future other cognitive and emotional gratifications, beyond prurient interest, that might explain the popularity of these programs.

In conclusion, reality-based television programming, as a cheap-to-produce alternative to more standard entertainment fare, appears to have become a permanent part of our media diet as new programs are added each season. In fact, since the collection of these data, several popular new shows have aired, including *Fear Factor, The Bachelor*, and *The Osbournes*. Thus, we hope research into this phenomenon will similarly expand to explore these programs both alone and relative to other types of programming with which audiences might be more familiar. In this way, scholars can deepen understanding of what, if any, unique appeal these programs might have, to whom, and to what effect.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

[1]Jurors are selected randomly from the master jury list of the county, which is created by merging name lists provided by the Motor Vehicle Department and the Pima County Voter Registration Department.

[2]Degree or source of familiarity (e.g., from actual viewing, exposure to commercials for the programming, conversations with individuals who had viewed the programming) was not considered a critical factor to ability to sort programs because only minimal cues (e.g., use of humor, air time) are sufficient to allow confidence in grouping.

[3]The amount of television consumption of the persons included was generally consistent with Nielsen data on the average adult's daily television viewing: 4.45 hr (Nielsen, 2000).

[4]Sports programming was unfortunately omitted from our program list. However, we note that we do not consider it a form of reality-based programming according to our definition, because professional athletes are public figures comparable to actors, newscasters, and talk show hosts.

[5]All scale items used are available from the first author.

[6]Although some respondents might have regularly viewed other reality-based TV programs and thus might have been incorrectly identified as only casual viewers of such programming, we believe that by selecting the most popular such programs at the time, we minimized error in viewer classification. Further, any error introduced would make for a more conservative test of differences between regular and casual consumers of reality-based programming.

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