Money Over Morality: How Reality Television's Rise in Popularity and the Subsequent Monetary Gain Led to a Decrease in Care for Those Who Took Part

Karl Corcoran

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Dr. Ruth Moran

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Declaration of Originality

This thesis is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Hons) [programme name]. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Karl Corcoran

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Abstract

This thesis aimed to draw a correlation between the monetary gain seen from the spike in popularity of reality television and the mistreatment of the members of the public who went on these shows. This study takes an in-depth look at several reality television shows, with the main case studies being *The Jerry Springer Show* and *The Biggest Loser.* This study is backed by qualitative research that reflects how decisions made by producers and networks are driven by a desire to make money, and how this, in turn, leads to a decrease in care for the members of the public who take part.

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Introduction

Reality television is relatively young in comparison to other forms of media and content, yet its reach and impacts on society and trends are widespread, which can be seen from shows like 'Keeping up with the Kardashians',[1] the stars of which have a huge foothold and influence in the fashion and cosmetics world.[2] There is great potential for monetary gain in reality television, with the global reality TV production size in 2024 worth $38.6 billion, a number expected to rise significantly in the coming years.[3] High profits are great for shareholders and showrunners, but usually come at the expense and suffering of those who take part in these shows. Often, the lives of reality television show participants are altered permanently, as many are not equipped to deal with stardom or scrutiny. In extreme cases, some participants have even taken their own lives[4] after appearing on well-known reality television shows such as *The Bachelor,*[5] *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,*[6] *The Voice,*[7] *The Jermy Kyle Show*[8] and several people from *Love Island.*[9]

This study aims to explore the exploitative nature of the reality television world by taking an in-depth look at various reality television shows, specifically from the 1990s and 2000s, when the genre began to take off. The research gathered will examine the way contestants on

[1] *Keeping Up With The Kardashians,* created by Ryan Seacrest, E!, 2007-2021.
[2] King, Emma. "How the Kardashians Became the Biggest Influencers of the 2010s." *British Vogue*, British Vogue, 19 Dec. 2019, www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/kardashian-jenner-familys-impact-on-the-world. Accessed January 23rd 2026
[3] Dataintelo, and Debadatta Patel. "Reality TV Production Market Research Report 2033." *Dataintelo.com*, 30 Sept. 2025, dataintelo.com/report/reality-tv-production-market. Accessed January 23rd 2026
[4] Adegoke, Yomi. "Why Suicide Is Still the Shadow That Hangs over Reality TV." *The Guardian*, 27 May 2020, www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/may/27/why-suicide-is-still-the-shadow-that-hangs-over-reality-tv-hana-kimura-terrace-house. Accessed January 23rd 2026
[5] *The Bachelor,* created by Mike Fleiss, ABC, 2002-present
[6] *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,* executive producer Alex Baskin, Bravo, 2010-present
[7] *The Voice,* created by John de Mol Jr. NBC, 2011-present
[8] *The Jermy Kyle Show,* created by Tom McLennon, ITV, 2005-2019
[9] *Love Island,* created by Melanie Marks, ITV2, 2015-Present

shows were treated, many of whom were taken advantage of or mislead and manipulated by producers.

There is a deep-rooted history of mistreatment in reality television, and this study intends to unearth how this all came to be and why it is not challenged. This study will also examine the power structures in the television industry, which are driving forces in the mistreatment and unethical practises that go on. Producers, out of fear of their superiors and losing their jobs, will go to extreme lengths to deliver entertaining episodes that rate well and, in turn, generate revenue from the advertisements, with little care about what consequences it would have for the contestants on these shows. The main purpose of this study is to take all these factors into consideration and draw a correlation between the rise in ratings and monetary gain and the increasing mistreatment of the contestants and guests.

The driving force of the reality television imbalance, as with many things in this world, is money. Although the public discourse has highlighted a call for change, there has not been much discussion about the root cause of these issues, which is the formula used to create these shows. For the safety of future contestants and guests on shows, it should be mandatory to provide care for people before, during and after participation. It is also of great importance to inspect what has gone wrong in the past, like how a lack of care or provision of mental health services possibly exacerbated situations. Shows still need to generate revenue to survive and need to be entertaining to do this, but not at the expense of someone's dignity. A balance and common ground need to exist; how can the people be protected while also allowing these shows to succeed?

The central question asked in this thesis is how much of a driving force money has been in relation to the mistreatment of contestants and guests on reality television shows. To answer

this question, various reality television shows and their formulas will be examined for unethical practises and the public humiliation of people in the name of entertainment, but actually for the purpose of making money. There will be research into the evolution of reality television for a deeper understanding of what reality television is, to more accurately ask and answer questions in relation to the main thesis topic.

Another aspect of this research will be a look into why people put themselves forward for various shows and why it is people watch reality television, even though most know it is mostly manufactured drama that exploits members of the public. It will be important for this line of questioning to have relevant psychological references to back up the conclusions arrived at in relation to human behaviours.

The theoretical framework in this thesis will focus on human psychology in relation to media, focusing on the producers, contestants and audiences who make, take part in or watch reality television. In relation to those who make this form of television, the ethical and moral issues that arise when making certain types of reality television will be examined. It is important to question the actions of these producers and hold them to a standard against what is considered morally ethical in most of society to determine if what they have participated in is inherently good or bad.

For contestants, the why of it all will be key. Why is it that people put themselves forward for various types of reality television? Is it money, fame, or help? Or are they tricked and lied to by producers? Misled and deceived. Have they seen others have success and been driven by jealousy and desire? Or is it a complicated mix of all these things?

When it comes to the nature of the audience, the aim is to discover what it is that connects with people and gets them to latch on and how it is that those who make the show get people to engage. At the end of the day, none of these shows happens without the audience. They must be kept happy and wanting more. So how is it that these shows can be made while being both entertaining and also treating people with basic human dignity? It should be an important aspect that every show follows a set of strict guidelines.

The methodology overview will be a mix of different styles applied to different sections of this thesis. For the history of reality television, a textual analysis will be implemented from a variety of sources to set up a good foundation for this thesis. This method will also be used to find the data to back up claims and theories relating to human psychology, ethics and morality to accurately conclude the research findings.

To examine the variety of reality TV from the 1990s and 2000s, as well as the nature of the behind-the-scenes practices on these shows, there will be an analysis of the viewership data and the revenue shows generated. Alongside this data, there will be an analysis of the evolving nature of what contestants were put through, and these two sets of data will be analysed for correlation or pattern.

There will also be two main case studies in this thesis. Both of which are documentaries made about reality television shows. They are: *Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action*[10] and *Fit For Tv: The Reality of The Biggest Loser.*[11] Both these documentaries contain testimonials from producers on the show and contestants and guests who came onto these shows. This is an

[10] *Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action,* created by Luke Sewell, season 1, Netflix, 2025
[11] *Fit For TV: The Reality of The Biggest Loser' directed by Skye Borgman, season 1 Netflix 2025*

important dynamic to include in this thesis as it breathes some human lived experiences into the research. It also provides an insight into both sides of the story. From those who made the show and those who took part.

This thesis will be comprised of five chapters. There will be an introduction chapter, which is this current one. Three analysis chapters and a conclusion chapter

Chapter 2: First analysis.

This chapter will focus on the history of reality television. How it has evolved over the years, and the different types of reality shows, taking a look at how the shows are made, why it is we watch them, and why is it people go on them.

Chapter 3: Second Analysis: case study 2 - *Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action*

This chapter will analyse the first case study in this thesis, analysing *The Jerry Springer Show,*[12] which is an important piece of media in relation to this thesis topic as it was a catalyst for the public acceptance of the mistreatment of members of the public in media during the 1990s. There is also great evidence to backup the argument of producer misconduct from testimonials of those who worked on the show in the documentary that aired on Netflix

Chapter 4: Second Analysis: Case Study 1 - *Fit For Tv: The Reality of The Biggest Loser*

This chapter will analyse *The Biggest Loser*[13] in a similar way as in the previous chapter but with the intention of gathering different findings. As this show is a long term reality based format, unlike *The Jerry Springer Show,* this analysis will provide insights into damages in

[12] The Jerry Springer Show, created by Burt Dubrow, NBCUniversal, 1991-2018
[13] *The Biggest Loser* created by David Broome, NBC 2004

manipulation that have lasting effects on people's lives, with several testimonials from previous contestants on the show.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

After all is written and done in the previous chapters, there should be enough evidence compiled to lay out strong conclusions for the end. In the conclusion chapter, all the pieces will be put together and compiled so that everything researched presents a coherent argument that reflects how greed from producers and network executives led to people being exposed to unethical situations on reality television shows.

Overall, this study is important as it highlights past welfare issues for reality television participants, which still bleed into the modern formats. In fact, it will be shown that these issues are still alive today, but they should have no place at all. The data extracted from a variety of sources will also back up the claims being made regarding the root causes and driving forces, which are money and greed. It will be argued is what has blinded producers and network executives as they have ignored the consequences and lasting effects their actions have had on participants over the years. In many cases, altering the direction of people's lives, sometimes for the better, most often for the worse. For the reader, this should shed new light on the issues and controversies surrounding reality television formats and will hopefully leave them asking if they should support certain versions of reality television. The end goal is to weigh up the moral efficacy of reality television and determine if people's dignity and mental health should not be sacrificed for the sake of entertainment and rising shareholder value. A question which is rarely asked and often ignored by most people, maybe because many are unaware or don't know how these shows are made. Hopefully, this will provide a full picture based in fact and

findings that have accurately argued this case, and one which will leave the reader with a new mindset and outlook on these issues.

Chapter 2: History of Reality Television

This chapter will focus on the history of reality television and how it has evolved over the years, and the different forms it takes. This chapter will also delve into how the shows are made, why it is we watch them and why people choose to put themselves forward for them. These are important topics to explore in the context of the wider research question. By laying out and understanding the framework of reality television and the human interaction with it, the research and findings in the following chapters will have a better foundation for more accurate analysis. The information gathered here is key to understanding how the nature of reality television came to be.

The term 'Reality Television' is a broad term that covers many different types of television entertainment. According to Niedzwiecki and Morris, Reality television has elements of documentary, drama, sitcom and tabloid journalism. It may be a catchall with no firm footing, and due to its ever-evolving nature, it cannot have one permanent definition. Therefore, researchers will usually focus on a particular aspect of the genre as a whole.[14]

In this study, the main areas of focus will be on reality television shows that are non-scripted and feature members of the public coming into the public eye in search of fame, money or personal growth. Reality television casts such a wide net over the entertainment industry, with a wide range of programs and formats such as talent shows, game shows, talk shows, melodramas and sports.[15] Due to the complex nature and definition of reality television as a whole, there will not be an in-depth analysis of these subgenres in this chapter, but rather an overview of the various formats and their origins.

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[14] Niedzwiecki, Charissa K. and Pamela L. Morris. "Reality Television." The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Communication Research Methods. Vol. 4. P.1406

[15] Hill, Annette. *Reality TV*. London ; New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015,

Following that, a look into how some changed the industry and began to give shape to what we now consider reality television.

One of the earliest examples of reality television was the show *Candid Camera*, which began as a radio show called *Candid Microphone*. The show used hidden cameras to capture footage of pranks or hoaxes being played on members of the general public.[16]

The pranks on this show were generally quite innocent and harmless. They would consist of unusual circumstances taking place in public spaces in which actors played along, pretending to also be confused by the scenarios to help sell the lie to the target.

A part of this shows that success is rooted in our human nature, in which we get joy from the misfortune of others.[17] This concept is often referred to as schadenfreude. Part of this television show's success can be attributed to this concept.

This show gave the public an easily consumable premise in which they could view others in vulnerable and honest scenarios. Despite some aspects of the show being scripted, planned and controlled, the reactions of the unsuspecting participants were honest and full of truth from the bizarre situations. This was the unique selling point of this show and what the audience connected with.

It was clear there was an appetite for this type of programming as the show's popularity grew, but the show's popularity went up and down. When it moved to CBS in the 1960s, it became one of the top ten shows for a period of seven years[18] and over the years, it has had several

[16] Newcomb, Horace, et al. *Encyclopaedia of Television*. Chicago, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997. P.444

[17] Hershman-Shitrit, M., & Cohen, J. (2018). Why do we enjoy reality shows: Is it really all about humiliation and gloating? *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications, 30*(2), 104–111. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000186

[18] Newcomb, Horace, et al. *Encyclopaedia of Television*. Chicago, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997. P444

revivals and inspired other similar shows, such as *Punk'd*,[19] *Boiling Points*,[20] *Totally Hidden Video*[21] and many more. This show created a shift in what was possible to be made for television. But the genre would continue to evolve over the coming years, with the next big leap happening in the 1970s.

In 1973, the show *An American Family*[22] premiered on PBS, and the following year, *The Family*[23] premiered on the BBC. An American Family was a pioneer for reality television. Bill and Pat Loud, along with their five children, were filmed by camera crews over seven months. 300 hours of footage were recorded, and this was then made into 12, 1-hour episodes, which were viewed by over 10 million people in 1973.[24] *The Family* was a similar concept; it followed the Wilkins family from Reading.

This approach to filmmaking broke new ground and was received well by the public, as reflected in the viewership.[25] Both of these documentaries aimed to capture the everyday lives of the families. There was a terrible aftermath for both families following these shows. The Wilkens struggled for years following the media frenzy and public judgment.[26] and the Louds had millions watch their family drama unfold, including the parents divorcing and the eldest son, Lance, coming out as gay. Something rarely done in those day as throughout America in the 1970s, 70 per cent of people found homosexual relations to be wrong[27]

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[19] *Punk'd,* created by Ashton Kutcher and Jason Goldberg, MTV 2003-2007
[20] *Boiling Points,* MTV, 2003-2007
[21] *Totally Hidden Video,* presented by Steve Skrovan, Fox, 1989-1991
[22] *An American Family,* produced by Craig Gilbert, PBS, 1973
[23] *The Family,* produced by, Paul Watson, BBC1, 1974
[24] Gray, Tim (2018) 'Before 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians,' There was PBS 'An American Family' https://variety.com/2018/vintage/features/reality-tv-an-american-family-1202660360/ Accessed November 15th 2025
[25] "The Family First Episode." *Www.bbc.com*, www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/anniversaries/april/the-family. Accessed November 3rd 2026
[26] Independent, 1999 https://www.independent.co.uk/news/the-wilkinses-of-reading-where-are-they-now-1082290.html
[27] De Boer, Connie. "The Polls: Attitudes Toward Homosexuality." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1978, pp. 265–76. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2748395. Accessed 14 Oct. 2025.

This would have had a heavy psychological toll for the members of both families, who were publicly scrutinised,[28] as their deeply personal issues became known to millions.[29] Perhaps an overlooked and maybe unknown consequence from taking part in what essentially was an experiment, as nothing of this nature had ever been done before. The success of these programmes would begin a new wave of observational documentary-style shows, which had elements of modern reality television.

Such shows as *The Big Time*[30], which first ran from 1976 to 1981. The premise was that ordinary people got to live out their dream careers for a day. Like Sheena Easton, who was given the chance to make a song and ended up having two top 20 songs afterwards.[31]
Or *Real People*[32], which ran from 1979 to 1983 and featured video segments where ordinary people would come on and showcase their strange talents or abilities. In these shows, members of the public were seen in contrived or unnatural scenarios, yet what remained, and what the viewers loved about these shows, was that they saw people reacting so earnestly. Shows of this nature gave people at that time a peek into human nature. They were able to see how everyday people conducted themselves in unique and bizarre situations.

As people nowadays can see anything they want, whenever they want to, it may be hard to imagine what a novelty this would have been at the time. People are curious by nature, and such entertainment on television would have been hard to turn off.

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[28] Kelly, Liam. "The Family at 50: Inside Britain's Pioneering Docusoap." *The Telegraph*, 15 Aug. 2024, www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/0/the-family-wilkins-bbc-one-reality-documentary/?ICID=continue_without_subscribing_reg_first. Accessed 14 Oct. 2025.
[29] PCI Centres. "The Dark Side of the Spotlight: How Fame Affects Mental Health." *PCI Westlake Centres*, 8 Aug. 2023, www.pcicenters.com/fame-affects-celebrity-mental-health/.
[30] *The Big Time,* produced by Eshter Rantzen, BBC1, 1976-1981
[31] Pitman, John '*The Big Time: Sheena Easton: The Making of a Star'* 18th April, 1981 https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/ba942ed2083a423c990df0fac1f234d0
[32] *Real People,* directed by David Caldwell, NBC, 1979-1984

After this programming came what many refer to as the camcorder era of television, which was a result of the new, lightweight equipment available that gave filmmakers more freedom to make run-and-gun style programming.

Another factor that helped launch this style of programming, which would help define a large portion of the reality television style and approach, was the 1988 strike by the Writers Guild of America, which lasted 154 days.[33] In this strike, writers who sought payment for reruns as well as more creative rights[34], CBS reported that over $500 million was lost in revenue, and reruns ran constantly, with many people not watching at all, while 10 per cent never watched again.[35] With the strike and lack of content to play, networks looked to other avenues to fill time slots, such as sports and began to see what they could make that did not require writers. This left space for shows like *Cops*[36] and *America's Most Wanted*[37] to take off. These shows were a smash hit, but also cost a fraction of the cost of the programming on networks at that time. Producers estimated that an episode of *Cops* cost around $200,000 to make. Around a third of what a prime-time sit-com costs to make[38].

This would have caused a shift in the mindset of producers. Without the added costs of actors, writer and crews, they could cut down heavily on costs, which gave the show a greater net profit.

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[33] Sen, Mallika. Farrar, Jennifer "This Isn't the First Time Hollywood's Been on Strike. Here's How Past Strikes Turned Out." *AP News*, 18 July 2023, https://apnews.com/article/past-hollywood-strikes-62de005f62e38dd09b38cd591ea26123

[34] "A History of WGA Contract Negotiations and Gains." *Www.wga.org*, www.wga.org/the-guild/about-us/history/a-history-of-wga-contract-negotiations-and-gains.

[35] Mandell, Jonathan "Recalling 1988 Strike - CBS News." *Www.cbsnews.com*, 2 Nov. 2007, www.cbsnews.com/news/recalling-1988-strike/ Accessed November 6th 2025

[36] *Cops,* created by John Langly, Fox, 1989-2013

[37] *America's Most Wanted,* Michael Linder, Fox, 1988-2011

[38] Doyle, Aaron, Arresting images : crime and policing in front of the television camera 2003, P33

The series 'Cops' has made 400 million from airing the reruns alone.[39] A lower percentage of these profits, therefore, gets paid out to those who helped make the show. The money stays in the network. It would make sense, therefore, from a business perspective, to explore more shows that can be made in similar ways. The networks had the capabilities and evidence to show them that this type of programming could be successful. What they needed next were concepts they could apply these methods to that would entertain viewers.

In 1991, a Dutch television show named *Nummer 28* aired.[40] This was a hidden camera show in which 7 university students lived in a house together. This show ran for one season and was the first of its kind, as it had strangers being filmed living in a space, though it didn't have any games or interference from producers and was purely observational.

The following year saw a similar show air on MTV called *The Real World*[41], in which seven young creatives aged 18-25 lived together in a loft in New York City. The pacing and style of this show established the modern form of reality television. It introduced the confessional interview style, which was used as a narrative storytelling device.

Alongside that show, this was edited closer in style to an upbeat, fun and exciting soap opera rather than an observational documentary. This involved manufacturing drama or unimportant aspects being blown out of proportion through sly editing techniques for the sake of entertainment. This is because watching people going about their lives can be boring. Derman and Yilmaz argue that the model of reality television thrives on prearranged storylines and fabricated narratives[42]. This theory could be seen in the early days of 'The Real World' and

[39] Jurgensen, John, Wall Street Journal 'Cops': Making Crime Pay November 16, 2012 https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323551004578117362117479612

[40] *Nummer 28* , directed by Joost Tholens, season 1, Today Tv, 1991

[41] *The Real World* created by Mary-Ellis Bunim, Jonathan Murray, season 1, MTV, May. 21, 1991

[42] Derman, Giray. Yılmaz, Ozan 'The Reality Paradox: Controversies, Reflections and Responsibilities' *International Journal of Social and Economic Sciences* 2023 P.40

later took off in other series. *The Real World* went on to become one of MTVs longest running series, having a total of 33 seasons.

Over the next few years, a few networks began to experiment with the reality television genre with shows such as *Eco-Challenge*[43], *Road Rules*[44], and *The Challenge*[45], which all ran for many seasons and had great success. But the shows that became worldwide hits and forged the path for reality television were *Big Brother*[46] and *Survivor*[47], and they brought reality television into the public discourse. Following this, there was a surge of various reality shows that spawned.[48] The potential of reality television was being recognised, and soon it would cause a whole new era of television was rising.

[43] *Eco-Challenge* Mark Burnett, season 1, Discovery Channel, April, 1, 1995
[44] *Road Rules* Mary-Ellis Bunim, Jonathan Murray, season 1, MTV, July 19 1995
[45] *The challenge* Mary-Ellis Bunim, Jonathan Murray, season 1, MTV, April 20 1998
[46] *Big Brother,* John de Mol Jr. season 1, Channel 4, 18th July 2000
[47] *Survivor*, Charlie Parsons, season 1, CBS, May 31st 2000
[48] Cort, Amanda 'Journal of Intellectual Property and Entertainment Law' Volume 13, Spring 2024. P. 427

Analysis 2 - Case Study

The Jerry Springer Show

This chapter will analyse the reality television show, *The Jerry Springer Show*[49], which is a significant piece of media in relation to this thesis for several reasons and is a prime example of how the influx of money can result in the mistreatment of people in the reality television industry. The chapter will also analyse how producers are complicit in this unethical treatment as a result of the structure and power dynamics within the industry. A key source in this chapter will be the documentary *Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action*[50], which contains interviews with producers and guests from *The Jerry Springer Show*. The testimonies given in this documentary discuss the exploitative nature of the show and how profits were made from the public humiliation of those who went on. The producers under Richard Dominik also discuss the pressures of working on this show and how it affected them, which provides firsthand insight into why producers make the decisions they do.

The Jerry Springer Show first aired in 1991, and more than 5000 episodes were made over the course of its 27 seasons.[51] Jerry Springer began his broadcast career as a reporter for a local television station and would later become a news anchor on the same station. He won seven Emmy awards for his contributions before making the switch to his talk show.[52]

In the early seasons, *The Jerry Springer Show* was centred around politics and was serious in its tone and topics of discussion. According to Robert Feder, a media critic who features in the documentary, the show wasn't being received well, which prompted stations to move it from

[49] The Jerry Springer Show, created by Burt Dubrow, NBCUniversal, 1991-2018
[50] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, season 1, Netflix, 2025
[51] Honderich, Holly. "Jerry Springer - Godfather of Reality TV." *Bbc.com*, BBC News, 27 Apr. 2023 www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-65420566.
[52] "Jerry Springer | Biography, TV Show, & Facts | Britannica." *Www.britannica.com*, www.britannica.com/biography/Jerry-Springer.

its daytime slot to one o'clock in the morning.[53] Better known as the graveyard slot[54] due to the low viewer ratings and the tendency of shows placed here getting cancelled.

The Jerry Springer Show needed to get its viewership numbers up during this time; failure to do so would result in its cancellation. The direction of the show took a turn when Richard Dominick took over as executive producer from Burt Dubrow. Dominick planned to create a talk show that was wild and sexy[55], modelling the show on what was popular and controversial at the time during the American Culture Wars in the 1990s, in which orthodox values were challenged by progressive movements.[56] The 1990s were a time when boundaries were pushed in the media, sparking outrage over content that contained promiscuity, racial issues, violence, satanism and drug use; all of which could be seen on 'The Jerry Springer Show'.

In this chapter, various theories will be used to critically analyse *The Jerry Springer Show*, such as audience theory, media ethics and power structures in the workplace. These methods will be used to comparatively analyse the Jerry Springer show in the media landscape to accurately unearth the negative and dangerous aspects of the show, but also to understand how and why the show became so popular.

After Richard took over as executive producer of *The Jerry Springer Show*, its content changed drastically. As the show was now shown at 2 a.m., more explicit content could go on air due to the "Safe harbour" period[57] between 10 PM and 6 AM, where the rules were more lenient as to what could be shown on television, as children are unlikely to be watching during these hours.

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[53] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, Netflix, 2025 (06:52)

[54] Collins Dictionary defines 'Graveyard Slot' as "The hours from late night until early morning when the number of people watching television is at its lowest." https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/graveyard-slot

[55] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, Netflix, 2025 (07:40)

[56] Hartlep, Nicholas D. "Culture Wars and Enduring American Dilemmas by Irene Taviss Thomson." *The Journal of American Culture*, vol. 33, no. 4, Dec. 2010, pp. 342–342, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734x.2010.00756_6.x. Accessed 9 Jan. 2020. pp.4

[57] Veney, Bryant "A History of TV Censorship in America." *CableCompare.com*, www.cablecompare.com/blog/a-history-of-tv-censorship-in-america. October 14th 2025

These new rules arose due to the rise in popularity of cable television in the 1980s and 1990s[58], which in turn led to deregulation in broadcasting across America. This change led to various channels, such as HBO, Showtime and MTV being able to have shows with more explicit content, such as graphic violence, swearing and nudity.[59] Dominick saw the changing landscape of television during this time and used it to his advantage. If Jerry Springer aired at 2 in the morning, they should lean into the explicit content[60].

'The Jerry Springer Show' began its metamorphosis during these early experimental changes, where Dominick tested the waters to see what rated well and what he could get away with. Dominick was demanding of his staff and specific about what he wanted for the show, aiming for shock value to catch people's attention when flicking through the channels.[61]

The viewership began to rise steadily, which led to the show getting back its daytime slot, while also keeping its nighttime slot. This meant it was getting two sources of ratings. But all of this did not come without trouble for Richard, whose network superiors were not pleased. [62]

The show generated significantly higher ratings when leaning into the controversial themes popularised during this decade, which got eyes on shows. These themes were violence, nudity and profanity, as stated previously. This type of content was new and exciting for viewers. Dominick spotted a gap in the market which he capitalised on. The goal was to make a talk show that was off the walls, unexpected and more explicit than anything being shown at the time

[58] Adgate, Brad. "The Rise and Fall of Cable Television." *Forbes*, 2 Nov. 2020, www.forbes.com/sites/bradadgate/2020/11/02/the-rise-and-fall-of-cable-television/.
[59] Veney, Bryant "A History of TV Censorship in America." *CableCompare.com*, www.cablecompare.com/blog/a-history-of-tv-censorship-in-america. October 14th 2025
[60] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, Netflix, 2025 (09:55)
[61] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, Netflix, 2025 (10:41)
[62] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, Netflix, 2025 (13:00)

Speaking on the show's content in relation to ratings, Annette Grundy, one of the show's producers, stated in the documentary that you could help the little kid and get a 1.9 (million viewers) or have the pimp and prostitute and get 3.7 (million)[63]

This is an example of the thought process and justification that is made by those who worked on the show, as they were ok with showing explicit, morally questionable content so long as it rated well.

When the show was bought by Universal Television from Multimedia Television, Richard, Jerry and the staff got free rein over what they could do. Whereas Multimedia Television would tell them to tone the show down, Universal Television encouraged them to push the boundaries.[64] The show now had its formula and the permission to use it.

Over the years, the ratings of 'The Jerry Springer Show' rose steadily as its fanbase grew. The show's viewership even doubled in size between November 1996 and November 1997 to more than 6.7 million viewers.[65] And for a brief time in February 1998, beating Oprah for the number one daytime talk show spot on the Nielsen ratings.[66] The reaction and engagement from the public is evidence that Dominick was right about the gap in the market for this type of programming, but it is also a reflection of the changing landscape of television during this time, in which the public showed an interest in outrage programming. The Jerry Springer show was one of the show breaking down barriers and moved the line, challenging what was ok in the

[63] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, Netflix, 2025 (13:24)
[64] Bella, Timothy. "When Jerry Springer's "Vulgarity Circus" Ruled Daytime TV and Took on Oprah." *Washington Post*, 28 Apr. 2023, www.washingtonpost.com/history/2023/04/27/jerry-springer-tv-show-ratings/.
[65] Matelski, Marilyn J. "Jerry Springer and the Wages of Fin-Syn: The Rise of Deregulation and the Decline of TV Talk." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1 Mar. 2000, pp. 63–75, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0022-3840.2000.3304_63.x Accessed 18 Mar. 2025.
[66] Littleton, Cynthia. "Springer Tops Winfrey for the First Time." *Variety*, 5 Mar. 1998, variety.com/1998/tv/news/springer-tops-winfrey-for-the-first-time-1117468435/. Accessed 11 Nov. 2025.

public's mind of what was ok to do and show on television. *The Jerry Springer Show* allowed people to be humiliated on television for entertainment.

The formula that Richard Dominick constructed relied heavily on the fear and intimidation of his staff. In the documentary, there are several instances in which the producers talk about how they viewed Richard and the fear he instilled. Melinda Chait Mele described Dominick as intense and scary[67], and Toby Yoshimura said he was like a mob boss.[68] Dominic would act like a bully towards his staff, whom he overworked. The production team would make 200 shows a year, which amounts to 30 to 40 shows a year per producer.[69]

The pressure and psychological effect this style of leadership has on people in their jobs is well documented and researched, for instance, in a study on the impact of abusive leadership, which indicated that this behaviour can lead to employees engaging in similar unethical behaviour. This study also mentions that such behaviour from a superior can lead to job insecurity, emotional exhaustion, interpersonal aggression and a slew of other dysfunctional workplace behaviour.[70]

On top of all this, the producers also mention the pressure they were under to deliver episodes that rated well. With constant threats that if they did not deliver, they would lose their jobs. The show wasn't about helping people or saving anyone; it was about entertaining with the end goal of getting high viewing numbers, which ultimately generated revenue from advertisers.[71]

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[67] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, (15:13) Netflix, 2025
[68] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, (18:34) Netflix, 2025
[69] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, (29:20) Netflix, 2025
[70] Li, Miao, et al. "Impact of Abusive Leader Behaviour on Employee Job Insecurity: A Mediating Roles of Emotional Exhaustion and Abusive Peer Behaviour." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 13, 22 Aug. 2022, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.947258. pp, 1,3
[71] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, (36:27) Netflix, 2025

There can be similarities found between working as a producer on 'The Jerry Springer Show' and a salesperson's role, even though they are vastly different industries. Both roles are highly competitive, pressuring positions, in which the end goal is to secure participation from potential guests or buyers, with both roles also requiring a degree of persuasion and emotional manipulation under tight deadlines. A salesperson is required to meet certain targets as a Jerry Springer producer needs to create dramatic episodes that entertain. There is a great deal of job insecurity in both these roles, which in turn can lead to workers trying to get results by any means and bending their moral code to survive and remain in their position. There is a common term known as Low Sales Performance (LSP) in which workers experience depressive episodes from underperforming at work, as they fail to meet targets, and negative feelings emerge as a result. Emotional exhaustion is common in roles where physical and emotional depletion occur from excessive job demands.[72]

On *The Jerry Springer Show,* all these factors combined to make up an environment where pressure trickled down to the show's producers, who got their desired results by any means necessary. This was achieved by emotionally manipulating and deceiving those who came onto the show. The producers would source guests who were likely to create entertaining television, with the hopes that things would end in a fight. According to Rober Feder, there was a direct relationship between violence and ratings.[73]

An episode that aired in 1997 called 'Klanfrontation'[74] became the pivotal turning point for the show. Irv Ruben, the founder of the Jewish Defence League, was to speak with members of the Ku Klux Klan. But the emotions on both sides quickly spiralled out of control, and an intense

[72] Amyx, Douglas, and Larry Jarrell. "The Influence of Salesperson Depression, Low Performance, and Emotional Exhaustion on Negative Organizational Deviance." *Journal of Managerial Issues*, vol. 28, no. 3/4, 2016, pp. 127–44. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44113701. Accessed 1 Feb. 2026. Pp. 130

[73] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, (24:12) Netflix, 2025

[74] The Jerry Springer Show, created by Burt Dubrow, Season 7, episode 2, NBCUniversal (1997)

fight broke out. This episode rated extremely high[75], from then the show evolved to suit the appetite for violence of the viewers at home, which would generate views. The show became a circus where people would come on and settle their differences, often with physical altercations, for the public to consume.

From then on, the goal became to source guests who could be emotionally manipulated and coerced into a fight, charged up by their circumstances. For example, a love triangle or people with opposing beliefs. The guests would also usually come from small towns, and the producers would lure people onto the show by giving them special treatment. In essence, the producers are buying the emotional performances with sympathy and friendship or more lucrative opportunities or promises.[76] The producers would mislead people by exaggerating what a great opportunity it was to go on *The Jerry Springer Show* and share their story. Once guests had been sourced who had the potential to rate well, the producers put them through their carefully constructed system to ensure they got the best results from them on the day. Melanie, a guest on the Jerry Springer Show, who also appears as a contributor in the documentary, describes in detail how they would make guests feel like royalty. Picking them up in limos, staying in fancy hotels and giving them unlimited free drinks, but on the day of the episode recording, the producers flipped the switch and began to produce the guests so they would perform as needed for the show.[77]

There was a term for getting manipulated by the producer of *The Jerry Springer Show,* simply called getting "Springered". In the documentary, producer Toby Yoshimura describes how he would prepare them for the show by throwing open the dressing room door, picking up chairs

[75] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1 (22:33) Netflix, 2025
[76] Grindstaff, Laura. *The Money Shot : Trash, Class, and the Making of TV Talk Shows*. Chicago ; London, University Of Chicago Press, 2002. Pp 244
[77] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1 (32:20) Netflix, 2025

and throwing them, screaming and getting the energy and emotions running high. He said you had to reach into their brain and tap on the thing that would make them laugh, cry, or scream in a fight. The producers speak about how they would rehearse scenarios with guests before they sent them out on stage, and there are several videos in the documentary on them doing exactly that. Tobi then says he would rev them up to tornado level, then send them out.[78]

These testimonies from the producers of *The Jerry Springer Show* detail how they would carefully orchestrate and manipulate people to go on television and engage in violence. These people would go on and expose themselves and their very private personal situations to the public, who would jeer, ridicule and laugh at them. In the previously referenced book by Grindstaff, the writer argues that day time talks shows such as *The Jerry Springer Show* are guilty of class exploitation, deliberately going after more vulnerable people and making entertainment out of their unfortunate situations.[79]

To ensure the guests would go out and do as they were told, the producers also threatened not to give them their plane tickets for their return flight home. This leverage was used on Nancy Campbell-Panitz, whose son appears in the documentary. Retelling the story of his mother's experience on *The Jerry Springer Show*. Nancy's appearance on the show ultimately led to her murder in July 2000; no one from the show was prosecuted. The findings from the research in this chapter reflect a clear lack of care for the well-being of the guests who would come onto *The Jerry Springer Show*. The show became a vicious cycle. Richard Dominick would demand good ratings, and this pressure trickled down to the producers who feared for their jobs and, as a result, would exploit anyone they could in order to get the results they

[78] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1 (33:55) Netflix, 202
[79] Grindstaff, Laura. *The Money Shot : Trash, Class, and the Making of TV Talk Shows*. Chicago ; London, University Of Chicago Press, 2002. Pp 253

wanted from them. They did not care about the mental strain this all had on people, or the knock-on permanent effects it had on their lives. One of the show's producers described it as the Stanford prison experiment[80], saying they would play with people's psyches until they got a result[81]. This show kicked open the door for the mistreatment of the public, and it became normal to see people exposing themselves on television on reality shows that came in the early 2000s. There was clearly money to be made from exploitation, as seen from the high ratings and millions of dollars *The Jerry Springer Show* generated in ad revenue. There is a clear correlation on this show between success and the exploitation of people for profit.

[80] Zimbardo, Philip G. "The Stanford Prison Experiment: A Simulation Study of the Psychology of Imprisonment." *Stanford Prison Experiment*, 1999–2026,

[81] Jerry Springer: Fights, Camera, Action, created by Luke Sewell, episode 1, season 1, (46:50)

Chapter 3 – Case Study

The Biggest Loser

The Biggest Loser[82] (TBL) was a reality television show that first aired in 2004 and ran for 17 seasons. With many successful spin-offs abroad. This show, which became an international brand, made hundreds of millions in revenue from its broadcast, products and endorsements during this time. The idea for the show came to its creator and executive producer, David Broom, when he was leaving the gym. On the gym's bulletin board hung a poster asking for help. Put up by an obese person seeking a trainer to help save their life.[83] At the time in America, there was an obesity epidemic[84], and Broom believed, rightly so, that there was a gap in the market for this type of reality entertainment show. Certainly, it would change the way in which reality television was viewed.

The title name 'The Biggest Loser' can be thought to reveal the true nature of this television show. It is purposefully misleading. When read, most would believe it to be about losers in relation to the dictionary definition. Without the context that it is a weight-loss show, the title can be misinterpreted. The title's actual meaning is in reference to the show's goal. The contestant who loses the largest percentage of their body weight wins the competition and receives the prize money. This all becomes clear when the show begins. But the subconscious message to the audience remains. The producers wanted viewers to think of those who go on the show as "losers". Portraying them as less than. This is to ease the audience into a mindset of mocking and ridiculing the contestants, who are humiliated on television under the guise of a health transformation for their benefit. This chapter will examine how the 300-plus contestants who went on *The Biggest Loser* were exploited for monetary gain and how their

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[82] '*The Biggest Loser'* created by David Broome, NBC 2004

[83] '*Fit For TV: The Reality of The Biggest Loser' directed by Skye Borgman, Netflix 2025*

[84] Sturm, R. "Increases in morbid obesity in the USA: 2000-2005." *Public health*vol. 121,7 (2007): 492-6. doi:10.1016/j.puhe.2007.01.006

"healthy" transformations were dangerous. The lives of those who went on the show were left with lifelong physical and mental trauma due to the lack of care from the trainers, producers and NBC.

Perceptions of obesity only began to turn negative in the latter half of the 20th century[85]. This was due to the social implications of being obese. Over time, as a result of industrial advances, food became less scarce. And after World War 2, food was easily accessible to most of the Western world. Obesity once gave one status. It was a sign of wealth. But over the years, the public perception has become increasingly negative. Being overweight began to be seen as "unattractive" but more importantly, unhealthy.

In the 1950s, Ancel Keys linked obesity and diet to clogged arteries and heart attacks. And several studies in the 1990s, such as 'A prospective study of Obesity and Risk of Coronary Heart Disease in women'[86]. The public's mindset towards obesity began to slowly shift between these two decades. This evidence can also be recognised by looking at the evolution of so-called "beauty standards" in the 1990s. A trend dubbed 'Heroin chic', which came with its own health risks from malnutrition.

Obesity in America began to be associated with the sins of gluttony and greed. With the redemption being fat loss[87], the mindset, along with the discoveries in health, can be attributed to the success of TBL in the early 2000s. It also presents solid reasoning and motivation for why people would want to go on this show.

The reference cited from the previous paragraph conducted a study that examined episodes from TBL to determine people's motivations for going on the show. As stated in the contestants'

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[85] Eknoyan, Garabed. "A history of obesity, or how what was good became ugly and then bad." *Advances in chronic kidney disease* vol. 13,4 (2006): 421-7. doi:10.1053/j.ackd.2006.07.002

[86] "A Prospective Study of Obesity and Risk of Coronary Heart Disease in Women." *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 322, no. 13, Mar. 1990, pp. 882–89. https://doi.org/10.1056/nejm199003293221303.

[87] Ingraham, Natalie. ""Mend This Fractured Family": Sin, Redemption, and Familial Citizenship on NBC's "the Biggest Loser."" *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 44, no. 7, 27 Apr. 2022, pp. 1255–1271, https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221088953. Accessed 12 Feb. 2023.

opening statements, where they discuss their family background, current body size/health status and why they went on TBL. The study concluded that the most common motivation for applying to The Biggest Loser was a desire to be healthier for familial reasons. These include such reasons as being a better role model and setting a good example, or being healthier so they're parenting abilities would improve. Guilt among the mothers was common, and fathers were worried about dying early.

In the documentary *Fit For TV: The Reality of The Biggest Loser*, the producers say that in season one, around 500 people applied to be on the show. Whereas in the following seasons, thousands and thousands of people applied[88]. This reflects the rapid growth of TBL, but also how impactful its formula was on its overweight audience. Over 65% of Americans were overweight at this time. Many viewers could imagine themselves in this situation, unlike other reality television shows at the time, like Survivor.[89] This meant people were more likely to relate to and connect with what they saw on screen. Many are offended, and some find it inspiring[90]. So much so that many ended up applying to go on the show.

The show portrayed obese people in a negative light. Framing the result of weight loss as a happy ending. Viewers would have seen this on their screens and only seen one side of the story. The happy ending and the winner walking away with a significant cash prize. But what isn't talked about is the negative mental and physical side effects and aftermath of what contestants went through on the show.

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[88] *Fit For TV: The Reality of The Biggest Loser' directed by Skye Borgman, Netflix 2025 episode 1 (15:46)*

[89] Mocarski, Richard, and Kimberly Bissell. "Edutainment's Impact on Health Promotion." *Health Promotion Practice*, vol. 17, no. 1, 3 Nov. 2015, pp. 107–115, https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839915613026

[90] Barry, Adam E, and Anna K Piazza-Gardner. *Applying the Transtheoretical Model to Reality Television: The Biggest Loser Case Study.* Vol. 3, no. 1, 1 Jan. 2012, pp. 20–26. Accessed 5 Dec. 2025.

The unsafe practices on the show were able to transpire because of the detailed contracts contestants had to sign before going on the show. They were described in the documentary as thick in size and written in a complex style only comprehensible to lawyers. These contracts were signed in haste, and when one potential competitor asked for an attorney, they were told Sure, but ten other people are waiting in line eager to sign.[91] This was a form of manipulation, framed as a great opportunity slipping away. These contracts protected TBL from any potential repercussions that may arise from the contestant's participation in the show. The contestants were signing away their lives, literally, as even in the case of a death on the show, neither they nor their families could sue or prosecute the show.

The weight loss, exercise and the diet implemented on the show were intense and dangerous. Not to mention the approach was not realistic for regular everyday people who have jobs and families. The results were impressive and eye-catching, as Danny Cahil, the winner of season 8, discusses. Over a period just shy of seven months, he lost 293 pounds[92] or 132 kilograms. This averages a weight loss of over 9.5 pounds or 4.5 kilos a week. The CDC maintains that healthy weight loss is around 1/2 pound per week. Dr Rober Huizenga, who was the medical adviser for the contestants on TBL, believed 3/4 pounds was a safe aim. Unhealthy risks and complications begin to emerge when exceeding these levels, and people are less likely to keep the weight off.[93]

The extreme weight loss on the show was achieved with strict diets. With many competitors eating around 800 calories. In the documentary, Dr Rober Huizenga would recommend they maintain a diet of 1200 calories for women and 1500 calories for men. But this advice was

[91] *Fit For TV: The Reality of The Biggest* Loser directed by Skye Borgman, Netflix 2025 episode 1 (24:30)
[92] *Fit For TV: The Reality of The Biggest Loser* directed by Skye Borgman, Netflix 2025 episode 1 (02:28)
[93] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Steps for Losing Weight." *Healthy Weight and Growth*, 26 Feb. 2024, www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/losing-weight/index.html.

rarely taken on board, as if people wanted to win, they needed to shed as much weight as possible.[94]

Dr Rober Huizenga also discusses his inspiration for the intense training on TBL. Huizenga worked with the NFL Raiders early in his career and noticed that due to the intensive training workload, linebackers, known for being heavy enforcers, struggled to keep their weight up and required massive calorie intakes just to maintain weight.[95] This is often seen in high-performance athletes such as 23-time Olympic gold medallist Michael Phelps, who would eat 6000-8000 calories a day when training[96]. The idea was for the contestants to train with the same intensity as professional athletes. A combination of the diet, training and pressure from the trainers is how the show was able to get such rapid weight loss results each week. Contestants usually lose between 5-12 pounds each week. This level of training and strain on the body can be damaging to those who aren't used to such intense regimes.

This is evident in Tracey Yukich's experience on TBL, season 8. In the documentary, she reveals that at the start of filming, there was a challenge in which the potential contestants had to run a mile to guarantee their spot on the show. Tracey collapsed at the end and had to be flown to the hospital by a helicopter, and was diagnosed with rhabdomyolysis. This is where damaged muscles begin to break down and can lead to kidney failure and, in extreme cases, death. Tracey went on the show but was advised by Dr Huizenga, advice which she followed. Due to this, Tracey had to be cunning in how she played the game. Due to this and the decisions she made, she was portrayed as a villain in the show. Something she was only made aware of when the show finally aired. Her experience on the show and its aftermath left

[94] *Fit For TV: The Reality of The Biggest Loser* directed by Skye Borgman, Netflix 2025 episode 2 (11:08)
[95] *Fit For TV: The Reality of The Biggest Loser* directed by Skye Borgman, Netflix 2025 episode 2 (02:17)
[96] 'Michael Phelps' 10000 Calories Diet: What the American Swimmer Ate While Training for Beijing Olympics?" *Olympics.com*, International Olympic Committee, 16 May 2021, www.olympics.com/en/news/michael-phelps-10000-calories-diet-what-the-american-swimmer-ate-while-training-.

Yukich with lifelong health issues and trauma from being portrayed negatively in the public eye.[97]

In 2017, a qualitative report was conducted that explored the experiences and perspectives of former contestants on TBL[98], which provides important insights into the effect that being on this show had on people. The findings and results from the interviews conducted are relevant to the research topic of this study. In the findings, it was concluded that contestants found that there was more focus on the drama that happened on the show rather than the actual weight loss and health transformations of the contestants. With many feeling that the manufactured drama and manipulation were overwhelming, and their purpose on the show was for entertainment rather than improving their health. These findings support the argument that producers use and manipulate people for the purpose of creating entertaining television and, in turn, creating revenue from exposing people in vulnerable and sensitive situations, given the nature of the show.

The report also had important findings in relation to how the contestants felt and were treated and supported after they left the show. Post-Traumatic Reality TV Syndrome is the name given in this report for the harsh and emotionally difficult reality of life for contestants after leaving TBL. The main issue was a lack of support in dealing with fame and scrutiny, a difficult thing to venture alone at. There was also a lack of education and therapeutic help given to the former contestants, which led to many regaining the weight they had lost. The former contestants were left without help to readjust to normal life after being on the show, and many struggled with this. This is further evidence of a lack of care from producers and a reflection of the underlying issues that it is only profits and results that they care about, and once they get what they want

[97] *Fit For TV: The Reality of The Biggest Loser* directed by Skye Borgman, Netflix 2025 episode 1 (35:40)

[98] Moore, Darren, et al. "Life after NBC's "the Biggest Loser": The Experiences and Perspectives of Former Reality TV Contestants." *The Qualitative Report*, 4 Mar. 2017, https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2658. Accessed 24 Apr. 2021. P.697-701

out of the people that take part, they will leave them to recover on their own from the intense emotional damage that remains as a result of going on TBL.

The findings in this chapter suggest clear misconduct and unethical treatment of members of the public who are humiliated on national television for the purpose of making money. The people who make this show are aware of what damage this causes, but do not care, as is shown in the support after the show. The bottom line for producers is monetary results, and it is evident that they are willing to place ordinary people in dangerous predicaments both physically and mentally to get what they want.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine the practises of reality television shows in the early 90s and 2000s to find patterns of unethical media ethics that arose during this period when reality television popularity soared. This research was intended to find a correlation between rising profits and the mistreatment of participants on reality tv shows.

Over the years, reality television has morphed into many different subcategories since its early experimental days, and the genre has become difficult to define as a whole as a result of the numerous forms it comes in. This explosion in popularity following huge hits in the early 2000s led to an overall increase in airtime on the majority of tv channels. With some networks and channels even being created solely to show this type of content. Such as E! and TLC. Since then, reality television has been on an upward trajectory, generating an estimated $34.1 billion in 2024[99] alone.

The findings from these early years suggest there was a lack of regulation in place, as shows received little negative pushback or challenge for how they conducted business. Watching these shows was new and exciting for tv audiences. Recognising this and the potential of reality television, networks began to flood the market with all types of niche shows which it continued to due for years and to this day, resulting in the wide and complex range that exists today, though the issues remained and became more extreme as time went on as shows progressively moved the line of what was ok to show on television. Reality TV shows may have gone more extreme than it originally should have as a result of the changing nature of censorship during this era of television, and it never went back the other way, normalising these abnormal

[99] Tyagi, Indu. "Reality Show Market Research: In-Depth Study 2032." *Wiseguyreports.com*, Wiseguy Research Consultants pvt ltd, 6 Aug. 2024, www.wiseguyreports.com/reports/reality-show-market.

practises that flew under the radar, which are odd in comparison to other formats of entertainment.

It became clear that the participants on these shows were taken advantage of, naive to how everything is done. Often lied to or sold unlikely dreams of fame or lured with a chance of winning huge sums of money. Only realising afterwards, when their episode aired, how they were inaccurately portrayed or made to be a villain through editing techniques. Public reactions can be intense and unpleasant, especially to those experiencing fame or public recognition for the first time.

The manner in which reality television is edited is a huge and common issue throughout the industry, as it twists the truth and portrays a false or exaggerated narrative. A technique called "Frankenbiting", in which two different audio clips are spliced together to appear as one singular clip, is often used in reality television. An incident involving the BBC made headlines all over the world late in 2025, where this style of editing, splicing two clips together for television, was implemented in a Panorama documentary. The documentary featured a clip of Donald Trump where two clips were edited together to appear as if the US president was encouraging the Capitol Hill riot of January 2021. This led to the BBC's director general, Tim Davie and head of news, Deborah Turness, resigning from their respective roles.[100] The fallout that followed this incident gives a clear indication that portraying false narratives through editing techniques is not seen as ok, and can be damaging for the reputation of individuals. So why is it so widely accepted for regular individuals who go on reality television?

From the research gathered in this paper, the conclusions arrived at are that there are carefully orchestrated systems and guidelines in place that reality television shows follow in order to

[100] Phillips, Aleks. *BBC Director General Tim Davie and News CEO Deborah Turness Resign over Trump Documentary Edit*. 9 Nov. 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3vn25d5dq7o.

protect themselves while also getting enough content out of their participants. This footage is then edited to portray false narratives that paint certain individuals poorly or exaggerate the truth. The participants can do little about this, though, as the contracts they signed, often under time pressure or under the impression that this chance to be on reality television is slipping away, so they sign without being fully aware of what they have agreed to. When these shows have aired, there is little that these people can do about it. They do not have the resources or contacts to bring the networks to court and often do not get any compensation for the damage that has been caused to their lives. At most, they may do interviews in magazines or on tv or documentaries, as in the two case studies in this thesis, but often nothing comes of this except spreading awareness, which too is important

Everything, it seems, always circles back to money. Money is what drives and motivates these shows to be made in the first place. Shows are rarely made purely for the passion for it. Producers and networks have to run a profitable business just like every other industry. As stated before in previous chapters, reality television is much cheaper to make than fictional, narrative-driven television shows. This makes reality television shows much less of a risk; the shows are likely to break even and begin to make a profit sooner. The biggest challenge in making reality television is living with the guilt of what participation in these shows does to the mental health of people.

The fatal consequences that reality television has had on people are well-documented. Over the years, many very high-profile shows, such as Love Island (UK), The Bachelor/Bachelorette (US), Hell's Kitchen and The Jermey Kyle show have had previous contestants or guests take their own lives. The case studies in this thesis and the other show that what was spoken about in the 1990s and 2000s has given the public an appetite for this style of programming, but it is clear that this approach has had dire consequences for members of the public, and attitudes need to be shifted regarding the safety of those who take part.

The thesis concludes that there is clear evidence for a lack of care for those who go on reality television, both before and after. The biggest change that can be made to help and protect people, it appears, comes before anyone goes on the shows. The manner in which reality television contracts are designed is to take advantage of contestants or guests while protecting the organisations. To prevent this sort of misconduct, regulations should be put in place to provide potential contestants or guests with legal guidance for the signing of contracts. This change, along with a chance for people to see shows before they go to air, to make alterations if needed, would create a safer environment in reality television while maintaining the space for it to exist.

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