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Portrayals of women in prime time reality TV programs

Ivonne Martinez-Sheperd

Iowa State University

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Portrayals of women in prime time reality TV programs

by

Ivonne Martinez-Sheperd

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Journalism and Mass Communication

Program of Study Committee:
Lulu Rodriguez, Major Professor
Dennis Chamberlin
Dianne Bystrom

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2006

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ABSTRACT

Reality shows are among the most exciting and successful forms of TV program today. The different styles and format of these shows have favorably positioned them in the network markets, generating high ratings and large profits. Because they have been tremendously popular TV fare, how do they portray females and minority women? Do they, as past studies have found, depict women negatively and in largely domestic roles?

This study aims to determine the extent to which women were shown and how they were portrayed in reality TV shows. It examined the content of a census of reality shows aired from June to July 2006 shown on primetime on the four major networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX. The results indicate that in terms of roles, attitudes, behavior and appearance, women were portrayed positively. They were also often depicted as the winners or victors in these shows. The females in the reality shows examined were mainly career professionals and were less likely to be featured in domestic roles. Although the proportion of minority females in these shows was still low, minority females were portrayed as enjoying the same benefits and opportunities as Caucasian females.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Reality shows are everywhere, from cable and broadcast television to the Internet. Reality TV programming has generated millions of viewers, including those who primarily tune in during prime time hours, and those who are considered day time viewers. Reality shows have created a new culture in TV programming and have grown and diversified into various categories. They have enjoyed continuous popularity by holding auditions throughout the United States, creating a fever among viewers who dream of Hollywood stardom.

Reality shows have proven to be one of the latest, most exciting, and successful forms of programs on TV. The different styles and format of these shows have favorably positioned them in the network markets, generating high ratings and large profits. Today’s reality TV genre consists of game shows, talent contests, sitcoms, and lifestyle programs. Furthermore, research findings have shown that not only average educated people, but also the highly educated ones, tune in to these reality-based programs for entertainment (Reiss and Wilts, 2001). Such findings reveal that people enjoy watching these programs to see various “real life” ethical dilemmas, as well as to witness how each character’s desire of changing his/her ordinary life into extraordinary fame play out. These shows are taking over ratings from sporting events, movies, drama and news. For example, America’s currently top-rated reality program on broadcast TV is CBS’s American Idol (Nielsen Media Research, 2006). This program averages more than 31 million viewers per week. Reiss and Wilts (2001) also report that the finale of the reality
show *Survivor* dominated the front page of the *New York Post* after gaining ratings that surpassed those of the Super Bowl.

Although tremendously successful, the reality programs’ role in gender and minority representations is yet to be explored. This new genre of TV programming, especially those shown during prime time hours, needs to be studied because they attract the greatest audiences. Although called “reality TV,” they contain scenes that are scripted, directed and edited to influence people’s perception of gender and minority groups.

TV has portrayed females in many ways. Studies have shown that women have been underrepresented and stereotyped in TV programs. Elasmar, Hasegawa and Brain (1999), for example, found that studies of gender roles on prime time programs suggest that women in the 1980s were portrayed as working individuals. Still under-represented in prime time shows in the 1990s, they appeared to hold lower status positions than men. During that decade, women were portrayed as having a greater focus on domestic issues. Such representations were even more pronounced for minority women.

According to the 2000 United States census, the country has a total population of 281.4 million of which 143.3 million were females and 137.9 million were males. Of the 143.3 million women, 131.1 million (or 91.5%) were Caucasian, African American, Asian, or Hispanic. As shown in Table 1, white females represent 70% of the total female population while black females constitute 13.87%. Hispanic females make up 12.08% of the net total female population while 4.04% were Asians.
Table 1. United States female population by race, 2000 US Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Females</td>
<td>91,845,570</td>
<td>15,841,862</td>
<td>18,193,005</td>
<td>5,294,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>70.02%</td>
<td>12.08%</td>
<td>13.87%</td>
<td>4.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the percentage of minority women in the population has increased over the past 40 years, this change in demographics has not been reflected on TV, observers agree. African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans are seldom seen on prime time hours as well as on daytime TV shows. Indeed, the lack of minority female representation in reality shows mirrors the lack of minority females in other forms of TV programs. What little may be available is subject to considerable inaccurate portrayals.

NBC’s top-rated reality show, *The Apprentice*, is a case in point. In this show, the overall winner of the competition is granted a six-figure salary job in the Trump Organization. The leaders of these batches of applicants often emerge as the main characters in each weekly episode. This show has featured a disproportionate number of white females in positions of leadership. In the first season, the only African American female contestant was a problematic and controversial individual who stood out well above the rest because of her disagreeable demeanor. In the fourth season, the only Hispanic female contestant was portrayed as less intelligent than the other female characters. All Asian females featured in the show never played significant roles in the competition. Overall, out of the show’s five seasons, only one female ended up as the season’s final winner. She was, as expected, Caucasian.
It is therefore pertinent to ask: How are minority women portrayed on prime time reality programs? Furthermore, is primetime reality giving minority women equivalent opportunities to appear on TV?

**Historical Roots**

Reality television is nothing new. According to Clissold (2004), the origins of reality shows date back to the Cold War era (1945 –1991) when Americans were influenced by government propaganda to use hidden cameras and microphones in suburban cities for surveillance purposes. Video cameras hidden in strategic places to ostensibly curb the communist threat prompted the popularity of entertainment shows based on ordinary life experiences. *Candid Camera*, created in 1948, was the first TV reality show (Clissold, 2004). Produced by Allen Funt, the show helped relieve community tension by spinning the concept of being viewed during surveillance as a form of entertainment. The popular phrase, “Smile! You’re on Candid Camera,” started a cultural acceptance that anyone can be caught under surveillance at any time, anywhere. Ouellette and Murray (2004) report that surveillance cameras are still found everywhere in the United States. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (1998), 2,396 cameras were found in public and private locations in New York alone. After the September 11 attacks, even more cameras have been secretly installed (Murphy, 2002). This has fostered a culture that has taught Americans that in order to be good citizens, they must allow the government to watch their every move.

In the 1950s, shows such as *Beat the Clock* and *Truth or Consequences* debuted on American television, ushering in game shows as a new type of reality program. By the
mid 1950s the first reality star sitcoms, such as *Mr. Adam and Eve* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet Nelson*, went on air. These shows featured famous married couples in a setting that resembled their “real” homes (Gillan, 2004). In the 1960s, the concept of transforming ordinary people into television celebrities was introduced in the United Kingdom with the show *Seven Up*. It documented the lives of 14 people from age seven to adulthood (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 2006).

Programs utilizing private surveillance were prevalent in the 1970s. For example, the PBS documentary *An American Family* was considered a social experiment in surveillance (Kompare, 2004). First broadcast in 1973 as a 12-hour documentary series, it attracted an audience of 10 million viewers (PBS website, 2006). The show involved a crew of cameramen following family members for seven months. According to the PBS website (2002), *TV Guide* magazine considered this the first reality TV series that ranked among the 50 greatest shows of all time. Featuring the first openly gay TV character, the show was a big hit because it presented real drama and the problems many American families faced.

In the mid 1980s, the element of crime was introduced in reality shows (Jermyn, 2004). *Crime Watch*, a British reality show, inspired the widely acclaimed *America’s Most Wanted* (1988) later in the United States. This show tapped audiences’ curiosity about real victims, criminals and witnesses. Furthermore, the show solicited audience participation for the viewers’ own entertainment. According to Cavender (2004), this type of reality show solidifies community bonds by asking audiences to pull together in the fight against crime.
In the 1990s, technological advances such as the Internet WebCam were integrated into reality TV. The use of the Internet as a tool for audience participation has attracted millions of people around the world (Andrejevic, 2004).

By the mid 1990s, the idea of televising strangers together in the same environment for an extended period of time was incorporated into US television programming with the MTV show *The Real Word*. In the same period, British television introduced the concept of personal improvement and makeover in reality programs with the show *Changing Rooms* (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 2006).

In 2000, reality TV started to offer different types of plots. Ouellette and Murray (2004) differentiated the formats within reality shows. The first is “game-do” (i.e., *Survivor, Big Brother, Fear Factor*). The second type consists of dating programs, such as Warner Brother’s *Blind Date* and NBC’s *Joe Millionaire*, where contestants compete for a relationship with the main character. The third is composed of makeover or lifestyle programs such as NBC’s *The Swan* and Lifetime’s *A Wedding Story*, where contestants are given an opportunity to substantially alter their looks and their lifestyle. Also popular are docu-soap realities, such as MTV’s *The Real World*. Other formats include talent contests such as CBS’s *American Idol*. Interestingly enough, even reality sitcoms such as MTV’s *The Osbournes* have also emerged.

**Reality Shows Equal More Profits**

In no time has the popularity of reality TV more evident than in the late 1980s, which also saw the unprecedented growth and expansion of local independent stations, cable TV and VCRs (Raphael, 2004). Reality shows were intended to salvage the major
networks from debt due to skyrocketing production costs. At that time, the average cost of producing a prime time drama was more than $1 million per episode, including talent fees, location costs, and other expenses (Vogel, 1990). To cope, producers laid off technicians, engineers and extras. The writers’ strikes in 1988 delayed the opening of the fall season, causing a significant monetary loss to the networks (Raphael, 2004).

Realizing their dependence on writing talent, the networks ventured into reality programs that cost 50% less than regular programs to produce. When the FCC started allowing the networks to finance and own their programs in 1991, reality shows became even more attractive. Reality shows can also be sold abroad (Raphael, 2004). It is an international product designed to be easily translated from one culture to another and that requires little creative development after its purchase (Deery, 2004). Its low cost allows different countries to create unique versions of reality shows and enjoy the privileges of production and ownership (Museum of Broadcast Communications, 2006).

The profits generated by the networks also became a boon to the Internet and the WebCam industries. Magder (2004) attributes the success of reality TV to increased advertising revenues that do not have to be allotted to high-paid actors, directors and writers. In effect, the networks do not have to pay to make the show; the sponsor does. On top of that, the networks do not have to wait until the fall season to release new programs; they can do so year-round, which allows them to compete with the cable industry. According to Elber (2003), by January 2003, “one-seventh of all programming on ABC was reality-based, and that NBC, FOX, and CBS will bring even more reality shows in their programming and less scripted drama” (p.15).
Female Minorities in Reality TV

Indeed, the future of reality TV seems bright. Although many see it as just a trend, it does not seem that this genre will be fading any time soon. Their appeal lies in their depiction of people in different scenarios. Because this type of programming will always be subject to producer manipulations, how many women participants, especially minorities (Hispanic American, African American, and Asian Americans) appear on prime time reality shows? How are these minority women participants portrayed in terms of their personalities and appearance?

This study expects to contribute to the limited academic literature on the audience effects of reality TV programs by bringing new considerations for future academic research on gender and minority portrayals. The results of this study are also expected to create greater sensitivity in the development of future programs by initiating a portrayal analysis of female minorities in reality shows. This study hopes to serve as a stepping stone for the further analysis of women’s portrayals in different types of TV programs.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sinisa Savija killed himself on July 1997. A month before his death, he was the first person to be evicted from the island setting of a new game show called Expeditions Robinson, to be broadcast on a Swedish network. “He was a happy and stable person when he went away, but when he came back, he told me, ‘They are going to cut away the good things I did and make me look like a fool, only to show I was the worst, and that I was the one that had to go,’ ” his widow told newspapers reporters. “It’s not a game when you choose ordinary people and put them under great pressure constantly in front of the camera” (Brenton and Cohen, 2003, p. 1).

Reality TV is nothing new and although the first of its type dates back to the 1940s, how this genre has been defined has changed throughout the history of television. This chapter begins by examining the history of the reality TV program genre. This is followed by a survey of previous studies on the portrayals of females in television. Then, this chapter explores the possible influence of reality television on audiences using the tenets of cultivation theory.

The Reality TV Genre

For a commonly used term, reality TV is difficult to define because of the array of subjects it has dealt with throughout its evolution. “In the early stages of the genre, reality TV was associated with on-scene footages of law and order or emergency services; more
recently, reality TV is associated with anything and everything, from people to pets, from birth to death” (Hill, 2005, p. 41). According to Joniak (2001), reality TV has its roots mainly from documentary film and photography. Photography’s dominance as the most reliable method of documenting reality for many decades led to the use of cinematography to capture “the real” as first practiced by the Lumière brothers (Joniak, 2001). “The first cinema artists had the intention to record reality; their cameras turn to what they called actualités or documentary views of ordinary subjects” (Barsam, 1992, p. 15-16).

Kilborn and Izod (1997) disagree, stating that reality TV has no meaningful connection with documentaries because reality programs use a wide range of TV techniques that enhance entertainment value. “Documentary is the representation or interpretation of events and issues in the real world. As such, documentaries can be powerfully persuasive” (p. 5). They are not “as intrusive into private lives, and do not employ editorial distortion in the interest of increasing the entertainment value of an item” (p. 86).

Brenton and Cohen (2003), however, acknowledge that documentaries, such as direct cinema and cinema-vérité, were influential in the development of reality shows. “Both forms allowed for the first time, light, portable cameras, and sound that granted filmmakers unthinkable mobility and flexibility. Also, these advanced camera techniques allow the crew to be far and less obtrusive” (p. 22). Biressi and Nunn (2005) add that what they call “free or direct cinema” was also important in the development of this genre.
“Direct cinema captures actuality with less creative intervention. The camera has to be a passive agent, and the production team avoids even making eye contact with its subjects. Direct cinema camera prefers to follow its subjects around in their natural habitat. It puts a window in the wall of a particular subject, and also includes interviews” (Brenton and Cohen, 2003, p. 23). Cinema-vérité, on the other hand, “interrupts film subjects, the crew interacts with them and even films their responses to the rough-cuts of the film footage” (Biressi and Nunn, 2005, p. 40). Free cinema, therefore, does its work outside the established system, in real locations outside of the studios.

Hill (2005) offers a more comprehensive view, arguing that reality programming developed mainly from a mix of tabloid journalism, documentary television and popular entertainment. Tabloid journalism audiences who rely on personal and sensational stories for information and entertainment had moved from newspapers to TV shows, mixing and matching their consumption of news and reality programs. Sometimes, they turn to tabloid news to learn more about a reality TV series (Hill, 2005, p. 15). Hill (2005) notes that in the 1960s and 1970s, documentary TV news programs like Sixty Minutes and observational documentaries like An American Family directly influenced the reality programming of today. In addition, popular entertainment programs like The Tonight Show (started by NBC in 1954) and Oprah (NBC, 1984) have formats that focus on interpersonal relationships and the conflicts that sometimes occur in those relationships. It is therefore no small wonder that today’s reality shows are a hybrid of presenter talk, vérité material, dramatic reconstruction and various forms of audience participation enhanced by special effects which contribute to visual excitement (Kilborn, 1994).
Portrayals of Females in TV History

Throughout the decades, TV has depicted females by focusing on their physical characteristics, sexual appeal, and romantic success, whether they are housewives, mothers, or objects of desire (Ward and Harrison, 2005).

In the 1950s when TV became a new form of mass entertainment, producers basically portrayed race and gender following the Hollywood ideology. This ideology generally marginalized women, portray ing them predominantly as homemakers who yield to their husband’s whims. African American women were relegated to the role of maids in white households (Roman, 2005). Black actresses such as Ethel Waters and Louise Beavers in the 1950s played the role of loyal domestics on the show Beulah (1950-1953) (Roman, 2005). In the 1950s, Latina women were non-existent on TV although the Ricky Ricardo character in I Love Lucy became a household name. Mostly, however, the Latino culture such as that depicted in the show Zorro, was featured in a negative light (Roman, 2005).

During the 1960s and 1970s, women characters on TV were still portrayed as stay-at-home moms (Signorielli, 1991) with the exception of lead characters in a few shows such as I Dream of Jeannie and Bewitched (Zuckerman and Dubowitz, 2005). By the end of the 1960s, popular shows like Julia, the Bill Cosby Show and the Flip Wilson Show began to feature black female talent in a positive way. Like the Latinas, however, Asian females were absent on TV, except in the show Ohara, which included an Asian male in its cast (Roman, 2005).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, shows like Charlie’s Angels started to break down traditional portrayals, but the female role models TV displayed moved “from one
narrow and unrealistic ideal (the beautiful, contended housewife) to another (the beautiful, smart, and athletic private detective)” (Zuckerman and Dubowitz, 2005, p. 61). However, sitcoms like *The Golden Girls* featured females that reflected values of post-modernism (Roman, 2005). It was in the 1980s when portrayals of single mothers and single women became more popular. By that time, women characters were shown as having careers outside of the house (Zuckerman and Dubowitz, 2005).

In the 1990s, females on TV were vested with wider character ranges, including that of the sexually promiscuous and aggressive type depicted in *The Howard Stern Show* and *Sex in the City* (Zuckerman and Dubowitz, 2005). In a content analysis of women portrayals on prime time television network programs during the 1992-1993 season, Elasmar, Hasegawa and Brain (1999) found an increase in the number of women characters and that “females were less likely to be married, be housewives, caring for children, have darker shades of hair, less likely to commit or to be the victim of a violent crime, less likely to be involved in a romantic relationship, and more likely to be under the age of 50. Hence, women on prime time TV in the early 1990s were likely to be young, single, independent, and free from family and work place pressures” (p. 23).

According to Roman (2005), “from 1955 to 1986, black females increased their TV presence nearly three-fold, growing from six percent to 17% by 1992-93. Hispanic portrayals dropped from two percent to one percent, however, in the 1994-95 TV viewing season” (p. 74).

After the turn of the century, minority women portrayals on TV were still low and negative, prompting an outcry from the National Organization for Women Foundation that examines all prime time programs on six broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, FOX,
NBC, UPN, and WB) on an annual basis. Their 2002 findings showed that women were still underrepresented on prime time hours and that minority females need more opportunities to be featured with dignity and respect (National Organization for Women Foundation, 2006).

**Portrayals of Females and Minority Females on Reality TV Programs**

So far, there is a dearth of academic research on the portrayal of females in reality shows, especially those shown during prime time hours in TV networks that reach millions of viewers every week. Although the findings of such studies may be difficult to generalize due to the extreme variability of reality shows, it is an important topic to analyze because “TV has become a behavioral model, educational tool, informational provider, a source for concern, debate, and criticism” (Roman, 2005, p. 301).

Brown (2005) did an exploratory study of multiple episodes of several reality shows, show-related chat rooms, and official and unofficial websites. Her results showed that females are better represented in non-reality shows and that lesbians are “virtually nowhere to be found in the universe of reality TV” (p. 76). Women featured in shows that involve physical challenges, such as *Survivor* and *The Amazing Race*, were depicted as mean or overly aggressive characters. Black women, often underrepresented, were shown as having strong obnoxious personalities that repel others. Asian women were rare in this genre. When they were present, they were portrayed as smart, geeky, and dangerous (Brown, 2005). This is the case, Brown (2005) posits, because only celebrities like Anna Nicole Smith and Sharon Osborne have control over how they are portrayed.
In another study, Stephens (2004) found that reality shows like *A Wedding Story* and *A Baby Story* considerably stereotyped minority females. In *A Wedding Story*, every time half of a couple is non-white, the producers make it a point to show footages of activities related to race. Although this is not necessarily bad, Stephens (2004) worries that this might not be the reality of the cultures represented. While these two shows present a diversity of races and backgrounds, the representation of class-based similarities in favor of cultural concerns might indeed be misleading (Stephens, 2004).

Maher (2004) analyzed two shows, *A Wedding Story* and *A Baby Story*, and found that the majority of characters shown were middle class whites and that most relationships were “mono-racial.” When the couples were non-whites, differences in class were highlighted. She observes that white couples were more likely to live in better conditions and have better education and jobs despite the TLC network’s claim that these shows depict “diversity expressed by modern couples” (TLC website, 2006). Examining another TLC show called *Maternity Ward*, Maher (2004) noted more realism that highlighted social problems like teen pregnancy, drug abuse during pregnancy, and financial concerns. Here, race and class demographics were exactly the opposite of those in *A Baby Story* in that bad stories were related to non-whites. Hispanic female characters, for example, were shown to have higher incidences of teen pregnancy (Maher, 2004). Such findings have been consistent since the 1980s, according to Cavender (2004). Since then, “white is good” and “black is bad” have been the recurrent themes in such shows as *America’s Most Wanted*.

Focusing on representations of crime on the reality show *Cops*, Rapping (2004) notes that the scenes always take place in low-rent apartment complexes, strip malls, and
bars whose denizens were mostly African Americans or Hispanics. The show seems to suggest that Hispanics get involved more in illegal activities because they are immigrants who do not speak the language and have problems integrating into the norms of American culture. Rapping (2004) observes that the show’s post-modern cultural mix stands out with subjects such as drug abuse, sexual deviance, and immigration. *Cops*, therefore, portrays immigrants and minorities as criminals.

Also focusing on *Cops*, Prosise and Johnson (2004) did a study of police practices with respect to minorities and found that police officers tended to treat Hispanics and African Americans as suspects more frequently. The officers were relatively more aggressive toward and had a tendency to make sarcastic jokes when arresting Hispanics. Their findings mirror those of the *Seattle Times*, which found that while Washington state troopers pulled over white and minority drivers at the same rate, the minorities were searched more than whites although state data indicate that minorities were less likely to commit illegal actions.

Along the same lines, Kraszewski (2004) examined *The Real World*, a reality show in which contestants of different race and religious backgrounds are asked to live together in a luxurious apartment for several weeks. Even though African Americans participated regularly in this show each season, it featured a Hispanic character only once, in a season shot in San Francisco. The character, Pedro Zamora, was of Cuban descent. More importantly for the producers, however, is the fact that Pedro suffers from AIDS. Kraszewski (2004) observes that the episodes were manipulated to create race-related arguments.
The same is true in reality shows about dating. In a textual analysis of the reality dating show *Blind Date*, De Rose, Fursich and Hasking (2003) analyzed text that pops-up throughout the show. These imposed texts are often animated with cartoons. The producers use these to run commentaries as the couple’s date progresses. Although the participants are aware of these, the pop-up texts create meanings vastly different from the participants’ experience. In a show that features races and ethnicities, crude humor in the pop-ups strengthen negative stereotypes. As an example, in an episode where a minority’s date did not turn out to be a success, a pop-up commentary derisively stated, “No marriage? How will I get a green card?”

Such belittling instances occur even in TV programs aimed at the ethnic market. One of the latest that targeted Hispanics was a show called *Show Me the Green* aired on the Spanish-language TV channels of Los Angeles, San Diego, Houston and Dallas in which the contestants munch on burritos filled with live worms in hopes of winning the big prize, a US green card.

**Audiences of Reality TV**

Reality TV, as mentioned in Chapter 1, has proven that it can attract even highly educated audiences (Reiss and Wilts, 2001). As such, it rakes in high advertising revenues due to its multi-demographic appeal. According to Deery (2004), reality TV is designed to deliver a demographic of 18-34 years old with some disposable income. According to the Museum of Broadcast Communications, the audiences for reality shows are men and women 18-49 years old.
A recent study done by Lee (2006) showed that reality TV audiences can be very discriminatory. Surveying the viewers of *American Idol*, he found a general preference for white participants. He surmised that if the show were to feature more black participants, more black households will watch it, and black contestants will be less likely to be voted off. The racial preference was so stark so that Elton John, a popular entertainer, was prompted to comment: “The three young singers I was really impressed by [who all happened to be black] landed in the bottom three. They have great voices. The fact that they constantly landed in the bottom three I find to be incredibly racist” (Lee, 2006).

**Reality TV Effects**

Although reality shows have yet to cause a stir in the US, other countries have warned about their potential deleterious effects. In Russia, the Orthodox Church has cautioned people against the show *ZA Stekom*, the Russian version of *Big Brother*, stating that “it is highly probable that participation in this program will have a long-term negative impact on personal development, family and intimate relations of the young people who are behind the glass” (Brenton and Cohen, 2003, p. 6). In Turkey, the Radio and Television Supreme Boards have ordered that the Turkish version of *Big Brother* be removed from the air. In France, Pope John Paul II denounced the show *Le Monde* for its “lack of cultural values” (Brenton and Cohen, 2003).

Sometimes, the long-term impact of reality shows on participants can easily be discerned. For example, a Japanese show called *Susumu! Denpa Shownen* (*Don’t Go For It, Electric Boy!* ) featured a man who consented to be locked in a small apartment eating
nothing but dog food over 15 months. Another show, The Chamber, shown on the ABC network in the US, featured contestants strapped to heart monitors trying to answer questions “while being buffeted with hurricane force winds or exposed to extreme heat and cold, sometimes only wearing underwear” (Brenton and Cohen, 2003, p. 113).

Current American shows such as Survivor, Fear Factor, and the Amazing Race sometimes put participants in inhuman situations.

Brown (2005), a psychologist who spent two months as a participant in a popular reality TV show, explains her concerns: “After filming ended, I returned to my usual life, fascinated by the phenomenon of reality TV. I watched the show with which I had been involved like any other consumer of network TV and was frequently surprised to see how these people whom I had known so well had been portrayed. I recognized some of the characters on the screen, but they lacked the depth and color of the people with whom I had spent time” (p. 72). She indicts the people behind the show, males and females alike, as responsible for creating stereotypes. She also calls for more research on women’s portrayals in this genre. “Feminist psychologists need to open their critical eyes and minds to this form of mass medium. Where are the special issues of feminist psychology journals on women in reality TV? By legitimizing interest in reality TV, feminist psychologists will discover an entirely new and highly valuable direction for the analysis of women in the media. They will be provided with a powerful standpoint from which to observe emerging roles for women in a dominant culture” (p. 83).

Unknown to audiences, psychologists are deeply involved in all facets of major networks shows. They are included in the screening process, as monitors during filming, and are at times advisors to contestants, often providing aftercare once the series has
ended (Brenton and Cohen, 2003). CBS, which exposes its contestants to the hardest mental conditions in their major reality shows, employs Dr. Richard Levak as an advisor. In a 2001 symposium on “Reality TV: Psychology in PrimeTime” sponsored by the American Psychological Association (APA), Levak joined a panel composed of Dr. Gene Ondrusek, the first psychologist to be involved with reality TV, and Dr. Kate Wach, former president of the APA’s Media Psychology Division. In the session, they expressed concern that “we [the psychologists] are walking this very thin line between working for the producers and protecting the contestants in these TV experiments” (Brenton and Cohen, 2003, p. 96). This concern is valid considering that “television is an indiscriminate medium consumed by an often indiscriminate audience. These shows’ messages are broadcast across all demographic lines to anyone who has access to a TV set and wants to watch” (Thompson, 1990, p. 41).

Cultivation Theory

“Reality TV represents a media phenomenon that has enormous potential impact on cultural constructions of gender, culture, and sexuality, yet it remains virtually unknown and unobserved” (Brown, 2005, p. 81).

It is undeniable that television is the most pervasive form of media today because of its ability to transcend the literacy barrier (West and Turner, 2004). Close to 98% of American homes have TV sets (Nielsen Media Research, 2000). How TV shapes audience’s perceptions of women will be examined in this study using cultivation theory.

“Cultivation theory predicts and explains the long-term formation and shaping of perceptions, understandings, and beliefs about the world as a result of the consumption of
media messages. It was created by George Gerbner who suggested that TV cultivates certain beliefs about reality that are held in common by mass communication consumers” (West and Turner, 2004, p. 377). One example is the media-fueled fear of being at risk of anthrax contamination when the actual possibilities of such possible outbreak were very low (Peterson, 2002).

In the 1960s, concerned about the negative effects of TV on society, the federal government created the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence and the Committee on Television and Social Behavior (West and Turner, 2004). Gerbner, as a member of these groups, pursued two important studies in the 1970s, the “Violence Index” and the “Cultural Indicators” projects (Baron and Davis, 2003). The Violence Index Project involves an analysis of the violent content of prime time network programs. The project found that violent acts in these shows were at least 10 times higher than those identified in actual crime statistics (Baron and Davis, 2003). The second project on cultural indicators revealed the conceptions of social reality cultivated by TV viewing that became the foundational axioms of cultivation theory. These are: “(1) television is essentially and fundamentally different from other forms of mass media, (2) television shapes our society’s way of thinking and relating, and (3) the influence of television is limited” (West and Turner, p. 379).

The first assumption states that television is a powerful medium because of its accessibility and ease of use (Baron and Davis, 2003).

The second assumption pertains to the influence of TV. “TV is responsible for a major cultivating and acculturating process in which people are exposed systematically to a selective view of society on almost every aspect of life, a view which tends to shape
their belief and values accordingly” (McQuail, 2000, p. 110). This view is akin to that of the social cognitive theory which posits that observers can acquire symbolic representations of behaviors, and these pictures provide information on which to base subsequent behavior (Baron and Davis, 2003, pg 193). It also goes with Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory which predicts that the more people are exposed to violence on TV, the more violent they will become.

The third assumption negates a single across-the-board TV impact by assuming that TV influences viewers through steady limited effects (West and Turner, 2004). This was later known as “the ice age analogy” in that it predicts that the cumulative minimal influence of television can cause long-term big damages (Baron and Davis, 2003). Indeed, in 1980, Gerbner found that heavy users of television, regardless of income or education, perceived the world as “mean” due to this prolonged exposure. In other words, those who watch a great deal of crime on TV will, for example, develop the perception that the world is dangerous irrespective of demographic characteristics (Baron and Davis, 2003).

The cultivation process, therefore, occurs through mainstreaming and resonance. “Mainstreaming is the tendency for heavy viewers to perceive a similar culturally dominant reality to that pictured on the media although this differs from actual reality. Resonance occurs when viewers’ lived reality coincides with the reality pictured in the media” (West and Turner, 2004, p. 383). These two processes ultimately lead to the learning of values and assumptions from the media (West and Turner, 2004).

Many studies have employed cultivation to investigate the impact of television misrepresentation on audiences. For example, Dixon and Linz (2000) examined the
representation of Hispanics on TV in Los Angeles, CA from 1995 to 1996. Their findings confirmed the observation that minorities are portrayed negatively in the media. Applying the cultivation hypothesis and social cognitive theories in ethnic blame discourse, the researchers found that white viewers come to link lawbreaking behaviors with minorities through constant TV exposure. Because Hispanics were persistently portrayed as committing crimes, white Americans tended to frame this group as dangerous. Furthermore, a social relationship is developed between these two groups as white Americans see themselves portrayed as victims. Such a perception is detrimental especially in a society that is still fighting to “ameliorate discrimination.”

Mastro (2003), who studied stereotypical media images and messages related to ethnicity, showed that negative stereotypes correlate with negative judgments about ethnic groups. Because many white Americans have the opportunity to see and interact with Hispanics only through TV, negative portrayals reinforce discriminatory practices against and stimulate low self-esteem among minorities.

Ward and Harrison (2005) agree, stating that “cultivation analysis explains why frequent TV viewing is associated with creating more stereotypical associations, and that exposure to specific genres is associated with viewers’ assumptions about the distribution of real-world roles “ (p. 5). In their study that looked at the impact of TV and magazine content on gender role outcomes, they found evidence that girls who use these media with greater frequency were more likely to endorse what is portrayed in them. Prolonged exposure to these media caused the girls they studied to expect that they will be divorced, have an affair, and be sexually active. As such, “the impact of other media such as feature films and new TV genres such as reality programs need to be analyzed” (p. 15).
As Baron and Davis explained (2003), resonance is a process in which the audience members associate their life with the world of TV. In some circumstances, this can be dangerous because violent TV content can promote more violence for those already in violent environments. Indeed, viewers with certain personal attitudes identify more with what they see on TV, which can strengthen certain attitudes and beliefs (Sorsoli, Porche and Tolman, 2005).

Cultivation analysis can also be used to determine the influence of the media on others aspects of social life such as education. For example, Reyes and Rios (2003) provided evidence that stereotyping minorities on educational aspects can negatively influence teachers and students. If, for instance, the media ascribe high drop out rates and low academic achievement to Latinos, society in general might believe that such is really the case. For this reason, the authors cited the importance of media literacy training among teachers and parents to assist students in figuring out the difference between the real and the unreal.

In this popular genre of TV reality shows, those who win are often non-minorities in gender or race. The idea is for audiences to identify with the majority to keep the ratings strong. This study focuses on the representations of white females and minority females in reality TV shows during prime time hours on the major networks (NBC, CBS, ABC, FOX). Based on the foregoing literature review and the assumptions of cultivation theory, this study investigates the following research questions:
Research Questions

RQ1. To what extent do women participants appear on prime time reality shows? How many of these women belong to minority groups (Hispanics American, African American and Asian American)?

RQ2. How are women participants in general and minority women in particular portrayed in these shows in terms of their roles?

RQ3. How are women participants and minority women portrayed in these shows in terms of their appearances?

RQ4. Are female participants mostly portrayed in reality TV shows as the winners or the losers?
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Content Analysis

Content analysis has been applied in studies that examined television programs for their race and gender portrayals since the 1960s. The results of these studies have been used as evidence to support changes in programming regulations and policies. For example, Greenberg and Baptista-Fernandez (1980) report that the Mexican-American Anti-Defamation Committee had been successful in protecting the Hispanic image by seeking to ban commercials that depicted stereotypical representations of this minority group.

A content analysis of TV programs is usually done by recording the programs and analyzing them for specific criteria. For instance, Baptista- Fernandez (1980) analyzed 255 television series from 1975 to 1978 to identify 3,549 television characters of various demographic characteristics that would provide information about Hispanic-American portrayals on TV programs. Her findings revealed that Hispanic males were seen more on TV than Hispanic females. She also demonstrated that Hispanics were represented by less than 1.5% of the overall TV character population.

Few content analyses on reality TV programs have been done in this decade. A study by DeRose, Fursich and Haskin in 2003 analyzed the pop-up super-text imposed in the reality show *Blind Date*. Their analysis reveals that the show’s pop-up text suggested ethnic misrepresentation. However, other studies have looked at the amount of TV time devoted to US ethnic minorities. Mastro (2000), for example, showed that the
misrepresentation of minorities in television is still a problem after analyzing minority portrayals on TV over a period of 21 years.

In another study, Chiricos and Eschholz (2002) compared the content of local TV programs in Orlando, Florida in 1998 to a real world index to determine the actual number of minorities arrested against those featured on TV. Their findings demonstrated the disconnect between the representation of Hispanics in the media and actual crime indicators.

Following this agenda, the current study also employs content analysis to study the portrayal of women in prime time reality TV programs.

Sampling

The main objective of this study is to determine the extent to which women are shown and how they are portrayed in reality TV shows during prime time hours.

To gather data for this study, a content analysis of prime time reality shows in the four major networks, the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the FOX network was conducted. The period of analysis covered eight weeks during the 2006 summer season.

Unit of Analysis and Time Frame

The unit of analysis for this study is the complete episode of reality shows shown on the four major networks during prime time hours. The female participants in these episodes were examined individually. The summer season of 2006 covers the months of
June and July. Prime time refers to the broadcasting time slots of 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., Mondays through Fridays. Reality shows refer to games, dramatic programs, and shows that feature real life episodes in natural settings and in a less scripted way. The contestants and participants in these shows are mostly ordinary people, not professional actors. Reality shows in this study fall under one of the following 10 categories:

1. Game shows: Participants compete to win a prize, usually a large amount of money. Participants are usually in a TV studio environment. Example: NBC’s *Deal or No Deal*.

2. Special living situations: Participants compete to win a prize, usually a large amount of money, but are usually in an outside and/or preset environment. Examples: CBS’s *Survivor* and *The Amazing Race*.

3. Talent contests: Participants use their talent to compete for a prize and to gain fame. Participants are eliminated from the show as judges and/or the audience members vote them off. Example: ABC’s *American Idol*.

4. Life events programs: Participants share with the audience life moments such as giving birth, weddings, birthdays or any other meaningful event. Participants are filmed in normal living conditions. Examples: Lifetime’s *A Wedding Story* and *A Baby Story*.

5. Professional lifestyle shows: Participants share with the audience their professional life by showing day-to-day business or professional activities. No outside experts or judges are brought to the scene. Example: *The Restaurant*.

6. Primarily celebrity-oriented shows: Participants are celebrities such as singers, athletes, and actors, among others. They are assigned specific tasks and compete
for a prize. Examples: *Dancing with the Stars, Who Wants to be a Millionaire? Celebrity Edition*. Other types of celebrity shows follow people as they conduct their personal or professional lives. Examples: *The Anna Nicole Smith Show, The Osbournes, and The Newlyweds.*

7. Dating shows: Participants compete for a date at the end of the show. Example: *The Bachelor, Elimidate.*

8. Job search shows: Participants compete to win their dream job. They perform several tasks based on the skills needed for the position. They are judged and removed from the show by an expert or a panel of experts. Examples: *The Apprentice, America’s Next Top Model, The Contender.*

9. Makeover / Self improvement programs: Participants vie for physical or psychological improvement. A group of experts help them achieve make over or improvement objectives. At the end of the show, the accomplishments are displayed. Examples: *The Biggest Loser, The Swan, Trading Spaces, Super Nanny.*

10. “Hoax” reality shows: Participants think they are appearing in a legitimate reality show, but the rest of the cast are actors who are “in on the scheme.” Examples: *My Obnoxious Boss, My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé.*

11. Other

**Conceptual and Operational Definition of Variables**

The first research question asks: *How many women participants appear on prime time reality shows? How many of them belong to minority groups?*
To answer this research question, the following variables will be coded:

1) Number of females (adults and children) shown in the reality programs

2) Number of minority females (adults and children) shown in the programs

3) The television network that carried the program, and

4) Type of reality show.

The number of females who participated and were featured in these programs was counted. They were classified according to ethnicity and were coded as either Asian American (or Asian), African American (or African, black), Caucasian (or white), or Hispanic American (or Hispanic, Latina). Only the first 10 female participants with speaking roles in each of the four groups above were analyzed in the episodes.

The second research question asks: How are women participants in general and minority women in particular portrayed in these shows in terms of their roles?

Roles refer to the part played by a female participant within the context of the reality show. This study classified female characters as adults or children, and majority female vs. minority female. The variable “role” has three dimensions: (1) type of role, (2) attitude, and (3) importance of the role to the show.

Type of role refers to the observed pattern of behavior exhibited by the female characters and was ascertained using a series of semantic differential or bipolar rating scales, ranging from 1 to 5. To measure type of role, coders were asked to evaluate the female character and determine where her role lies in between the bi-polar adjectives separated by five points on a scale. Specifically, coders were asked to rate female participants on the following scales:

1. domestic/motherly : : : : : career/professional
2. victim : aggressor
3. submissive : authoritative
4. non-religious : religious
5. non-athletic : athletic

A character who is domestic/motherly often is shown as a wife or a mother with tasks primarily focused on the home, such as cleaning, cooking, taking care of the children and/or a spouse, while the career professional is mainly featured as someone deeply involved with a career (i.e., a teacher, a business woman).

The victim is featured as suffering from a tragedy and is always in need of help while the aggressor is shown as argumentative and overpowering.

The authoritative female is completely independent and is portrayed as having tremendous self-initiative. On the other hand, the submissive female is completely dependent on others and does not take risks. She generally takes orders from others and is subservient.

The religious female demonstrates strong religious beliefs and convictions while the non-religious female does not show or exhibit these same traits.

The athletic type demonstrates ability and prowess in the field of sports while the non-athletic female shows little, if any, enthusiasm for sports.

Attitude is the dimension of role that refers to the extent to which the character is seen as positive or negative. The positive character generally exhibits good behavior and thoughts. The negative character is shown as exhibiting and espousing negative ideas.
Attitude was measured by a five-point Likert scale where 1 means “negative,” 3 means “neutral,” and 5 means “positive.”

*Importance* refers to the extent to which the female character’s role constitutes a major aspect of the show’s plot. It was measured by determining whether the character performed a minor or a major role within a specific episode using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 means “a minor role” and 5 means “a major role.” A major role means the character offered the main attraction or was given the stronger focus in an episode. Here, the character was assigned substantial dialogues and was a significant part of the show’s plot. A participant with a minor role is one that has few speaking lines and is only featured in very few screen shots. This character is only peripheral or tangential to the plot.

The third research question asks: How are women participants and minority women portrayed in these shows in terms of their appearance?

*Appearance* refers specifically to the clothing worn by the female characters. It was measured with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 means the character was wearing a “neutral” clothing attire; 2 means she is wearing clothing that is “somewhat alluring” (i.e., more liberal clothing that tends to highlight the body, such as excessively tight pants, too much make up, transparent apparel, or low-cut shorts or skirts); 3 means “sexy” in which the character wears a revealing attire; 4 means “very sexy” in which the character is attired in a lingerie, skimpy dresses or over revealing outfits; and 5 means “no clothing at all.”
Research question four asks: *Are female participants mostly portrayed in reality TV shows as the winners or the losers?*

*Winners and losers* refer to the opportunities that are given to women in the shows. They are operationally defined as follows:

1. **Winners:** The female gains something of tangible value from the show. Examples are money, vacation opportunities, a job, or the prerogative to continue participating in the show.
2. **Losers:** The female does not gain anything of value and is disqualified from the show.
3. **Cannot be determined:** The show does not give information about the female as winning or losing in the show.

**Data Analysis**

To determine inter-coder reliability, Holsti’s (1969) formula below was used:

\[
\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}
\]

Using this formula, reliability was calculated by multiplying the number of coding decision in which both coders agreed by the number of coders, and dividing the number of coding sub-samples assigned to each coder. Most content analysis reports a minimum level of agreement of 90 percent or above when using Holsti’s formula. As such, in this study, the minimum level of agreement must be equal to or above 90% (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006).
Two coders, one male and one female, were trained on how to use the coding sheet and how to abide by the coding protocols. Written instructions and procedures were given to the coders to guarantee that the procedures were understood. The coding protocols were pre-tested on a two-week sample of reality programs aired from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. on the four major networks. To determine inter-coder reliability, each coder analyzed a total of 22 of 137.50 hours (16%) of the sample. The results showed an agreement of 702 out of the 760 situations, producing an overall reliability coefficient of .923. The results of inter-coder reliability testing for the variables of interest are shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Reliability expressed as % agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of reality show</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type role #1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type role #2</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type role #3</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type role #4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type role #5</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of role</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical appearance</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning vs. losing</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Statistical Analysis**

Because most variables involved in the research questions are nominal and ordinal, descriptive statistics were applied to analyze the data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 14.0.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this study is to identify the extent to which women were shown and the ways in which they were portrayed in prime time reality shows broadcast over the four major US television networks. This chapter describes the study’s sample and answers the four research questions posed in Chapter 3.

The Sample

Data for this study were gathered by conducting a content analysis of prime time television programs aired over the 2006 summer season. The period registered a total 480 broadcast hours. Of the total number of shows aired during the season, 116 (28.65%) can be categorized as reality shows. They occupied 137.50 hours of the prime time schedule. This study examined a complete census of all reality shows aired from June through July 2006. The unit of analysis was the entire show, from the opening screens to the closing credits. The median length of the reality shows was 60 minutes (range=120 to 30 minutes). Because the sample was taken during the summer season, it includes replays of original episodes.

Table 3 shows the most popular types of reality shows featured during the prime-time hours. Of the eight types of reality shows identified, talent contests (40 or 34.5%) and shows about job searches (22 or 19%) were the most frequently featured by the four networks combined (Table 3). These were followed by special living shows (18 or 15.5%) and lifestyle programs (17 or 14.7%). The least popular show types were game
shows (only 2), dating shows (with 4), and celebrity shows (with 5). NBC and ABC aired the most number of reality shows at 35 each.

Table 3. Types of reality shows aired by the four major networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Type of reality show</th>
<th>Game</th>
<th>Special living</th>
<th>Talent contest</th>
<th>Life-Style</th>
<th>Celebrity</th>
<th>Dating</th>
<th>Job search</th>
<th>Make over</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>116.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women in Reality Shows

*RQ1. How many women appeared on prime-time reality shows? How many of these belonged to minority groups (Hispanic American, African American and Asian American)?*

As shown in Table 4, a total of 611 females participated in the prime time reality shows studied during the summer season of 2006. Adult females (535) comprised 87.6% of the sample; there were 76 girls, constituting 12.4% of the sample. Of the total 611 female participants, 142 or 23.2% belonged to minority groups. Table 4 lists the distribution of female participants categorized by race.
As can be seen in Table 4, the distribution of female characters by race on reality television slightly differs from that of the 2000 census statistics. In this study’s sample, 76% of the characters were white, slightly higher than the census figures which show that 70% of all women in the country is Caucasian. The figures for Asians and blacks also lean closely to the census data. Asians comprised of 3.1% of the sample; they constitute 4% of the entire US female population. Africans made up 14.2% of the sample; in the national census findings, they constitute 13.87% of the total number of females in the country. Only the percentage of Hispanics in the sample did not match those of the census figures. While the 2000 census data clearly show that Hispanic females make up 12% of all females in the nation, they constitute only 5.9% of the study’s sample. Thus, it can be said that reality shows, in general under-represented Hispanic females.

Table 4. Number of female characters in the reality shows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Female adults</th>
<th>Female children</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NBC featured the biggest number of female participants during its prime time reality programs (229 or 37.5 % of the sample). It was followed by FOX with 145 (23.7%), ABC with 120 (19.6%), and CBS with 116 (19%), in that order.

The number of minority participants by group varied by network (Table 5). There were more African American participants in the NBC reality shows than in any other network (45 or 19.65% of the total number of African Americans). FOX was second
overall in terms of showing African American females, with 25 or 17.24%. Asian American women were seen more on ABC (11 or 9.16% of the total Asians in the sample). CBS featured significantly more Hispanic women, with 13 or 11.2% of the total Hispanic female participants.

To determine whether the networks differed in terms of the racial group to which the women they featured belonged, a chi-square test of independence was conducted. As the results on Table 6 shows, there was a significant difference among the networks on this regard ($\chi^2 = 444.240, p < .05$). NBC clearly had the most number of females, whether they were white or belonging to a minority group.

Table 5. Composition of female participants in the four major networks by race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>ABC</th>
<th>CBS</th>
<th>FOX</th>
<th>NBC</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>9.16</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>45.00</td>
<td>87.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>9.48</td>
<td>17.24</td>
<td>19.65</td>
<td>14.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>91.00</td>
<td>111.00</td>
<td>172.00</td>
<td>469.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>79.16</td>
<td>78.44</td>
<td>76.55</td>
<td>75.10</td>
<td>76.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>36.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>11.20</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>120.00</td>
<td>116.00</td>
<td>146.00</td>
<td>229.00</td>
<td>611.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Minority</td>
<td>20.84</td>
<td>21.56</td>
<td>23.45</td>
<td>24.90</td>
<td>23.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Chi-square test comparing the extent to which the four networks featured women in their reality shows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson chi-square</td>
<td>44.240</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio</td>
<td>43.005</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-linear association</td>
<td>3.819</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of valid cases</td>
<td>611</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of a one-way analysis of variance test done to compare the networks in terms of the total number of females who were guests of their reality shows suggest that there was a significant difference among them on this aspect ($F=24.525$, $p<.05$, Table 7). A Tukey’s HSD multiple comparison test was then conducted to find out what networks were different from each other in terms of the number of women shown in their reality programs. Following the results of the previous chi-square test, the results show that CBS (116) and FOX (146) were the only networks that were not significantly different from each other in terms of the sheer number of females who graced their reality shows.

Table 7. Analysis of variance test showing difference among the networks in terms of number of women shown in reality programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Lower bound</th>
<th>Upper bound</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1.2833</td>
<td>.45251</td>
<td>.04131</td>
<td>1.2015</td>
<td>1.3651</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>.00000</td>
<td>.00000</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>1.0137</td>
<td>.11664</td>
<td>.00965</td>
<td>.9946</td>
<td>1.0328</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>1.1747</td>
<td>.38052</td>
<td>.02515</td>
<td>1.1251</td>
<td>1.2242</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>1.1244</td>
<td>.33029</td>
<td>.01336</td>
<td>1.0981</td>
<td>1.1506</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>7.194</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.398</td>
<td>24.525</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>59.352</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66.547</td>
<td>610</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. (continued)

Tukey HSD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) Network</th>
<th>(J) Network</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower Bound</td>
<td>Upper Bound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>.28333(*)</td>
<td>.04072</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.1784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>.26963(*)</td>
<td>.03853</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.1704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>.10866(*)</td>
<td>.03524</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.0179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>-.28333(*)</td>
<td>.04072</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.3882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>-.01370</td>
<td>.03889</td>
<td>.985</td>
<td>-.1139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>-.17467(*)</td>
<td>.03564</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.2665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>-.26963(*)</td>
<td>.03853</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.3689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>.01370</td>
<td>.03889</td>
<td>.985</td>
<td>-.0865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>-.16097(*)</td>
<td>.03312</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.2463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>-.10866(*)</td>
<td>.03524</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>-.1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>.17467(*)</td>
<td>.03564</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.0829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>.16097(*)</td>
<td>.03312</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.0757</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

An ANOVA test was also conducted to determine whether the networks differed from each other in terms of the number of minority females in their reality programs. The results, shown in Table 8, indicate significant differences among the networks in their minority female reality show constituents (F=3.790, p<.05). A Tukey’s HSD multiple comparison test reveals that NBC (with 57 minority females) and CBS (with 25) were significantly different from each other.
Table 8. Analysis of variance test showing difference among the networks in terms of number of minority women shown in their reality programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>Std. error</th>
<th>Lower bound</th>
<th>Upper bound</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.8500</td>
<td>.68169</td>
<td>.06223</td>
<td>2.7268</td>
<td>2.9732</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3.0000</td>
<td>.49344</td>
<td>.04581</td>
<td>2.9093</td>
<td>3.0907</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>2.8425</td>
<td>.50771</td>
<td>.04202</td>
<td>2.7594</td>
<td>2.9255</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>2.7904</td>
<td>.52121</td>
<td>.03444</td>
<td>2.7225</td>
<td>2.8583</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>2.8543</td>
<td>.55225</td>
<td>.02234</td>
<td>2.8105</td>
<td>2.8982</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3.420</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.140</td>
<td>3.790</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>182.616</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>.301</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>186.036</td>
<td>610</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tukey HSD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>Std. error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Lower bound</th>
<th>Upper bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>-.15000</td>
<td>.07142</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>-.3340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>.00753</td>
<td>.06758</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.1666</td>
<td>.1816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>.05961</td>
<td>.06181</td>
<td>.770</td>
<td>-.0996</td>
<td>.2188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>.15000</td>
<td>.07142</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>-.0340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>.15753</td>
<td>.06822</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>-.0182</td>
<td>.3333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>.20961(*)</td>
<td>.06251</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.0486</td>
<td>.3706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>-.00753</td>
<td>.06758</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.1816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>-.15753</td>
<td>.06822</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>-.3333</td>
<td>.0182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>.05207</td>
<td>.05809</td>
<td>.807</td>
<td>-.0976</td>
<td>.2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>-.05961</td>
<td>.06181</td>
<td>.770</td>
<td>-.2188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>-.20961(*)</td>
<td>.06251</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.3706</td>
<td>-.0486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>-.05207</td>
<td>.05809</td>
<td>.807</td>
<td>-.2017</td>
<td>.0976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

What type of reality shows had the most minority female participants? As shown in Table 9, talent contests exhibited the highest percentage of African Americans (69 or
26.6%). Job searches, the second most popular type, had the highest Hispanic representation (17 or 16.7%). One of the least aired types of reality show, those that deal with dating, featured the most number of Asian females (5 or 33.3%).

Table 9. Racial composition of female participants by type of reality show

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Show Type</th>
<th>Race of female participants</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special living</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Show type</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talent contest</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>69.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Show type</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Show type</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Show type</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Show type</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job search</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Show type</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make over</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Show type</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Show type</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>87.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Show type</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type of roles

RQ2. In general, how were women portrayed in these reality shows? How were various minority groups portrayed in these shows in terms of their roles?
As detailed in Table 10, women were generally portrayed as having a professional career and were thus less likely to be portrayed in domestic roles. The majority of the 87 African American women participants (57.5%) demonstrated “neutral” roles, about midway in the domestic-professional scale. Hispanic females were highly represented in professional roles. Out of the 36 Hispanic females in these shows, 28 were shown as having careers outside of the home. Hispanic females were shown in these shows as gainfully employed individuals, ranging from police officers and chefs to artists such as singers and dancers. Of the 19 Asian females in the sample, 11 were shown as career professionals. They were frequently depicted as lawyers and business women, artists and students.

Examined as either victims or aggressors, majority of the female characters fell under “neutral” in the bipolar scale. Only 5.4% of the characters in the sample depicted females as victims. Female characters that loomed large as “victims” were found in the Treasure Hunter, a program that showed women suffering from either physical or mental strain and desperate for assistance after spending several days in search of treasure. African American females, however, were less likely to be portrayed as victims and were more likely to be depicted as aggressors. In the Big Brother, for example, the only African American participant was overly argumentative compared to the other participants.

Were they shown more in authoritative or submissive roles? The data indicated that more than half (60.7 %) of the female characters were seen as performing a “neutral” role on this bipolar scale. As a whole, they were, however, less likely to be submissive. African American females, in particular, were more likely to be authoritative, while
Hispanic females were the most submissive. Authoritative African females were seen in the show *So You Think You Can Dance*. Here, they were depicted as being very independent and having tremendous self-initiative while performing numerous dance performances. In *Hell’s Kitchen*, the only Hispanic female participant was shown often taking orders from other participants, and overly obedient to her team and the head chef.

The great majority of the female characters (97.5%) showed no preference for a particular belief or religion. A very small number (0.3%), mostly Hispanic, were shown as not having a religion or demonstrated the absence of any religious belief. Most non-religious females were found in *Wife Swap* where the very sectarian nature of the female contestants was played up against the highly religious values of the family with whom they lived. The religious characteristic was ascertained by coding whether the female participant mentioned something in favor of, or against, any particular religion or if the character was portrayed as practicing her religious belief.

More than half of the female characters analyzed (64.5%) can also be considered “neutral” in terms of their athleticism although they were more likely to be athletic or athletic-looking. A character was considered athletic if she demonstrated ability and prowess in the field of sports. For instance, if the character was shown as being active and performing athletic roles such as running, swimming, or participating in sports, she was classified as athletic. Several female characters were seen in athletic roles in the *Fear Factor*, where participants hurdle physical challenges to win a prize. Many of the activities in the show required a high level of athleticism. A character was considered non-athletic if she displayed little, if any, sports activity or enthusiasm for sports. Examples of demonstrably non-athletic roles were seen in *Wife Swap* where certain
females’ participants overtly displayed a dislike for sports and were featured overall as being passive.

Were women portrayed in a positive or negative light? As seen in Table 11, prime time reality programs tended to portray women positively. A female exhibits positive characteristics when she shows good behavior and general demeanor, and does not provoke conflict. Positive roles were evident in Rock Star Supernova where female participants demonstrated good intentions in helping each other to develop their singing skills although they were pitted against each other in this talent contest. A person was coded as having a negative character if she exhibits bad behavior and espouses negative ideas. This character was often problematic and tended to create controversy in the show. In the show Super Nanny, for example, some young daughters were depicted as behaving disrespectfully toward their mothers. Only 3.9% of the 611 female participants demonstrated very negative roles, and 10.3% were depicted as having negative attitudes.

As can be inferred from Table 11, reality programs assigned major roles in their “plots” or story lines to women, including those who belong to minority groups. More than half of the female participants (51.0%) demonstrated major roles in the reality shows, particularly those shown at NBC, such as The Last Comic Standing, and America Got Talent. CBS featured the least number of females with major roles. In general, a low percentage of women (11.9%) were portrayed as performing insignificant roles in the reality shows that featured them. In the season finale of The Apprentice, for example, women were often portrayed as merely assisting the male contestants.
Table 10. Roles portrayed by reality show female participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1. Domestic</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.7234</td>
<td>1.07448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>142</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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Table 11. Attitudes depicted by female characters and the importance of their roles in reality shows

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<th>Percent</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. dev.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very negative</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.5876</td>
<td>1.12357</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
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<td>10.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>37.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
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<td>19.3</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Very positive</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<th>Std. dev.</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Minor</td>
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<td>11.9</td>
<td>3.8674</td>
<td>1.44419</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<td>Neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>107</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Major</td>
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<td>51.9</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Physical Appearance

*RQ3. How are women participants and minority women portrayed in these shows in terms of their appearance?*

Women were prominently portrayed wearing neutral outfits (72.8%) especially in job search shows, game shows, and special living situations. Only 7.7% donned somewhat alluring clothing, such as transparent apparels, high-cut shorts or halter-top shirts. Just a little below 10% can be described as wearing a “sexy” attire, and 8.5% can be characterized as wearing very sexy outfits (Table 12). “Very sexy” clothing are those that are over-revealing, such as lingerie or skimpy dresses. Alluring, sexy, and very sexy attires were often seen in talent contests perhaps because the participants were doing their best to draw the attention of judges and audiences. Nine or 1.5%, of the female characters
was not wearing any clothing at all. Of these characters, seven were Caucasian, one was African, and another was Hispanic.

Girls were mostly shown as having neutral outfits (89.5%); however, 9.2% wore alluring outfits, and another 1.3% donned very sexy attires.

Table 12. Physical appearance of female participants in terms of clothes worn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. dev.</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<td>72.8</td>
<td>1.5810</td>
<td>1.05949</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alluring</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very sexy</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no clothing at all</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Winners or Losers?

**RQ4. Were female participants mostly portrayed in reality TV shows as winners or losers?**

A significant percentage (43.7%) of the adult female participants were depicted as the shows’ winners. For example, in *Hell’s Kitchen*, the female contestants frequently won the cooking challenges posed. In *The One*, females participants regularly won the singing contest. In contrast, the sample showed an almost equal number of girls who were losers and winners. Table 13 shows that minority women were generally portrayed as winners. However, Asians were more likely to lose than any other minority group, while African females had more appearances as winners.
Table 13. Female participants as winners or losers in the reality shows

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Win / Lose</th>
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<td>Losing</td>
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<td>7.0</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>36.8</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>24.1</td>
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<td>10.0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>27.8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>26.2</td>
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</table>
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to determine the extent to which women were present in reality shows aired on prime time, and how women were portrayed in this popular form of TV program. A content analysis of the four major broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC) during the summer season of 2006 was conducted to ascertain the representation of females in this TV program genre.

The results indicate that women had been positively portrayed in these reality shows. Caucasian females made up the majority of this study’s sample. Among the minority groups, African Americans were the most frequently featured minority female, especially in shows aired on NBC and FOX. Asian females were the least represented of all minority groups. Hispanic females were found more on CBS-produced programs, while Asian females can be seen more frequently in shows owned by ABC.

Within the reality show genre, different types of programs have evolved over the past few years. As particular types of shows gain popularity, spin offs are created by competing networks to salvage market share. In this study, the most popular types of reality shows observed were talent contests and those that deal with job searches. The least popular were game shows and shows about dating or how to get a date.

Talent contests, the most common reality show in all broadcast networks, primarily featured African Americans compared to women who belong to other minority groups. Job searches, the second most common reality program category, featured mainly
Hispanics. One of the least shown reality shows was dating programs that had a high representation of Asian females.

A total of 611 females were shown in reality shows during prime time hours in the summer season of 2006. Adult females constitute the majority, comprising 87.6% of the sample; there were only 76 girls, comprising 12.4% of the sample. Of the total 611 female participants, only 142 or 23.2% were of minority descent.

In summary, therefore, in terms of composition, this study showed that white women composed the majority of females shown in this TV genre. Among the three minority groups studied, African Americans were the most prominent, representing 14.2% female of the population in these shows. The next most popular minority group was the Hispanics, 5.9% of the total females. Asians were the least featured, comprising of only 3.1% of the total females on reality TV.

The portrayal of women in current reality programs generally follows typical female depictions on contemporary TV. Since the 1990s, women have been increasingly portrayed as independent and less likely to have the traditional role of a stay-at-home mom. African American females were more likely to be depicted as independent and as having self-initiative. The results of this study show that females were seen mainly as career professionals and were less likely to be featured in domestic roles. Of the racial groups studied, Hispanic and Asian females had predominantly professional roles. The female characters on reality TV were also seen as non-aggressive; neither were they depicted as victims.

The findings also showed that women, in general, were portrayed as neither submissive nor authoritative. In the rare occurrences of submissive or subservient roles,
Hispanic females were more likely to be the subjects. Therefore, the findings indicate that the submissive and subservient females appear to be feminine roles of the past.

Women on prime time reality TV do not tend to be religious (less than 2% appeared to exhibit strong religious beliefs or made it a point to say that they abide by a certain religious practice). The majority also indicated they have no interest in or do not like sports although many appeared to be athletic.

In general, women and girls were presented in reality shows in very positive ways, especially in terms of their appearance. They wore clothing appropriate to the occasion, mostly falling under the category “neutral” in terms of the level of sexiness their outfits demonstrated. In general, neither adults nor children wore clothes that can be considered “sexy” and “alluring.”

Female participants also often emerged victorious in reality shows. Asian females, the least portrayed racial group in games, scored the most losing roles in these shows.

In summary, the findings of the present study show that in terms of roles, attitudes, behavior and appearance, women were portrayed positively in the sample of reality shows analyzed. They were also often depicted as the winners or victors in these shows. Although the proportion of minority females in these shows was still low, these minority females were portrayed as enjoying the same benefits and opportunities as Caucasian females.

These findings run counter to those of Brown (2005) who found that females were better represented in non-reality TV programs. She also notes that women in reality shows that involve physical challenges, such as Survivor and The Amazing Race, were often shown as mean or overly aggressive characters. In this study, shows that involved
physical challenges were categorized as those that highlight special living situations. Under this category, 57.1% of the 112 women participants were clearly considered “neutral” in terms of aggressiveness.

Brown (2005) also notes that African American women were often under-represented. If they were found in these shows at all, they were shown as having obnoxious personalities that tend to repel others. In contrast, while this study found under-representation across all minority groups, African American females were the most highly represented.

Finally, Brown (2005) observed that Asian women were rare in this genre and that when they were present, they were portrayed as smart, geeky, and dangerous. The current study also found extreme under-representation of Asian Americans, but did not code for characteristics such as “smart” or “dangerous.” Indeed, this study confirms that Asian females are rarely seen in this type of programs, considering that they comprise only 3.1% of the total sample. However, the results of the current study indicate that out of the 19 Asian female characters analyzed, 11 demonstrated professional roles and thus appeared smart, but they were far from being perceived as dangerous.

Maher (2004), analyzing two cable reality shows, *A Wedding Story* and *A Baby Story*, observed that white couples or white females were most likely to be shown as living in better conditions and having better education and jobs than minorities. In this study, however, such attributes were likely to be exhibited by Hispanic and Asian females who were often seen as successful career women. Maher (2004) also observed that negative roles were usually given to non-white females. In contrast, this study showed that women in general, including minority women, were portrayed in a very
positive light. They were rarely depicted as negative individuals in this particular TV
genre.

Another study on a reality dating show, *Blind Date*, done by De Rose, Fursich and
Hasking (2003), found that reality dating shows featured crude humor and negative
stereotypes specifically when the participants belong to minority groups. This study’s
results are again contrary to those of De Rose et al. This study looked at a total of 15
dating reality shows. Of these, only two featured females that can be described as having
close to negative roles. In 10 out of 15 shows, they were seen as exhibiting very positive
characteristics.

**Implications of the Findings to Theory**

Research results suggest that television creates certain beliefs about reality that
might be held in common by mass communication consumers. That is, people might
think that what may be happening on TV mirrors what is happening in the real world. If
women are mischaracterized on television, this might, according to researchers, make
people think that such portrayals are representative of actual living conditions.

This study provided an overview of what audiences see as portrayals of women in
reality TV programs. Based on the findings, reality TV paints very positive portraits of
women in general and minority women in particular. Although producers have the power
to manipulate these shows through editing and other production techniques, it seems that
overall, women were shown as having attributes that do not run the risk of annoying the
general TV viewing public.
Reality TV has attracted audiences because they are perceived as showing common everyday characters that are closer to them in attributes. When these characters are put in front of the camera to deal with supposedly “real life” situations but were staged by writers and producers, the public monitors to see how such people react to these challenges. It is therefore gratifying to note that women and girls were often seen in these shows as exemplifying positive roles and appearance, and having the same chances to win as any other contestant.

Over the years, researchers have added two axioms to cultivation theory—mainstreaming and resonance. Mainstreaming happens when television dominates other sources of information and ideas about the world, thus causing heavy television viewers to internalize the messages embedded in TV shows regardless of their education, gender, income or any other socio-economic attribute. For example, in this study, Asian women were mostly seen on dating shows. Such a characterization may lead heavy TV viewers to conclude that in general, Asian women are more likely to be single and in search of a date.

Resonance happens when viewers see things on television that are congruent with and thus reaffirm their own realities. For example, in this study, women were mostly portrayed as career professionals. Thus, female audience members may see this portrayal as an affirmation of their own life and strengthen their decision to be less family oriented and more career-focused.

Mainstreaming and resonance can have negative impacts on the audience if the portrayal is negative. As stated in Chapter 2, countries such as Russia, Turkey, France, and Japan have warned their citizens of possible negative effects from watching reality
shows. Furthermore, psychologists have called for the further investigation of the cognitive and psychological effects of this type of program on individuals and groups. However, this study concludes that reality television programs overall portray women positively.

The fact that Caucasian females constituted the great majority of the sample may be a consequence of advertising demands. Because the shows are sponsored by advertisers and not by the networks, there is a need to represent the highest proportion of the consuming public in these shows. For example, according to the Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies (AHAA), only a small percentage of the top 250 TV and print media advertisers in the US spend on minorities despite the fact that Hispanics are estimated to have purchasing power estimated at close to $1.2 trillion by 2010. Still, producers must guarantee these sponsors that reality shows are reaching the target audiences. This suggests that minority female representation might increase during prime time hours if and when advertisers realize the potentials of the minority markets.

Limitations of the Study

Data for this study were collected only during the summer season of 2006, which may have produced a sampling frame that is not representative of all reality shows seen on television. Replicating this study using units of analysis from the fall and spring television seasons, for example, may produce a more extensive categorization of reality shows than was employed in this study. The majority of the shows analyzed in this study were from two particular categories, talent contests and job searches, which may have also influenced the results. With or without a representative sample, however, the lack of
academic research in this area calls for more studies that will systematically detect patterns of women portrayals in these programs over time.

The findings of this study would have been more informative if female portrayals were compared to those of the male characters in the shows. This more comparative analysis would have threshed out if females were indeed being depicted fairly compared to their male cohorts.

A richer description of roles can be achieved by the inclusion of more characteristics or attributes to the series of semantic differential scales used to measure roles and appearances. Data on additional types of roles based on age, sexual preference, and even disabilities, for example, will be more illuminating and more comprehensive in reflecting people’s different life circumstances.

**Suggestions for Future Study**

There is a dearth of research efforts focused on this increasingly popular and financially successful TV program genre. More longitudinal studies that employ content analysis are certainly needed. These data should be matched by empirical studies on actual audience perceptions of women’s roles through survey or focus group techniques. Trend, panel and cohort studies will produce data that can track the performance of reality TV shows and their depictions of women through time.

Following the axioms of cultivation theory, an investigation involving only the top ten network reality shows in terms of audience share will make the sampling frame more manageable.
For more comparative explorations, studies that examine portrayals of women on reality programs aired over the cable networks will be necessary. Such studies will produce results that may lead to more competitive reality TV concepts and programming.

Another relevant area of inquiry will be a critical examination of those sponsoring these reality shows, especially how they impact production decisions.

Measuring how females, especially those in minority and under-represented groups, perceive how their groups are portrayed in shows falling within this genre can help sponsors and producers improve the quality of programs targeted toward them.

Studies that exclusively look at how girls see themselves as being portrayed in these programs are also worth conducting because children have been known to model their behavior on characters they see in the media. Because reality television is a large part of popular culture, they must be analyzed for their intended and unintended effects on children.

Finally, studies that compare different types of prime time shows (i.e., reality shows versus dramas or movies) in terms of how they depict women are also in order.
REFERENCES


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# APPENDIX A: CODEBOOK

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<td>5= professional lifestyle</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6= celebrity-centered</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7= dating</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8= job search</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9= make-over, self-improvement</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10= hoax</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>11= other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>Ethnicity of female character or</td>
<td>1= Asian-American</td>
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<td>participant</td>
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<td>3= White or Caucasian</td>
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| Type2  | Second dimension of role type, victim vs. aggressor                         | 1= victim  
2  
3= neutral  
4  
5= aggressor                                                        |
| Type3  | Third dimension of role type, submissive vs. authoritative                  | 1= submissive  
2  
3= neutral  
4  
5= authoritative                                                   |
| Type4  | Fourth dimension of role type, religious vs. non-religious                  | 1= religious  
2  
3= neutral  
4  
5= non-religious                                                   |
| Type5  | Fifth dimension of role type, athletic vs. non-athletic                    | 1= athletic  
2  
3= neutral  
4  
5= non-athletic                                                   |
| Attitude | Character’s attitude and behavior                                           | 1= negative  
2  
3= neutral  
4  
5= positive                                                      |
| Import | Importance of the role                                                     | 1= minor  
2  
3= neutral  
4  
5= major                                                          |
| Physical | Clothing worn                                                             | 1= neutral  
2= alluring  
3= sexy  
4= very sexy  
5= no clothing at all                                          |
| Win-lose | Whether the female character is winning or losing in the show             | 1= winning  
2= losing  
3= cannot be determined                                         |
APPENDIX B: CONTENT ANALYSIS SCHEDULE - JUNE AND JULY, 2006

Week of June 5 (Week #1)

ABC
Monday- 7:00 PM - Wife Swap

CBS
Wednesday - 7:00 PM - Game Show Marathon
Thursday - 7:00 PM - Game Show Marathon

NBC
Monday- 7:00 PM - Deal or No Deal
8:30 PM - The Apprentice
Tuesday- 7:00 PM - Last Comic Standing
8:00 PM - Last Comic Standing

FOX
Wednesday-7:00 PM - So You Think You Can Dance
8:00 PM - So You Think You Can Dance

Week of June 12 (Week #2)

ABC
Monday- 7:00 PM - Wife Swap
8:00 PM - Super Nanny
9:00 PM - How To Get A Guy

CBS
Tuesday-9:00 PM - Night Book Club
Thursday-7:00 PM - Game Show Marathon

NBC
Tuesday- 7:00 PM - Fear Factor
8:00 PM - Last Comic Standing

FOX
Monday-7:00 to 9:00 PM - Hells Kitchen
Wednesday-7:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance
Thursday- 8:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance

**Week of June 19 (Week #3)**

**ABC**

Monday- 7:00 PM- Wife Swap

8:00 PM- Super Nanny

9:00 PM- How To Get A Guy

Thursday-7:00 PM- Master of Champions

Friday-7:00 PM- America Funniest Videos

**CBS**

Tuesday-9:00 PM- Tuesday Night Club

Wednesday-7:00 PM- Big Brother

Thursday- 7:00 PM- Game Show Marathon

**NBC**

Tuesday- 7:00 PM- Fear Factor

8:00 PM- Last Comic Standing

Wednesday-8:00 to 10:00 PM- America Got Talent

Friday- 8:00 to 10:00 PM- America Got Talent

**FOX**

Monday- 7:00 PM- Hell’s Kitchen

Wednesday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance

Thursday-8:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance

**Week of June 26 (Week #4)**

**ABC**

Monday-7:00 PM- Wife Swap

8:00 PM- Super Nanny

9:00 PM- How To Get A Guy

Thursday-7:00 PM- Master of Champion
Friday-7:00 PM- America Funniest Videos

CBS
Thursday-7:00 PM- Game Show Marathon

NBC
Monday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- Treasure Hunter
Tuesday- 7:00 PM- Fear Factor
          8:00 PM- Last Comic Standing
Wednesday-7:00 PM to 9:00 PM- America Got Talent

FOX
Monday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- Hell’s Kitchen
Wednesday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance
Thursday- 8:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance

Week of July 03 (Week #5)

ABC
Monday- 7:00 PM- Wife Swap
            8:00 PM- Super Nanny
            9:00 PM- How to Get A Guy
Thursday- 7:00 PM- Master of Champions
Friday- 7:00 PM- America Funniest Video

CBS
Wednesday- 7:00 PM- Rock Star Supernova
Thursday-7:00 OM- Big Brother
            8:00 PM-Rock Star Supernova

NBC
Monday-7:00 to 9:00 PM- Treasure Hunter
            7:00 to 7:30 PM- Outrageous
Wednesday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- America Got Talent
FOX
Thursday- 8:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance

Week of July 10 (Week #6)

ABC
Monday- 7:00 PM- Wife Swap
     8:00 PM- Super Nanny
     9:00 PM- Super Nanny
Thursday- 7:00 PM- Master of Champions
Friday- 7:00 PM- America Funniest Video

CBS
Tuesday-7:00 PM- Big Brother
     8:00 PM-Rock Star Supernova
Wednesday-7:00 PM-Rock Star Supernova
Thursday-7:00 PM- Big Brother

NBC
Monday-7:00 to 9:00 PM- Treasure Hunters
Tuesday-7:00 PM- Fear Factor
     8:00 PM- Last Comic Standing
Wednesday-7:00 to 9:00 PM- America Got Talent
Thursday-8:00 PM- America Got Talent

FOX
Monday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- Hell’s Kitchen
Wednesday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance
Thursday- 8:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance
**Week of July 17 (Week #7)**

**ABC**
Monday- 7:00 PM- Wife Swap
   8:00 PM- Super Nanny
   9:00 PM- Rock Star Supernova

Tuesday – 8:00 to 10:00 PM- The One
Wednesday-7:00 to 9:00 PM- The One
Thursday- 7:00 PM- Master of Champions
Friday-7:00 PM- AFV

**CBS**
Tuesday- 7:00 PM- Big Brother
   8:00 PM- Rock Star Supernova
Wednesday- 7:00 PM- Rock Star Supernova
Thursday-7:00 PM- Big Brother
   8:00 PM –Rock Star Supernova

**NBC**
Monday- 7:00 PM- Project Runaway
   8:00 PM- Treasure Hunters
Tuesday- 7:00 PM- Fear Factor
   8:00 PM-Last Comic Standing
Wednesday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- America Got Talent
Thursday- 8:00 PM- America Got Talent

**FOX**
Monday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- Hell’s Kitchen
Wednesday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance
Thursday- 8:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance
Week of July 24 (Week # 8)

**ABC**
- Monday- 7:00 PM- Wife Swap
- Tuesday- 8:00 to 10:00 PM- The One
- Wednesday- 7:00 PM- The One
- Friday- 7:00 PM- AFV

**CBS**
- Tuesday- 7:00 PM- Big Brother
  - 8:00 PM- Rock Star Supernova
- Wednesday- 7:00 PM- Rock Star Supernova
- Thursday- 7:00 PM- Big Brother

**NBC**
- Monday- 7:00 PM- Project Runaway
  - 8:00 PM- Treasure Hunter
- Tuesday- 7:00 PM- Fear Factor
  - 8:00 PM- Last Comic Standing
- Wednesday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- America Got Talent
- Thursday- 8:00 PM- America Got Talent

**FOX**
- Monday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- Hell’s Kitchen
- Wednesday- 7:00 to 9:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance
- Thursday- 8:00 PM- So You Think You Can Dance
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