

***The Truman Show and Ed TV:
Metacriticism of Reality Television***

Patrick W. T. Quinn

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

In 1948 *Candid Camera* made its debut as one of the first reality-based television programs. Half a century later, reality-based television has erupted into its own genre of television. This type of television production is inexpensive to produce compared to the traditional dramas and comedies on television, though production costs are increasing due to the bizarre nature of some of the shows and the insurance policies they require. Reality shows have been successful in the ratings and have consistently placed in the top 20 shows (Nielsen Ratings 3/23/2003). Inexpensive production costs and high ratings suggest that reality television will be around for quite a while.

One question to examine when talking about reality shows is what ways are there to critique the genre as an art form. Art has traditionally been a good way in which to examine society. What political, moral, and ethical questions do artists ask when they produce some work? Notably, reality television brings out the voyeurism in viewers, but could this voyeurism cause a negative effect to society? In addition, questions of privacy and surveillance also become issues when examining reality television, as well as ethical questions concerning the use of human subjects for experimental processes.

While scholars and critics consistently argue the merit of "reality television" in broadcasting, there seems to be confusion as to what is meant by reality-based television. In a 2002 "call for papers," Ouellette and Murray define reality-television as "non-fiction programming that claims to represent ordinary people in ordinary or extraordinary real life situations." The public response to reality television has increased researchers' attention in different segments of academia.

The kind of reality television researchers seem to be interested in is the trashy depiction of human interaction invoked in these reality shows (Grindstaff, 1998). Grindstaff argues trashy television provides little educational content to audiences other than entertainment. This could include shows like *Survivor*, *Temptation Island*, *Big Brother*, *Joe Millionaire*, *The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette* etc. However, based on the definition above, it also includes shows like *Trading Spaces*, *A Wedding Story*, *A Baby Story*, news programs, documentaries, and talk shows (Whitney et al., 1997). The trashy genre of reality television seems to have one aspect that separates it from the more artistic or documentary style genres. According to Steven Reiss, Ph.D. at Ohio State University, contestants on the reality shows are extremely competitive and willing to do anything for a prize, including betraying other contestants or building alliances with other contestants (2001). People are encouraged to watch the shows in order to see who wins quick money. In a sense, it is a way people can go from "rags to riches" with little or no effort. In this context, the contestants are fulfilling the "American Dream."

Literature Review

Prior to 2000 reality shows were restricted to documentaries, news programs, home improvement shows, and general knowledge shows. Specifically a few shows like *COPs* and *America's Most Wanted* caught the attention of researchers, in which they focused on violence, racial issues, and aggression (Oliver, 1994; Whitney et al., 1997). In the Whitney study, the researchers used the program, the segments, and the violence sequences to quantify the research (1997). The research concluded violence on reality shows was more prevalent during the evening hours when the viewing audience is normally adult-oriented (Whitney et al., 1997). The findings further indicated little research had been done on reality-television's impact on audiences (Whitney et al., 1997). While this research was beneficial for coding violence, it does not provide a meta-critical analysis of what reality television means and how it can influence society.

In 1999, Cavender, Bond-Maupin, and Jurik examined the portrayal of gender in *America's Most Wanted*. This study examined the way in which women were depicted as crime victims on reality-television (Cavender et al., 1999). The study examined demographic variables, the way in which the women spoke about the victimization, and the portrayal of women as members of a family. Cavender et al. concluded that reality television produces gender stereotypes of women and portrayed underlying educational lessons, including bad things happen to women who go out alone. The study examined the way in which reenactments were done and the way women are stereotyped based on what is known about them from previous cultural teaching. Furthermore, it expanded the analysis of reality television to include issues such as gender.

The first amendment issue of privacy in police shows caught the attention of the federal government in 1999 (Costello & Biafora, 1999). Privacy issues were questioned when television cameramen followed police officers into homes and filmed individuals being arrested. The federal government felt it was unfair to allow cameras into homes where individuals had not consented to being filmed. Costello and Biafora further examined the way in which police have been portrayed in the United States and how public campaigns were started to present police in a better light. The combination of reality television, specifically police reality shows, produced a ruling from the United States Supreme Court that outlawed the media from attending raids because it was deemed unconstitutional (Wilson v. Layne 1999). The ruling from the court brought up the topic of freedom of speech from the media perspective or the right to privacy from an individual's perspective (Costello & Biafora, 1999). In essence, the right to privacy versus the right to freedom of the press becomes a controversial issue in understanding reality television shows. Many of the shows draw on footage of individuals unbeknownst to them. For instance, cameras are placed in "Big Brother" style around traffic lights, super-markets, and gas stations. The "eye" is continuously watching as people go through their everyday motions. A person could be guilty of something he or she didn't do based on this circumstantial evidence obtained from the watchful eye of "Big Brother."

In 2001, Davie discussed sensationalism of reality shows from a historical and international context. He responds to two books about reality television including *Entertaining Crime: Television Reality Programs* by Fishman and Cavender (1998) and *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates Over Media Standards* by Sparks and Tulloch (1998). Davie addresses the shift from

tabloid television based on marketing schemes to whether or not reality shows "dumb down" the material to make it appropriate to multiple audiences (2001). He further discusses whether reality television blurs the lines of reality and fiction when it portrays police officers as the first line of defense against drugs, crime, and family instability. Furthermore, he examines how reality television produces ways in which viewers are expected to perceive society, i.e., it molds the ways in which viewers see society. If reality television represents the way in which viewers are intended to see society, it is easy to envision an overall decrease in privacy for individuals and an increase in surveillance.

Lastly, an article by Laura Grindstaff asks whether or not reality television is trashy or transgressive (1998). She examines how reality shows exploit human misery for the amusement of the viewers. Furthermore, she acknowledges the way in which all television shows are manipulated and questions critics' complaints about the distortion of reality programs. Ultimately, she is asking why critics focus attention on whether the shows represent reality when they should be examining the content of the shows and the way in which they represent society.

Post-2000 has seen an increased interest in reality television. Ouellette and Murray's "call for papers" (2002) asked for research on articles ranging from the political economy of reality television to audience reception and cultural connotations. In addition, scholars have started to examine the ways in which technology is being used to manipulate people through surveillance (Nesson, 2001). The concern relates the desire of people to watch contestants or participants on reality television with the vast amount of technology now available to make it easy to constantly view people (Nesson, 2001). Nesson suggests this constant surveillance is a loss of the right to privacy.

While the scholarly material is increasing every month on reality television, two movies have already critiqued reality-television as a genre. In 1998, Jim Carrey acted in *The Truman Show*, a movie in which a society watches Truman Burbank unbeknownst to him. The society was specifically designed for Burbank and everyday life revolves around him and what he does. Cameras and microphones are designed to catch Burbank's every move. The movie has an unusual twist since it involves two audiences: first it portrays the actual audience who is watching the movie, and second it portrays the audience who is watching the show within the movie.

McMahan (1999) argues the way in which Burbank is portrayed is similar to a woman leaving a fairy tale. Traditionally, a character like Burbank would have been female since males typically aren't portrayed as being subservient to society. The way in which the producers manipulate him follows the traditional role of a woman being manipulated into doing something by the dominant male (McMahan, 1999).

The second movie, *Ed TV*, released in 1999, involves an ordinary man who volunteers to be videotaped 24 hours a day. The movie criticizes the way in which Ed is manipulated into acting and behaving certain ways in order to maintain high ratings for the company that has Ed's contract. McMahan further argues *Ed TV* is a portrayal of what happens to a person who is filmed constantly (1999). Eventually the person loses all his or her identity and becomes an object of the state. Ultimately, both *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* reflect the concerns of society of being watched by "Big Brother," the all seeing, but never seen camera in the sky (McMahan, 1999).

Research Question

The Truman Show and *Ed TV* make meta-critical arguments about reality television and its effects. Furthermore, the movies pose interesting questions concerning the role of humans in an experimental process and the way society is evolving into a "Big Brother" state in which everyone is under constant surveillance. Therefore, these movies will be the primary texts for the examination of reality television. In other words, this research will attempt to answer in what ways do *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* critique reality television?

Research question: How do *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* critique reality television?

Method

This research uses rhetorical criticism to examine what the movies represent. Rhetoric is the way in which something (literature, movie, object etc.) tries to persuade, plead or debate about a concept or idea (Eagleton, 1983) in order to convince us that it is correct. Rhetoric is not confined solely to literature, but to the surrounding environment. This can include the way in which a movie portrays something, or the way in which it tries to persuade the viewer to believe something. While it is not apparent that a movie is persuading us to think a certain way, or respond to a certain thought, the rhetoric of the movie suggests there is indeed some persuasion going on. Eagleton (1983) suggests critics must ask why the movie is important instead of asking how or what it is saying. The assumption is that there are outside factors that have influenced the artist to respond to the environment. In other words, there are cultural contexts that make the movie significant (Scheide, 1994).

Rhetorical criticism also attempts to examine how a book, movie, idea, building, etc. is structured and organized to further enhance an individual's understanding of what it does (Eagleton, 1983). For example, watching a movie about reality television not only shows the viewer what reality television is, but also how the director has organized and structured the movie to criticize reality television. In other words, the director may have structured and organized the movie to criticize reality television rather than idealize it. In addition, Eagleton suggests the structure and organization of the work can produce an effect in which viewers can respond in certain ways to an actual situation. This allows the viewers to experience something without actually doing it. For example, viewers of reality television may not understand what it is like to be under a camera for 24 hours a day, but *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* give them an opportunity to envision life under the constant surveillance of a camera.

Furthermore, the intent of the director is important? In other words, what is the movie's director trying to portray or represent. One area to look at is the cultural significance and the context in which the movie was made. For example, *The Truman Show* was made at a time when reality television was fairly new. In addition, technology has increased with the use of computers and the vast possibilities of information technologies. With more technology available, it is possible to track the participants and contestants of reality television shows. Another area to examine when applying rhetorical criticism is the social attitudes of the time the literature/movie was made. Again, *The Truman Show* was made in an era when technology represented an

unknown variable. In other words, technology could be both beneficial and detrimental to society.

In conclusion, rhetorical criticism is one way to examine *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV*. This includes examining the way the movies were structured and organized, what the intent of filmmakers were, the cultural significance of the films, and the social attitudes at the time the film was made. Understanding these will help in interpreting and analyzing the movies.

Results

This study uses two movies to critique reality television. The first movie is *The Truman Show* (1998), directed by Richard Weir. Truman Burbank lives in a small town called Seahaven where everything revolves around him. Cameras, microphones, and actors have been designated to follow Burbank's every move. It is not until Burbank is in his 30's that he realizes something is suspicious and decides to find out what is wrong with his life. While the movie seems farfetched to the average viewer, the technology that is used to track Burbank has received critiques of the technological revolution. For example, Jeremy Bentham, an 18th century English philosopher, portrayed a prison in which the inmates never know whether or not they were being viewed by the guards. Bentham's portrayal of a prison system certainly comes to mind when discussing a movie like *The Truman Show*. Furthermore, the way in which Burbank is treated as a living experiment should bring about questions of vivisection or the study of human beings in experimental situations.

Following the same line as *The Truman Show*, *Ed TV* (1999), directed by Ron Howard, was released a year later. Instead of following an individual who was unaware of the surveillance, *Ed TV* is a movie about Ed, an average working man, who volunteers to be filmed. Initially, he experiences stardom and popularity that makes his loss of freedom seem unimportant. However, he soon realizes the loss of freedom has destroyed his life, his family's life, and the prospect for a happy future. He decides to leave the show, but is forced to stay because of a contract that he had signed without reading. In an attempt to rid the television company of pestering his family, he makes a call to all audience members to dig up the worst thing they can find about the executives of the show. Almost immediately he is called by one of the executives who claims to have some information that will help him. While the show may be humorous, it also raises serious questions about the possibility of technology running and ruining individual's lives.

Several articles examine the way in which "Big Brother" technology is enabling the government to maintain control over the citizens. In addition, while many of the articles touch base on one of the issues, they seem to miss the big picture. While a large number of reality television shows have been produced since these two movies, the metacritical arguments the movies make are valid and should be examined when looking at reality television as an art form.

Initially, *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* resemble two movies that provide entertainment. The movies are slightly amusing, and to the non-analytical observer, they do nothing more than provide entertainment. However, after digging under the surface, critics can examine the way in which Weir and Howard have criticized reality television. Prior to these two movies, reality television was critiqued based on quantitative measures such as content analyses. It took almost two years after *Ed TV* before reality television stirred up additional responses from critics. How

do these two movies not only criticize reality television during the 1990's, but also post 2000?

Burbank, in *The Truman Show*, is an average guy with a wife and a job. Even when he finds out he is the subject of experimentation, he doesn't react out of the ordinary. He simply does his best to find his long lost love that he thinks has gone to Fiji. Burbank seems to represent the average person. He doesn't do anything out of the ordinary; in fact, he seems to be extremely boring. Even though Burbank is the ultimate boring character, fans within the movie are portrayed going to certain lengths to watch the 24-hour a day reality program (Baltake, 1998). In a sense, the show is their life and they are part of the vivisection (experimentation) process. The audiences' reaction to reality television is as important as the show itself. Without fan support, the shows would go nowhere. After all, it is the audiences who determine whether or not shows are successful. In fact, audiences can make someone famous or infamous if the right media is placed on them. Ebert (1998) suggests *The Truman Show* is not any more different than what Princess Diana had to go through after she married Prince Charles. Both were under the constant eye of everyone around them. It was impossible for Princess Diana to escape recognition, just as Truman couldn't escape recognition from the community and audiences he had become part of. Another response of *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* suggests it is the audience who is the captive, since viewers depend on television for the news, but they can't trust what they hear (Bishop, 2000). Furthermore, Bishop suggests viewers like to know when the media is deceiving them since they feel media smart (2000).

Ed also faces the problem of being constantly under the watchful eye of the camera. He too has to escape the recognition he receives from being a star. Yet, while both the movies seem to run in the same direction, one review suggests the movies are actually about two different things (McLarney, 2001). McLarney suggests *The Truman Show* is about a journey that one man takes to accomplish a goal, and *Ed TV* is about the "addictive power of the media" (2001, p. 2). This implies *The Truman Show* is about individualization (Wise, 2002), and *Ed TV* represents media technological control over a person's own well-being.

The two movies seem to be asking viewers what life would be like underneath the camera. In other words, what would the average person do if he or she had the opportunity to be under the nation's spotlight? The films seem to suggest the way in which Ed and Burbank are portrayed is similar to a project. The project is one in which the production companies are the scientists and experimenters. Ed and Truman are the subjects of the experimentation. In *The Truman Show*, the control group is Seahaven, the society in which Burbank lives and breathes. Different variables include the ways in which Burbank reacts to certain life events. This could be accidental or intentional. For instance, his father, whom Burbank thought was dead, comes back to see Burbank and tells him that Burbank is the center of a universe created especially for him. The producers have to adjust to this unforeseen accident, but they do so quickly. Instead of eliminating the father altogether, they write him back into the script in order to see how Burbank reacts to being reunited with his father. The way in which the two are reunited is an experimentation process of the human psychology.

The question of vivisection, or experimentation, becomes a concern in the show. Burbank is unaware that he is the subject of an experimentation process. After all, it is considered unethical to do experiments on someone without their consent. This involves doing both physical and psychological experiments. Physical harm is frowned upon because of its ethical and moral

implications. Isn't psychological harm just as great as physical harm? Is it not the fact that humans are able to think that separates them from animals? In *Ed TV*, Ed represents a person who consents to experimentation, but after the novelty of stardom wears off, Ed decides he doesn't like the idea of being filmed 24 hours a day. Yet, the production company finds reasons to keep Ed and his family under the spotlight. Yes, Ed may have signed a consent form, but does that mean the company should have the right to his psychological well-being?

While some critics focus on the surface issues of these movies, one critic has examined what the movies could really mean. A New York critic, J. A. Hanson (1998), used Jeremy Bentham's panopticon as a parallel image to *The Truman Show*. Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, brought Bentham's portrayal of the panopticon to light in the 1970s and is noted for his interpretation of the concept. The panopticon is a prison system in which prisoners can be observed from a tower through shutters (Foucault, 1979). Each of the prisoners is in an individual cell with no contact with any of the other prisoners. The prisoner cannot determine whether or not the warden is watching him or her and therefore must always be on the best behavior. Without the advantage of seeing and knowing what is going on, the prisoner becomes an object. He or she cannot communicate with the warden or other prisoners. The prisoner's humanity is further reduced by the knowledge that the warden is watching him. In order for this to work, the tower overlooking the prison must be outlined so the prisoner knows it is there, but it must also be unverifiable so the prisoner never can know whether or not someone is watching. In essence, the person who watches the prisoner has all of the power, for he or she can watch without being seen while the prisoner remains paranoid and uncertain.

How does this apply to *The Truman Show* or *Ed TV*? Hanson (1998) suggests the panopticon is not only refined to the idea of a prison system, but to one of popular entertainment. Specifically, *The Truman Show* portrays a man who is always under the watchful eye of an audience. While Burbank initially isn't aware of his popularity, he does become aware that he is at the mercy of the television industry. Cameras and microphones are placed everywhere to catch his every move. Christof, the creator of *The Truman Show* (the show within the movie), is the warden who peers down from the studio in the sky (Hanson, 1998). He has all the power and Burbank has none. Burbank is subjected to different tactics every day that make him act certain ways. While he thinks he is a free man, he really isn't because there is the all-powerful warden manipulating his every move. In short, Burbank is a living representation of what it would be like in the panopticon. In fact, Christof responds to Lauren's call (Burbank's long lost love) by saying, "What distresses you, caller, is that ultimately, Truman prefers his cell" (qtd. in Bishop, 2000, p. 14). Bishop further contends that media viewers are prisoners of the media, just as Burbank is a prisoner of his cell that Christof claims he likes (2000).

Maybe an even better analysis would be between *Ed TV* and the panopticon. Just as the prisoners in the panopticon are aware of the tower, Ed is aware of the cameras. He realizes that his every move has the potential of being aired. He cannot predict what way the production company will represent him, and because of his loss of power, he starts to lose his girlfriend and family.

In addition, the panopticon can be likened to George Orwell's *1984* depiction of "Big Brother" (Lyon, 1994). Orwell describes a society in which the police have ultimate control over everyone through the use of "Big Brother." This is a complex surveillance system that has the

ability to hear and see what individuals do every day. People cannot get away from the system, and they don't always know they are being watched. The information that is collected seems useless and irrelevant, but it is being filed away into archives where it can be used for a later date (Lyon, 1994). In *The Truman Show*, images of childhood experiences are flashed across the screen when viewers see Burbank sitting on the beach, even though the producers don't really know what he is thinking.

The production company not only has the power to manipulate Burbank, but it has the power to suggest to the audience what he is thinking. This further increases the idea that he is the product of technology. His thoughts are not unique or individual. Everyone has the capability of seeing into his mind, or so the producers of the show want the viewers to think.

Another way in which to look at the movies is to examine what they say about privacy. Privacy is something that is valued in American society. It was written into the constitution that individuals have a right to privacy. However, a person who is not in the privacy of their home may run into issues about what privacy is. *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* represent the power of the production companies to eliminate individual privacy. A closer look suggests *The Truman Show* criticizes the way technological advancements make the threat to privacy a real phenomenon. Nesson (2001) suggests the only reason privacy has been enjoyed over the past centuries is because there have not been the technological advancements to eliminate privacy altogether. He further argues *The Truman Show* suggests technology almost has the capability to reduce an individual's privacy. For example, the show depicts scenes in which tiny cameras are placed throughout the house, car, and surrounding environment. Nesson further suggests individuals engage in a loss of privacy every day when they use credit cards, cell phones, and when they walk past the ever seeing eye of the camera on the street corners or in the grocery stores. In fact, there are websites (e.g. globeexplorer.com) available where you can go and zoom in on a particular neighborhood with the help of satellite imagery (Nesson, 2001).

Another issue of privacy should examine who owns the right to invade an individual's privacy. In *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV*, corporations own the rights to an individual's privacy. In the book *The Transparent Society* by David Brin, a hypothetical question asks who do individuals in society want watching them (discussed in Nesson, 2001)? Do they want television production companies to own the rights to their privacy? Or, do they want all of the cameras and microphones out in the public to connect to a local police station? While it seems like neither are a good solution, *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* could suggest corporate ownership is much better than state or federal ownership.

How could this be the case? First, at least when it is corporately owned, there is the opportunity to view oneself and the way in which the production companies are representing on individual. While individuals may not have one hundred percent control over the companies, as seen in both *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV*, at least there is the glimmer of hope of getting out of a contract or escaping into the world-wide jungle of commercialism where everyone else is in the same kind of situation. On the other hand, if the cameras and microphones connect to a central system operated by the police, little information would be attainable to the average public person. Information would be compiled into databanks, just as feared in Orwell's *1984*. The information could be used against the individual at any time in order to incarcerate that individual for something he or she may or may not have done. Privacy would no longer be something to fight

for; it would be a memory of good times gone bad.

In conclusion, there seems to be at least six different areas of metacriticism that *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* make about television media and reality shows. These are the recognition of individuals, vivisection or experimentation with human subjects, Bentham's panopticon, Orwell's description of a society in which Big Brother rules, privacy and whether the media has a right to invade in our daily lives, and the technology that makes all of these possible.

Discussion

The question becomes how these critiques of the movies relate to reality television. There seems to be two aspects of face recognition that these movies are critiquing. The initial critique is the way in which a person can quickly be identified if he or she is on one of the shows. If one were to dig further under the surface, he or she could envision another possibility. This is the advancement of face recognition technology that would make it possible for the government and companies to identify people based on facial bone structure. While this is currently not in place for average civilians, the movies seem to be critiquing the way in which this kind of technological advancement is becoming more and more possible with the increased interest of reality television shows. Reality programs seem to suggest a certain type of desire by people to be easily recognized by anyone. This could be made possible through the use of facial recognition technology.

Technological advancements have made it possible for production companies to track individuals no matter where they are and what they are doing. In reality shows, cameras are placed on individuals' bodies to get their reactions from certain situations. The cameras also seem to be everywhere in the shows. They are in cars, bathrooms, kitchens, and bedrooms. Essentially, they are where the action is. In the reality program *Big Brother*, participants are confined to a house for six weeks, and with the use of technology, they are filmed 24 hours a day. The lights are left on 24 hours a day, and participants soon lose track of time. The only safe place is the room where the participants can go to talk to Big Brother. This suggests technology is a friend, and the viewers are not going to criticize what the participant says on camera.

Orwell's depiction of a society in which Big Brother rules is the third way in which these movies critique reality television. The movies represent a society in which producers of a television show can control, manipulate, and decide what the public should see and hear. Yes, there may be disagreement with the way in which something is handled, but the production companies have the final say by determining whether or not the disagreement will be aired. In addition, the knowledge that there is always the watchful eye seems to suggest individuals no longer are individuals, but a product of society. They are expected to behave and act in certain ways. Viewers see this when they watch reality television shows. When someone encounters something in the shows, most of the time they react with the knowledge of the camera being there. They don't want to do anything that would be out of the ordinary to draw attention to them. In addition, if they do something out of the ordinary, it is because that is what is expected of them. For example, contestants on *Fear Factor* may do something that most people think is absurd, but the idea of the show is doing something absurd is the way to win. This reinforces the idea that production shows have the ultimate say in what contestants think and do. If contestants

want to win, they have to abide by the companies rules, not their own.

The movies further seem to represent an examination of what people would do in an experimental situation. This applies to reality television, since this seems to be one of the general concepts of the shows. The shows are an experiment. They thrive on the reactions of the participants and contestants, as well as the audience. In essence, the shows are experimentation processes at the finest levels of psychological analysis. Many of the shows question the way people will react to certain situations. The situations themselves are the variables. This could include sending people to far off countries to try and survive in harsh conditions, like the participants on *Survivor* encounter. Ultimately, the movies could be asking whether the experimentation on human subjects is ethical and moral. Both of the movies suggest the production companies are taking advantage of individuals in order to make money; therefore, morally and ethically the shows are inappropriate.

The way in which the movies relate society to Bentham's panopticon suggests a loss of freedom American's hold so dear. With the availability of the advanced technology discussed above, the whole society has the potential of being under the watchful eye of the government or consumer prison warden. Individuals never know when they are the subjects of ridicule, when they are being watched, and whether or not they are doing something that is appropriate. They lose their humanity because they are concerned with behaving appropriately. In fact, reality programs seem to be reinforcing what the movies critiqued. The participants of shows like *Trading Spaces* and any of the home improvement shows act like it is no big deal to have the camera around. This seems to be leading to a loss of privacy.

Finally, privacy is the last critique I have categorized in the two movies. Again, along the same lines as Bentham's panopticon, privacy is important because it is a vital part of everyday society. The movies suggest that privacy can be replaced by monetary rewards. This is further seen in reality television shows where contestants are encouraged to give up their privacy in order to win money.

Conclusion

Reality television is a genre that defies the boundaries of fact and fiction. While it seems fictitious in many ways, reality television is a representation of what society is actually like. People who participate become symbols of society, and the ways the shows are filmed become examples to viewers of what society should look like. This study has examined the ways in *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* have critiqued reality television as a genre. The movies imply a negative overall examination of reality television because of the way in which society is portrayed.

The six areas that examined how *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* critique reality television include Bentham's portrayal of the panopticon, technological advancement, right to privacy issues, Orwell's depiction of *1984*, facial recognition made possible through technology, and the use of human subjects as experiments. First, Bentham's portrayal of the panopticon suggests we as a society are on the verge of becoming prisoners because we are encouraging reality television to succeed. Second, this study has examined the way in which George Orwell's book *1984* seems to be represented in the movies critiquing reality television in which no one is safe from the

watchful eye of the television camera. Third, this leads to the issue of technological advancement made available through increased technology. The movies indicate we don't know what technology is doing to society if we can't control the technology. In other words, we are mere pawns in the eyes of the large corporations who own the rights to technology. Fourth, facial recognition is a theme made available through technology. Not only are we able to recognize individuals with the help of the media, but also we could also eventually recognize individuals based on facial structure. Fifth, this could lead to the loss of privacy for everyone. The loss of privacy is the loss of the freedom we hold so dear, as well as the loss of hope for society. Lastly, these are made possible by the experimentation process of reality television. Like all experimentations, reality television is becoming more and more complicated. It must reach new levels to keep the attention of the audiences. Like scientists, we don't always know the outcome of reality television and what it means to our future generations.

This study has used rhetorical criticism to examine *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV*. This study is limited in that the movies are somewhat out-of-date since the reality television craze took off after the movies were produced. Future studies could look at other genres to examine whether or not the areas I discussed above are being portrayed in television and media in general. In addition, new reality television shows could be examined to see whether or not they fall into the six categories indicated above. Furthermore, product placement is an aspect of reality television shows that may be worth studying. In conclusion, reality television is a powerful form of media that blurs the lines between reality and fiction and its effects on society are unknown.

References

- Baltake, J. (1998). Real TV: Jim Carrey plays the unwitting star of the ultimate TV series in 'The Truman Show.' *The Sacramento Bee's Movie Club Review*. Available <http://www.movieclub.com/reviews/archives/98truman/truman.html> (Downloaded March 28, 2003).
- Bishop, R. (2000). "Good afternoon, good evening and goodnight": *The Truman Show* as Media Criticism. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 24 (1), 6-18.
- Cavender, G.; Bond-Maupin, L; Jurik, N. (1999). The construction of gender in reality crime TV. *Gender & Society*, 13 (5), 643-663.
- Costello, M. A., & Biafora, F. (1999). "Just the facts ma'am": the Supreme Court says "No" to media ride-alongs. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 7, (1), 15-25.
- Davie, W. R. (2001). Crime and passion: journalism for the masses? *Journal of Broadcast & Electronic Media*, 45 (2), pp. 355-364.
- Eagleton, T. (1983). *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ebert, R. (1998). Real TV: Jim Carrey plays the unwitting star of the ultimate TV series in 'The Truman Show.' In *The Sacramento Bee's Movie Club Review*. Available <http://www.movieclub.com/reviews/archives/98truman/truman.html> (Downloaded March 28, 2003).
- Ed TV* (1999). Produced by Brian Grazer and directed by Ron Howard. 123 min. Francisco Universal.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.

Trashy or transgressive? 'Reality TV' and the politics of social control. Available <http://proxy.arts.uci.edu/~nideffer/Tvc/section3/11.Tvc.v9.sect3.Grindstaff.html> (downloaded Feb. 21, 2003).

Hanson, J. A. (1998). An eye on *The Truman Show*. *Shoot The Messenger*. Available http://www.shootthemessenger.com.au/u_sep_98/film/trueman.htm (downloaded March 22, 2003).

Lyon, D. (1994). From Big Brother to Electronic Panopticon. *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society*. MN: University of Minnesota Press.

McLarney, M. (2001). *Ed TV*. *The Z Review*. Available <http://www.thezreview.co.uk/reviews/e/edtv.htm> (downloaded March 28, 2003).

McMahan, A. (1999). Watching you watching me. *Film Philosophy*, 3 (24). Available <http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol3-1999/n24mcmahan>

Nesson, Charles. (2001). Threats to privacy. *Social Research*, 68 (1), 105-115. Available proquest: <http://0-proquest.umi.com.library.uark.edu/pqdweb>

Nielsen Ratings (2003). Top 20 network primetime series by households: Season-to-date 09/23/02-02/16/03. Available <http://tv.zap2it.com/news/ratings/season/030216season.html> (Feb. 21, 2003).

Oliver, M. (1994). Portrayals of crime, race, and aggression in "reality-based" police shows: a content analysis. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 38 (2), 179-193.

Ouellette, L., & Murray S. (2002). CFP: Reality television (5/15/02; collection). Available <http://www.english.upenn.edu/CFP/archive/2002-03/0113.html>

Reiss, S. & Wiltz, J. (2001). Why America loves reality TV. *Psychology Today*, 34, 52-55.

Scheide, F. (1994). *Introductory Film Criticism*. Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

The Truman Show (1998). Produced by Edward Feldman and directed by Peter Weir. Seaside, FL: Paramount.

Wise, J. M. (2002). Mapping the culture of control: Seeing through *The Truman Show*. *Television & New Media*, 3 (1), 29-47.

Whitney, C., Wartella, E., Lasorsa, D., Danielson, W., Olizarez, A., Lopez R., & Klijn, M. (1997). Television violence in "reality" programming: The University of Texas at Austin Study. In National Television Violence Study (Eds.), *The National Television Violence Study, Vol. 1* (pp. 269-359). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.