

“Evaluating the ‘reality’ of South Africa’s first season of *Big Brother* among a select group of Rhodes University students”

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Krivani Pillay

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Professor Larry Strelitz
(Supervisor)

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the reasons audiences watched South Africa's first reality television series, *Big Brother*, and sets out to determine which discourse of realism attracted audiences to the programme. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the audience reception of South African reality television and to determine why audiences are attracted to this genre. The South African reality television programme, *Big Brother*, will be used as a case study to determine audience pleasures. This research also involves an examination of the 'reality' constructed by television producers and stakeholders. It will also investigate which discourse of realism viewers draw on when explaining the pleasures they obtain from watching *Big Brother*. What do audiences understand by the concept 'reality television'? Is there awareness of the fact that the series is highly constructed? This study outlines how the producers represent *Big Brother* and how they sell the programme as a reality television programme. This study also determines the producers' preferred meaning and sets out to reveal whether the audiences merely accept the producers' preferred reading of *Big Brother*. Audience ratings in the form of TAMS show that *Big Brother* is popular (Telmar; 2001). Fiske (1987) writes that in order for a television show to be popular, it has to be read and enjoyed by a diverse audience. Popular texts are polysemic in that their meanings can be inflected differently by various social groups watching the programme. This study examines how audiences understand the notion of reality television and if audience pleasures come from the myth that reality television represents reality.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1. A personal reflection

Reality television is comprised of a world of networks, directors, producers and editors coaxing audiences to have a glimpse of the lives of real people. No make-up crew, no wardrobe, no scripts because these are not real actors – its ‘real’ people in ‘real’ situations. In the late 1990s the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) introduced the American reality game show *Survivor* to the South African television audiences. There was much hype surrounding what was thought of at that time as a new type of television programme – reality television. At this time I was an undergraduate student living in a campus residence at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. I was lured into the world of reality television and was among the hundreds of thousands of South Africans who awaited the screening of this much publicised show (*Survivor*). In time the term ‘reality television’ became commonly used among friends and family who had been avid viewers of programmes that were part of this genre. National television critics and columnists like Barry Ronge wrote articles introducing many debates surrounding what is the real and reality television.

Soon after the introduction of *Survivor*, other programmes like the *Amazing Race* and *Temptation Island* (all American productions) appeared on South African television screens. Audiences embraced the programmes and soon audience ratings soared. During this time I was fascinated at how these shows managed to have a magnetic hold on so many students in my residence hall. I soon became fascinated with what I thought was a new genre in television programming. I found that in my household my family, who seldom watch any television other than the evening news bulletins, were equally enthralled and attracted to these programmes.

Following the introduction of the first American reality television programmes to South Africa – it was announced in 2001 that a South African equivalent of the international reality television programme *Big Brother* was to be produced and aired in the country. *Big Brother* was produced in 12 countries world-wide prior to its South African debut and had a different format to the other reality programmes aired at the time. Months before the show began, mainstream media had been reporting on this new programming format to be introduced in the country. The idea of 12 strangers living in a house for 106 days without any contact with

the outside world dominated many conversations with friends and family. I was still fascinated about the fact that people were talking about a show that was not even in production. It was my growing interest with the reaction of people watching reality television that prompted me, at postgraduate level, to conduct research about why people are attracted to this type of programming – in particular *Big Brother*. I was interested to investigate within a media studies perspective why people were attracted to *Big Brother* and to try and determine within which discourse of realism these viewers belonged.

While watching these programmes I often wondered why any of these shows exist and why audiences are so attracted to them. Having studied television production as an undergraduate student, I was informed of the television process and knew that the term reality television was flawed as most recorded video footage is carefully selected and edited in most programmes. The irony of reality television is that it is far from a person's reality – confining people in a purpose-built house with full surveillance (*Big Brother*) or confining people to a space and then playing them against each other in a test of survival (*Survivor*). At the time I decided to pursue this research, the first production of *Big Brother* was already aired in August 2001; when I conducted my focus group interviews in October 2002, the second season of *Big Brother* had come to an end.

2. Approach to study

This study investigates the following:

- Why are audiences attracted to *Big Brother*?
- What pleasure do these viewers receive from watching *Big Brother*?

I decided to use students from the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University as the subjects in my focus group interviews. Rhodes University has students who hail from a wide range of backgrounds, which meant I would have easy access to a cross-section of students. Since this study investigates the reasons people are attracted to *Big Brother*, I decided to use a purposive sample to choose my interviewees. To this end, I advertised the focus group session to all those who watched and enjoyed the programme.

The research methods used for this study included focus group discussions and individual interviews. Preliminary enquiries indicated that qualitative in-depth interviews would be possible with key production personnel at both M-Net and Endemol. The focus groups helped determine how the audience members interpret the content of *Big Brother*. A non-random sampling method was used to select a sample of people who watched and enjoyed *Big Brother* to participate in the focus groups. In line with focus group interviewing there were between five and eight people per group (Hansen 1998). The participants of the focus groups were students from Rhodes University as the researcher was based at this university.

According to M-Net's publicity manager, Xoliswa Mwrebi, the promise of *Big Brother* was to entertain through showing the 'real' (October 2002). Mwrebi said there was a dramatic increase in viewership figures for the first season of *Big Brother*. On average, more than a million viewers were tuning into the reality television production. The channel noted about a million in-home viewers watching the *Big Brother* live eviction show on Sundays. According to research figures supplied by M-Net publicity the viewership peaked on Sunday evenings at 14 ARs - more than double that of its nearest competitor channel.

The phenomenon of reality television has given rise to much debate at the heart of which is the audience. Why do audiences watch reality television? What is the 'real' that the programmers claim to deliver? Drawing from Mwrebi's interview, the promise of *Big Brother* is to portray the reality of those people in the *Big Brother* house. Given this, is this what attracts audiences to the programme? Within media studies, theorists define two dominant forms of realism. Ellis (1982; 130) writes that the "notions of realism are some of the most enduring means of judgement of film and TV creations." There are different emphases on the term realism. For Ellis (1982) and Ang (1982) what makes up the reality of a programme will differ for different audiences. Ang (1982) notes that for some viewers the represented reality must coincide with the social reality (problems like unemployment and housing shortages), while for others it should accord with their own experiences.

The two discourses of realism which will be explored in this study are referred to by media theorists as 'empiricist realism' and 'emotional realism'. According to Ang (1982) empiricist realism works at the level of a denotative meaning. This is a literal resemblance between the

fictional world of the text and the ‘real’ world as experienced by an audience member. The results of Strelitz’s audience research (2002) reveal that many students relied on an empiricist understanding of realism in judging the worth of the media and justifying their media consumption choices. ‘Emotional realism’, on the other hand, is associated with meanings that can be attributed to elements of the text Ang (1982). It works at the level on connotation. Ang’s study revealed that the realism of a programme lay in the subjective experience a programme offered to the world. In *Watching Dallas*, Ang’s viewers recognized that both in their own lives and in the lives of the television characters that happiness could never last forever.

In Chapter 2 I will trace the history of reality television and its emergence as a specific television genre. In this chapter I will demonstrate how reality television has its roots in the *cinema verité* movement of the 1960s, which was an attempt to portray ‘film truth’ by abandoning actors, using ‘real people’, and discarding constructed sets and a script. The chapter also introduces the reality series *Big Brother*, and briefly outlines how this programme is a hybridisation of genres.

It is Chapter 3 that will provide a detailed look at the production of *Big Brother*. Given my research focus, this chapter will also discuss the technical production of this programme, which was considered in the early 2000s to be ground-breaking in the local television industry. This chapter also looks at the concept of realism, which one must discuss when discussing the genre of reality television.

In Chapter 4, I undertake to explain why audiences watched South Africa’s first reality television series, *Big Brother*. I discuss the textuality of reality television in order to gain an understanding of why audiences watched the programme. This chapter further explores other areas of audience appeal, including realism, voyeurism and the appeal of live television.

Chapter 5 focuses on the research methodology undertaken in this study. I will detail the qualitative research methods used; in the form of focus groups and in-depth individual interviews. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the findings from my focus group interviews. I will determine if audience pleasures came from the claim that reality television represents reality.

Chapter 2 – The birth of reality television

2.1. Introduction

Structural changes, technological advancements and a higher demand for programming brought massive changes in the structure of television systems in the 1980s and 1990s (Waisbord, 2004: 363), which contributed to the emergence of reality television programmes as we have come to know them. This chapter traces the history of reality television and its emergence as a specific television genre. It includes a brief summary of some of the most popular reality television programmes and briefly looks at the introduction of reality television to South Africa. The chapter also seeks to identify whether reality television has a definitive style. I demonstrate how reality television has its roots in the *cinema vérité* movement of the 1960s, which was an attempt to portray ‘film truth’ by abandoning actors, using ‘real people’, and discarding constructed sets and a script. The chapter also introduces the reality series *Big Brother*, and briefly outlines how this programme is a hybridisation of genres. In order to understand how this television format makes use of various genres, it is important to review the historical timeline for reality television and illustrate this with reference to specific programmes.

2.2. Genres

Like most forms of entertainment, television thrives on multiple formats and genres (Rose, 1985: 3). Television was commercially viable from the late 1920s and more than nine decades later, history has shown that the older the medium gets, the more the once rigid genres blend into one another (Rose, 1985:1). Reality television, as a relatively new format in the medium, is said to be a hybridisation or mixture of genres. In order to understand the hybrid nature of this format of television, it is important to begin with a discussion of genres.

Berger (1992: 3) writes that genre is a French term (deriving from the original Latin) meaning "kind" or "class". Most television audiences are familiar with the term as it appears in programming schedules, reviews, advertising and television magazines. For Berger the most common genres are advertisements, news programmes, comedies, soap operas, documentaries, sports shows, talk shows, adventure programmes, detective shows, science fiction, hospital dramas and westerns (1992: 4). He notes that in principle a television programme should fit into only one of the categories if the classification system of genres is to work. However, in practice, increasingly, there are mixed genres, combinations of kinds of

programmes that complicate the matter of genre classification. An example of this can be *dramedy*, a subgenre that blends the rules associated with drama (serious) and comedy (funny).

Berger (1992: 5) further argues that in his analysis of television genres, programmes can be categorised into more basic genres. For Berger all television genres can be reduced to four types of programmes: actualities, contests, persuasions, and dramas. Actualities include news programmes and documentaries that portray what is going on in the world, focussing on events and people in society. Contests refer to a competition where the participants are contestants and not actors or actresses. Berger includes sport shows and game shows in this category. The category he refers to as persuasion is one which gets audiences to believe in something like a product. Advertisements are examples of this type of television format. Berger (1992: 4) groups the rest of the television formats into the category of drama, which is all encompassing and includes programmes like soap operas, situation comedies, police-, adventure-, action-, as well as hospital shows.

In contrast to Berger's structuralist classification of genres, Bignell and Orlebar (2005: 59) define genres as a sharing of expectations between audience and programme makers about the classification of a programme. They believe that a genre gives a programme an identity which, if familiar, provides both security and appeal for the audience (2005: 59). These are two different but important approaches to consider on the issue of genre; while Bignell and Orlebar's approach is audience-focused, Berger's is focused on the structure of the text.

In further trying to understand *Big Brother* as a television format that includes a variety of genres – it is important to establish the relationship between genre and format. Turner agrees that format is a production category with relatively rigid boundaries that are difficult to transgress without coming up with a new format (2001: 7). Genre, however, is a more inclusive category that can be used to describe programmes that use a number of related formats and is usually the product of a text and audience-based negotiation that is activated by audience expectation (Turner, 2001: 7). Therefore, television genre is based on the identification of features that distinguish one kind of work from another (Bignell and Orlebar, 2005: 60-62), while format can be seen as the features of a programme that define its

uniqueness, such as the premise, type of setting, range of characters and genres (Bignell and Orlebar, 2005: 59).

The key aspects of *Big Brother* includes the house, a group of ‘ordinary’ contestants, the process of nomination and voting out, hidden cameras and the role of *Big Brother* seen as the authority (Bignell and Orlebar, 2005: 59). A television format can be traded like a product to another production company in another country (Bignell and Orlebar, 2005: 60) as is illustrated with the *Big Brother* format later in this chapter. Like Bignell and Orlebar, Turner further substantiates that format is an original concepts that can be copyrighted, franchised or traded as a commercial property (in Holmes, 2008: 17). It is important to establish the distinction between format and genre as one gets into the discussion of *Big Brother* and the notion that is a hybridisation of genres. While there are many approaches to the concept of genre, it is clear that television programming in the postmodern era is marked by genre hybridity and that the notion of pure generic forms is outdated. Having discussed genre and format, I now move to look at the genre of the ‘real’ or ‘reality’.

2.3. *Cinema vérité* and direct cinema: the emergence of a ‘real’ genre

In order to determine the emergence of reality television as a genre, it is important to look at the discussion around *cinema vérité* and direct cinema. *Cinema vérité* was part of the broader artistic tradition of realism and the cinematic tradition of documentary filmmaking. This concept, which literally means *film truth*, was a style of documentary filmmaking developed by French film directors in the 1960s (Hall, 1991: 24-50). The production techniques for *cinema vérité* did not depend on actors, props and special effects; instead, *cinema vérité* directors used real people, small hand-held cameras, and homes and surrounding areas as the locations for their films as opposed to specially built sets. The producers wanted to present ‘life as it really was’ by using ‘real’ everyday issues as the artistic medium, with an aim of showing the truth of peoples’ lives and the social context in which they live. These realistic traditions were aimed at showing men’s and women’s real situation in life rather than at providing the viewer with escapist fantasy (Hall, 1991: 24-50).

“*Cinema vérité*” and “direct cinema” were developed during the same historical period.

Direct cinema is said to be an American filmmaking tradition identified as a major influence in the development of the British filmmaking tradition, particularly observational films (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 37). Direct cinema favoured discreet observational filming, with no

attempt of analysis but rather a revelation through situation. It provided evidence for which the audience could then assess the facts of the situation for themselves (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 38). As Nichols notes, in its idealised form, the direct cinema technique would avoid commentary, self-reflection, and music, preferring the use for long takes, indirect speech and overheard dialogue (1991: 38). For its credibility, direct cinema depended on absolute trust in the filmmaker's vision of the truth of any situation but paradoxically denied that the filmmaker would influence events (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 40).

Cinema verité on the other hand was overtly interventionist by interrupting film subjects and filming their responses to rough cuts of footage. This technique was often associated with French filmmaker Jean Rouché. In his work Rouché acknowledged that the presence of cameras affected film subjects. He further argued that this prompted his subjects to be more truthful and more of their true selves (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 40-41).

As constructed texts both *cinema verité* and direct cinema are ways of seeing and understanding the filmmakers perception of the world. Each filmmaker defines the truth according to his or her own convictions and experiences within a cultural context (Barsam, 1991: 204). Barsam makes reference to theorist Erik Barnouw's summary in this regard:

The direct cinema documentarist took his camera to a situation of tension and waited hopefully for a crisis; the Rouch version of *cinema verité* tried to precipitate one. The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility, the Rouch *cinema verité* artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of uninvolved bystander; the *cinema verité* artists espoused that of provocateur. Direct cinema found its truth in events available to the camera. *Cinema verité* was committed to a paradox that artificial circumstances could bring hidden truth to the surface (in Barsam, 1991:204).

The similarity in both techniques is the attempt to capture the truth but they differ in the sense that direct cinema takes a camera into a difficult context in anticipation of a crisis while *cinema verité* tries to precipitate one. While direct cinema is rooted in the documentary tradition and is more observational, it would seem that *cinema verité* is the forerunner of reality television. In presenting both techniques, it is evident that reality television has its roots in *cinema verité*, it has since expanded its characteristics drawing on other film genres therefore resulting in its hybrid or mixed nature. This is further explained in the next section of this chapter, where I demonstrate how a reality television programme like *Big Brother* is a mixture of genres.

Corner foregrounds the documentary genre in that he notes that the premise *Big Brother* is to observe what ‘real’ behaviour is (Corner, 2009: 44). He further observes that *Big Brother* openly boasts various modes of observational filming which has been driving the documentary tradition for decades (Corner, 2009: 45). Documentary claims to provide some form of ‘truth’ (Rosenthal, 1988), which is also the primary feature of the film style *cinéma vérité*, discussed earlier. Genre conventions of the documentary are therefore used to authenticate experiences of the participants in *Big Brother* in order to assure the viewer that what they are seeing is ‘real’. The projection of authenticity is a central project in any documentary programme. It allows the viewer to accept that what they are seeing really happened and so can be believed, that the programme is a “genuine representation of real life” (Leishman, 2000).

2.4. Reality television: difficulty of definition

Reality television is difficult to define as a genre due to the mixture of formats used in the various programmes that fall within the category (Madger, 2004: 146). Annette Hill (2005: 5) writes that it is difficult to categorise reality television, as it covers a wide spectrum of ‘possibilities’. For Hill, reality television is a catch-all phrase that includes a wide range of programmes about ordinary, real people (Hill, 2005: 2) – people who are not actors or actresses. She argues that reality television is located in “in border territories”, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama. The programmes incorporated within the reality television genre include; *Candid Camera*, *Crimewatch UK*, *Big Brother* and *Survivor*. Each of the above mentioned programmes differ in structure and use different formats. For example – *Big Brother* and *Survivor* are considered game shows as contestants play for a prize at the end of the season. However, these programmes have significant differences as much as they have commonalities. Therefore it becomes difficult to fix a precise definition to the term ‘reality television’ (Holmes and Jermyn, 2004: 5). This can be further illustrated in the programme *I’m a Celebrity* – where the show features real people without scripts, but the shows are contrived, edited and controlled by a large production crew. Tasks are specifically planned with anticipated reactions anticipated.

Even with the complexity of the different programmes that fall under reality television, Kilborn attempts to define the term reality television (Kilborn, 1994: 423). In 1994, he explored the emergence of reality television and noted, like Hill, that reality television was becoming something of a ‘catch-all phrase’ in the television industry. For Kilborn the central elements are:

Recording ‘on the wing’ and frequently with the use of light weight video equipment, of events in the lives of individuals and groups; the attempt to stimulate such real-life events through various forms of dramatized reconstruction; and the incorporation of this material in suitably edited form into an attractively packaged television programme, which is promoted on the strength of its reality credentials. (Kilborn, 1994: 423)

Barnfield (2002: 49) adds that the difficulty of definition comes in the notion that reality television is a loose term, and given the wide range of television programmes within this category, the term might be considered too general. One of the reasons for the difficulty in definition comes in the complexity of the programmes relationships with so many genres. Holmes and Jermyn provide a succinct reason for many have struggled to provide an all-encompassing definition of the genre:

One of the reasons that issues of definition, description and terminology cannot be easily solved is not simply because of hybridity. It is also because such categorisations are an act of discursive construction which is enmeshed with a range of other factors – not at least perceptions of cultural value where popular factual programming is concerned (2004: 7).

Furthermore, reality television promises ‘access to the real’ through observational techniques. However, as Andrejevic (2004: 16) explains, this is a misconception given that reality television programmes are products of the culture industry. Andrejevic (2004: 16) further notes that these programmes are edited and slickly produced into a package – thereby disproving any pretensions to presenting ‘real’ reality.

However, Murray and Ouellette (2008: 5) and Hill (2007: 3) argue that reality television should not be confused with factual television. Hill (2007: 3) believes that while the term ‘reality television’ may connote truth and information, it could be more usefully reclassified as ‘reality entertainment’.

Kompare (2009) suggests that perhaps a new term is needed to distinguish the documentaries of the past from the broader use of actualities today. For Kompare, the term appropriately enough is ‘reality’, because reality television is “a weapon in the pursuit of audience share which dwells on the spectacle of the world for its own sake, or in the service of narrative, rather than as proof of extra cinematic truth” (2009: 106-107). What Kompare is suggesting is that reality television does need the effort of a well written script to keep an audience interested. Due to its claim for cinematic truth, an audience watches a supposedly unscripted programme that could reveal anything at any given time. In television production, audiences seem to have a notion of what reality television is how it is used by broadcasters when they advertise their programmes and its use in social conversation when referring to a particular programme.

Reality television encompasses a variety of specialised genres and formats. Murray and Ouellette (2009: 5) provide a list of some of the programmes and their genres. The “gamedocs” includes *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, *The Apprentice*, *America’s Next Top Model*, the makeover programme (*What Not to Wear*, *Extreme Makeover*), and the “docusoap” (*The Real World*, *The Real Housewives of Orange County*). Other sub-genres include the talent contest (*American Idol*, *Dancing with the Stars*), court programmes (*Judge Judy*, *Court television*) and, reality sitcoms (*The Osbournes*, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*) (Murray and Ouellette, 2009: 5). From the discussion so far one can appreciate that there are different formats of reality television and each programme is hybrid of genres which is better illustrated in the example of *Big Brother* in this chapter.

2.5. Enter ‘Big Brother’.

In the American summer of 2000 (also dubbed the summer of reality television), American network CBS was desperate to boost ratings and attract a younger audience. It tried two formats that showed great promise in Europe (Madger, 2004: 137). A programme called *Survivor* was aired and ratings increased, attracting younger audiences. It was marketed as a “must-see, one of a kind” show. During the final episode, fifty one million people tuned in (Madger, 2004: 137). Additionally, the Writer’s Guild strike of 2007-2008 in the United States left many networks with scheduling problems, and relatively cheaply produced reality television shows were picked up to meet the expanded need for programming.

There was mixed reception to the *Survivor*, it was dismissed as a format that would not last long on television screens. But contrary to belief and 15 years after the first *Big Brother* series was broadcast in South Africa, reality television has become an accepted and popular genre particularly for prime-time television (Madger, 2004: 137). By 2002, major American networks devoted at least eight hours a week of their prime-time schedule to reality television. It seems then that the emergence of reality television was part of a strategy to find television formats that reduced costs and increased the bottom line (Madger, 2004: 145).

For Madger, reality television outlines four significant changes to television production: a growing interest in pre-packaged formats, the emergence of product placement or branding as a source of revenue for the programme, the use of television programmes across multimedia channels and the growing strength of European programmes to the American and other international markets (2009: 149). One company that illustrates this is Endemol, based in the Netherlands (Madger, 2009: 149).

Endemol was established in 1994. Two men with a long history in Dutch television production, John de Mol and Joop van den Ende, pursued similar growth strategies by incorporating game shows and dramas based on formats devised in-house (Madger, 2004: 145). The company's revenue due to its reality television formats topped 914-million-Rand in 2001. Madger argues that Endemol is easily the most prolific pan-European producer of television programming and rose to prominence based on the strength of its formats (Madger, 2004: 146). No format better illustrates Endemol's success than *Big Brother*. By 2002, the programme had been sold to seventeen different countries (Madger, 2004: 146). By 2004, Endemol had as many as 300 formats in production around the world. Its corporate holdings and affiliates now expand over 20 countries, including South Africa (Madger, 2009: 149). The success of European formats is certainly noteworthy in the discussion of reality television programmes (Madger, 2009: 150). By the mid-2000s selling television formats made good business sense for a company like Endemol (Madger, 2009: 150), which also produced regional versions of the show: in *Big Brother Africa* in 2003, the contestants came

from Angola, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Madger, 2009: 151).

A format like *Big Brother* has worked for the various broadcasters because its template provides detailed production and marketing guidelines that are tailored to each country in which it is broadcast (Madger, 2004: 147). An interesting fact is that on 31 December 1999, more than fifty percent of the Dutch population were not celebrating the New Year, but rather were at home watching the final episode of *Big Brother* (Woods, October 2012

http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/eserv.php?pid=UQ:8909&dsID=Johnson_Woods_Ch.pdf).

The *Big Brother* statistics according to a University of Queensland study quoted by Woods shows the programme has been watched by over two billion people. In Italy 69 per cent of the population claimed to have watched it, in America 52 per cent tuned in and in Germany 64 per cent watched it. The show also boasts a broader audience than television viewers; on the internet with live feeds at any time of the day (Woods, October 2012

http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/eserv.php?pid=UQ:8909&dsID=Johnson_Woods_Ch.pdf).

2.6. *Big Brother - a hybridisation of genres*

Big Brother as a reality television programme is best described as drawing on characteristics of other television genres (Terribas and Puig, 2000), blurring of borders between different genres and the borrowing of features is a growing programming trend. As established in the earlier discussion of genre – that the system of genres is not a completely ordered and neat system. The genre system is changing and is an increasingly hybridised set of forms and functions, and Corner (2009: 44) places *Big Brother* within the history of the game show and docu-drama genres.

Starting with the game show genre, *Big Brother* adopts one of the fundamental features of this form: the presence of contestants (called ‘housemates’) who compete for a prize of R1 million through various tasks. Another feature of the game show is audience interaction and the decision as to who stays and who leaves the house. Prizes are typical commodities in a game show and are usually quantified with a commercial interest because millions of viewers are watching the programme (Fiske, 1987: 271). The game show element injects a sense of uncertainty. The audience is aware that non-actors are competing in situations that are unscripted, and the outcomes have presumably not been pre-determined by the producers

(Hill, 2007: 104). According to Hill this element of uncertainty provides a sense of immediacy by allowing audiences to have the expectation that ‘anything might happen’ – another characteristic of live television (Hill, 2007: 104); also, such indeterminate outcomes may also be familiar to many audiences from the live broadcast of sporting events.

Hill argues that when it comes to the genre of documentary, audiences have a general understanding that this genre is based on a degree of fact and documents the world to a certain extent and under certain conditions (Hill, 2007: 101). There are obvious problems that *Big Brother* is not a true documentary in that while it is deemed to be true, what people do and say on the programme must be somewhat contrived precisely because of the format of the programme. Undeniably, *Big Brother* provides abnormal terms of living within surveillance space (Corner, 2009: 46). This ‘constructedness’ of the programme could be seen to detract from the portrayed ‘verisimilitude’ as the contestants are aware that people are watching them and will, to some extent, perform for those audiences and try to gain their support so they are not voted out of the *Big Brother* house. While the *Big Brother* format encapsulates various elements from different genres, there is no single conventional genre type that solely defines the programmes. It is therefore clear that a programme like *Big Brother* is a hybridisation or mixture of different genres like game, drama and documentary.

2.7. *The Reality television time line: a candid camera!*

Among the reality television programmes introduced to South Africa from the early 2000s are *Big Brother*, *Survivor*¹, *The Amazing Race*², *Idols*³ and *Popstars*⁴. However, most audiences could be mistaken to think that these were the first ever reality television programmes produced. A closer look into its history reveals that reality television is not a new phenomenon. The origins of reality television date back to the production *Candid Camera* which debuted in 1948 (Andrejevic, 20004: 91). This is arguably the first and most memorable American reality television series (Clissold, 2004: 33). The premise for *Candid*

¹ *Survivor* is a Reality television series first aired in May 2000 in the United States. Sixteen people are confined outdoors to a place anywhere in the world and have to survive the harsh realities of the surroundings and each other. The aim is to stay in the game the longest. The only remaining survivor wins a million US dollars.

² *The Amazing Race* (another American series) features 12 teams of two racing around the world competing against in a race to win a million US dollars. The series first aired in the United States in September 2001.

³ *Pop Idols* started in the UK. Countries around the world proceeded to host their own national versions of the show that scouts the country to find one talented Pop sensation. The winner gets a recording contract with a reputable music company for a year.

⁴ *Popstars* began in Australia in January 2001. The show is similar to Pop Idols but scouts for a pop group as opposed to one person. The group wins a recording contract with a reputable music company for a year.

Camera was the technique of capturing images with hidden cameras without the people involved being aware of them, with the objective of achieving humour. The show's famous tagline, 'Smile! You're on *Candid Camera*', not only signalled comic relief by exposing where the camera was hidden, but it also functioned as an ideological directive to stop worrying about being watched in a "Cold War climate of surveillance" (Clissold, 2004: 33). *Candid Camera* set the industry standard for capturing individuals in unguarded moments using an unobtrusive camera, which helped to perpetuate the 'real' – an underlying aesthetic of reality television (Clissold, 2004: 33). The programme was launched on 10 August 1948, and was arguably a prototype for reality television programming and the start of an era set to re-shape the entertainment industry (Clissold, 2004: 35).

Following the introduction of *Candid Camera*, which was broadcast from 1948 until 2004, other American and British reality television programmes emerged, including the British production *7 Up* (1964) and the United States productions of *An American Family* (1973), *America's Most Wanted* (1988) and *Cops* (1989). *An American Family* was a series about the Loud family of Santa Barbara, California who were filmed for about 300 hours, but only 12 hours were selected, edited and broadcast. The show enjoyed an audience of approximately 10 million American viewers as cameras showed the marital break-up of Bill and Pat Loud and also documented the announcement that their son Lance was a homosexual. The earlier reality shows relied more heavily on the 'documentary' approach, whereas the later generation relied much more on 'entertainment' values, as far as genre conventions are concerned. *An American Family* introduced 'real life' issues, which were considered controversial and overlooked by other programmes in an attempt to make a statement about the American society at the time (Holmes and Jermyn, 2004: 5).

The producers at PBS hailed *An American Family* as a social scientific breakthrough (McCarthy, 2008: 26). McCarthy states that in the example of *An American Family*, reality television served as a place where popular culture and social science overlapped. It was a realist ideal in which social norms, mechanisms of conformity, scripts and modes of interaction were put on display (McCarthy, 2008: 26). Kompare (2008: 109) observes that at the time of its broadcast *An American Family* was perceived as scandalous. The point of the

show was to get at ‘the truth’ of the typical American family. The show’s producer, Craig Gilbert, wanted to examine how family life had changed in the 1960s (Kompere 2008: 108). For many critics, part of the problem with *An American Family* was that the genre was less documentary and more indebted to the genre of the soap opera, both in terms of the framing of the lives of the subjects, as well as the attempt to affect an anthropological explanatory gaze while focusing on the ‘extraordinary’ rather than the ‘ordinary’ (Kompere 2008: 108).

The reality television trend was yet to develop into a fully-fledged media phenomenon. In the 1980s shows like *America’s Funniest Home Videos* emerged. The 1990s saw the production *The Real World* which was aimed at the so-called ‘MTV generation’. According to documentary filmmaker John Murray, his goal was that *The Real World* would be the ‘MTV generation’ version of *An American Family* (Andrejevic, 2004: 71). Andrejevic’s study of *The Real World*, revealed the following:

The MTV shows might be considered a hybrid format that combines observational techniques, with the cinema verité strategy of deploying the camera “as a deliberate provocation”. The observational segments are intercut with scenes shot in a confessional room where cast members speak directly to the camera and share their thoughts and reactions to the days’ events. The half-hour segments are edited and the narrative flow is bolstered with captions describing the location and superimposed background music (Andrejevic, 2004: 71).

Two decades later reality television has proven to be one of the most productive ideas in the history of television. By 2012 there were dozens of shows on television screens around the world; these included shows like *Project Runway*, *Wipeout*, *Jersey Shore*, *American Idol* and *Keeping up with the Kardashians* (McCracken, 2012: 14). Viewership numbers have been astounding. McCracken points to the fact that in America most prime-time shows gets an average audience of 12 million viewers. However, the first episode of the fifth season of *American Idol* drew 25, 5 million viewers (McCracken, 2012: 16). This exceeds the kind of viewership figures which claimed records in the 1980s for mainstream television shows like *Dallas*, *Miami Vice* and *Moonlighting*, and begins to approach the kind of viewership figures associated more with international sporting spectacles.

2.8. *Reality television in South Africa*

In South Africa, reality television as a new format experienced extraordinary audience reception after the emergence of *Survivor* (the United States version of the series) in 2000. The programme was aired on the public broadcaster's channel SABC 3, and attracted an audience of nearly one million viewers for each episode. According to the All Media Products Survey (SAARF: 1999 - 2001), *Survivor* attracted 20% more viewers than the channel's regular audience. Following the introduction of *Survivor*, reality television became the buzzword in the mainstream media, as most commercial radio and television programmes geared content towards discussions about the introduction of this new type of programming to South African screens. Soon after the phenomenal success of *Survivor*, the private pay channel M-Net and the International television production company Endemol introduced the first localised reality television game show to South Africa – *Big Brother SA*, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

2.9. *Conclusion*

In this chapter I traced the emergence of reality television as a programming category rather than genre, and argued that 'reality television' could not belong to a single genre because of the hybrid nature of the programmes that fall within the category. The chapter also looked at the introduction of reality television to South Africa and the emergence of the programme *Big Brother*. Finally the chapter concluded by discussing the technical production of *Big Brother* and its impact of the 'real' takes place in the next chapter. This will assist in understanding the programme's appeal with audiences.

Chapter 3 – The production of *Big Brother*

“‘House Arrest is basically fiction,’ said Fogarty. ‘Like all TV and film, it’s built in the edit.’

‘You manipulate the housemates’ images?’

‘Well, obviously. We’re not scientists, we make television programmes. People are basically dull. We have to make them interesting, turn them into heroes and villains.’

‘I thought you were supposed to be observers, that the whole thing was an experiment in social interaction?’

‘Look constable,’ Fogarty explained patiently, ‘in order to create a nightly half-hour of broadcasting we have at our disposal the accumulated images of thirty television cameras running for twenty-four hours. That’s seven hundred and twenty hours of footage to make one half-hour of television. We couldn’t avoid making subjective decisions even if we wanted to. The thing that amazes us is that the nation believes what we show them. They actually accept that what they are watching is real’”.

(Ben Elton, *Dead Famous*, 2001: 43).

3.1. Introduction

Ben Elton’s novel, *Dead Famous*, shows through fiction how reality television is manipulated in an attempt to sell the product as the truth and make it successful. This chapter will show that the central premise of *Dead Famous* is not far from the truth. The chapter examines the genesis of *Big Brother* South Africa. Given my research focus, I will also discuss the technical production of this programme, which was considered to be ground-breaking in the local television industry, to help us later understand why viewers were attracted to a programme which tracked occupants in the house 24 hours a day. It describes the relationship between the producers and broadcasters of the programme and the various decision-making processes applied to the production of *Big Brother*. Following a detailed outline of the production of *Big Brother* and its technical construction, the latter part of the chapter looks at the issues of realism when dealing with the concept of reality television.

3.2. The Origins of *Big Brother*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Endemol’s aim was to create the first interactive and cross-media reality programme. The Dutch production enjoyed an audience of 15 million viewers. It was broadcast from 16 September 1999 and continued until 30 December 1999. In 2000, Endemol licensed the format and *Big Brother* was sold to Germany, Spain, the United

States, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Switzerland, Sweden and Belgium. Since the Dutch production, 12 countries around the world, including South Africa, have produced their national version of the show. The format and rules of *Big Brother* was then adapted to suit the country in which it is broadcast (Madger, 2004: 146 and Lombard, 2012).

3.3. *Big Brother South Africa*

The Electronic Media Network (M-Net), a private pay television channel, was founded as South Africa's first private subscription television in 1986. The first broadcast, which was a one-channel, twelve-hour broadcast, went on air in October 1986 (Lombard, 2012). In the late 1990s M-Net's expanded its programming schedule and the MagicWorks commissioning division was established in 1997 to deal with local content, international co-productions and joint ventures. One of these projects included *Big Brother* (Lombard, 2012). M-Net expanded on its local productions by using local versions of successful international formats. Reality television was a first for South Africa and it was a new global television trend showing remarkable audience numbers (Lombard, 2012). On the international front, *Big Brother* was preceded by the popular British game show, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. The potential popularity of both these shows was spotted by the then Head of Local Productions at M-Net, Mr Carl Fischer (Lombard, 2012).

Endemol International, as already noted in Chapter 2, is one of Europe's top content-providers active in television production and other media services. In conjunction with Endemol, M-Net was responsible for introducing *Big Brother South Africa* to local screens. Endemol South Africa, a subsidiary of Endemol International, is the largest independent television-production company in South Africa. At the time of the production of *Big Brother South Africa*, it was jointly owned by the Dutch-based production company Endemol Entertainment and KMM Review Publishing Company (a local black investment group) with a 33% share in the company. Endemol South Africa has access to the programming formats of its international partners, resulting in the South African version of *Big Brother*. Endemol South Africa has a creative department responsible for the conceptualisation of television programming developed by Endemol International and the technical and creative execution of the programmes. The marketing, sales and business development department ensures the commercial viability of projects ventured into by Endemol South Africa (Lombard, 2012). In

a nutshell, M-Net is a broadcaster and television network that produces, acquires or commissions television content. It is also a production company and content supplier that is commissioned and contracted by broadcasters. M-Net acquired the rights to make a local version of *Big Brother* from Endemol in the Netherlands and Endemol South Africa is the production company that produces the show alongside M-Net (*Big Brother* South Africa Website, 2001 and Lombard, 2012).

What set *Big Brother South Africa* apart from its international counterparts was that it was the first country to host a designated 24 hour service to the reality television show – where viewers could watch all the action in the house (Lombard, 2012). In the first season in 2001, the *Big Brother* house was fitted with 56 audio microphones and 28 video cameras. The audio and video equipment was controlled by eight directors, eight producers and a supporting production team. The camera operators were stationed behind one-way glass mirror windows. The directors of the *Big Brother* 24-hour channel on DSTV had to apply just one criteria when deciding which camera should be put on the air. As it was a 24-hour channel, it could not be edited retrospectively so the directors had to immediately select the camera that was recording something of interest to the viewer (Fischer, 2002). For example, if anything interesting was happening in the lounge and nothing outside, a decision was taken to keep the cameras in the lounge on air and not the cameras where no interesting activity is taking place. In spite of this, the directors had to also ensure that the viewers were always geographically reminded of what other housemates around the house were doing at all times (Fischer, 2002). The South African producers customised the location (both inside and outside) the house to give the programme local specificity. For example, the backyard where most recreation takes place was fitted with a braai and a jacuzzi. The programme constantly showed contestants ‘braai-ing’ or cooking ‘local cuisine’, e.g. ‘poitjiekos’ (stewing meat cooked in an open fire) (Pitout, 2004: 169). All these elements were used to increase interaction between the housemates (Fischer, 2002).

The housemates were required by the rules of the game to wear a microphone at all times to enable the production team to hear and record all that happens in the house. When the lights were switched off, infra-red cameras monitored and recorded events. Cameras were also positioned in the bathroom, where hot water was only available between 21h00 and

22h00. This was referred to as the ‘shower hour’ during which housemates bathed in full view of the audience. This was considered ‘ground-breaking television’ because never before were cameras on 24 hours covering every angle of the house and watching every move of the housemates. This format that was never adopted on television before (*Big Brother* South Africa Website, 2001).

Twelve participants, representing a cross-section of South Africans, were selected to compete against one another to win a cash prize of R1 million. The participants entered the *Big Brother* house by choice and tried to stay in the house for the duration of 106 days.

Housemates had no contact with the outside world; this included telephones, radios, newspapers, television or access to the internet. The housemates could be heard and seen anywhere in the house or garden. They had no respite from one another as they slept in communal bedrooms and shared a common living area (*Big Brother* South Africa Website, 2001).

The ‘Big Brother’ in *Big Brother* was a disembodied voice in the house that determined the conditions and rules for the group. The ‘voice’ enforced the rules of the game, settled any disputes and also served as the participants’ confidante during their visits to the diary room. ‘*Big Brother*’ set tasks on a weekly basis and housemates had to complete these tasks, which forced them to work together, often creating disputes within the groups. It was also mandatory that the housemates went into a “diary” room every day for a few minutes. The diary room was a small, soundproof room equipped with a chair and a camera. Housemates discussed their thoughts with ‘*Big Brother*’ and any other issue unfolding in the house. Once every two weeks ‘*Big Brother*’ asked the housemates to nominate two of their fellow contestants for eviction and they had to motivate their choices on camera. The last person remaining was the winner of the series (*Big Brother* South Africa Website, 2001).

Because *Big Brother* South Africa was broadcast on a pay channel, the majority of South Africans who were unable to access the programme during the day could watch the day’s highlights package every evening at 18h30 during ‘Open Time’. This was the 2-hours long ‘free-to-air’ slot which M-Net had in its original contract to broadcast in the country in the

late apartheid period, and which ‘expired’ more than a decade ago. An hour long package was also produced for audiences in encoded time who did not watch the 24-hour channel. During the daily recording of the first season of *Big Brother South Africa*, 96 hours of footage was recorded from the different camera positions for every 24 hours of the housemates’ lived experiences. The footage was then edited into a 24-minute package for the daily M-Net broadcast. It is important to reflect on how the show worked and the technical elements that allowed the participants to be watched and heard 24 hours a day, as it gives us a better understanding of the findings in Chapter 6 which examines the reasons why viewers were attracted to the programme.

The first season of *Big Brother South Africa* was aired on 26 August 2001. The channel described *Big Brother South Africa* as a resounding success (Lombard, 2012). Television Audience Measurement Survey (TAMS) shows the channel commanded a viewership of 965 000 viewers on the debut evening of the broadcast, which commanded among the higher ratings during the same time slot previously (SAARF TAMS data - period 1 August-30 November 2001). At the end of the first season, *Big Brother South Africa*, was named the Newsmaker⁵ of the Year for 2001 in South Africa. The Chairperson of the National Press Club called it “the biggest media event ever in South Africa” (Abramjee, 2001). The first season of *Big Brother South Africa* showed an increase in audience interaction with the programme. According to the National Press Club, more than six million telephone calls were made, more than 330 000 users were registered on the official website and more than R30 million worth of advertising revenue was generated (National Press Club, June 2002). Having established the success of the programme, later chapters will focus on the viewers and the reasons they were drawn to the programme.

⁵Newsmaker of the year award is a National Press Club initiative awarded to a person, item or event that has been followed with interest in the mainstream media. The National Press Club was founded as the Pretoria Press Club in 1975. The club has since grown to become the National Press Club. The membership profile includes journalists, news photographers and communication practitioners from across the country. Annually the National Press Club awards the Newsmaker of the Year award. Nominations are judged in terms of news value and the resulting media coverage created by the nominees (National Press Club Statement, Yusuf Abramjee, 12 December 2012).

3.4. Realism

Strelitz conducted a similar study in 2002 where he explored how a sample of South African youth attending Rhodes University in Grahamstown, responded to texts produced internationally and distributed locally. His study investigated the individual and social reasons why local audiences are either attracted or reject global media. In a similar way this study attempts to understand what discourse of realism attracted audiences to season one of *Big Brother South Africa*, therefore it is imperative to consider the degree to which audiences find the programme ‘realistic’. As discussed in earlier chapters Strelitz too draws on the work of Ellis and Ang (as discussed in previous chapters) and summarises that both Ellis (1982: 8) and Ang (1982: 35) emphasise the multi-accentuality of the term ‘realism’, meaning that what constitutes the ‘reality’ of a programme, differs for different viewers.

What unites these understandings of realism is that a comparison is made between the realities ‘in’ and ‘outside’ a text. Ang (1982: 36) refers to this approach to realism as ‘empiricist realism’. It is cognitively based and works primarily at the level of denotative meaning, in which a literal resemblance is sought between the fictional world of the text and the ‘real’ world as experienced by the audience member. Judgements are made accordingly, and as Ang explains, “...a text which can be seen as an ‘unrealistic’ rendering of social reality (however that is defined) is ‘bad’” (1982: 36).

Ellis (1982: 6-7) also describes the dominance, amongst audiences and producers alike, of an empirical understanding of realism. He defines ‘realism’ as the expectation that a particular representation should present a ‘realistic portrayal’ of characters and events. These include surface accuracy; that it should conform to notions of what we expect to happen; that it should explain itself adequately; and that it should conform to expected notions of psychology and character motivation (1982: 6-7).

Given my research focus is to analyse the reasons why audiences watched South Africa’s first reality television series, *Big Brother*, and to determine what discourse of realism attracted audiences to the programme – it is imperative to get into a discussion of realism. In the early 1970s a new American television programme called *Dallas* sparked a worldwide phenomenon. The series centred on a fictitious, wealthy Texan family. It was aired in more than ninety countries and as Ang notes, more than half of the Dutch population watched

Dallas in the Netherlands in 1982 (1989: 1). As presented in Chapter 2, the only programme to beat the *Dallas* statistic in the Netherlands was *Big Brother* in 1999. Ien Ang wanted to delve further into the pleasures *Dallas* offered its Dutch audience. She placed an advertisement which read as follows:

I like watching the television serial *Dallas*, but often get odd reactions to it. Would anyone like to write to me and tell me why you like watching it too, or dislike it? (Ang, 1989: 10)

Ang received forty two replies which formed the basis of her understanding as to what audiences see as reality and fiction. In all the letters, the writers all watched the programme (Ang, 1989: 14). In trying to make sense of the pleasures derived from *Dallas*, Ang looked to the Marxist view that the production of industrial culture is subject to the laws of the capitalist economy where cultural products are packaged into commodities to make a profit (1989: 18). This begs the question: how is the pleasure of *Dallas* constructed? Ang argued the promise of pleasure is the use-value by which the industry tries to ‘seduce’ viewers to watch *Dallas* (1989: 19). However, in order to achieve this it would seem that producers have to have a definite idea what the audience will find pleasurable (Ang, 1989: 19). In other words they must be confident that their idea of pleasure will coincide with that of the viewing public (Ang, 1989: 21).

In exploring what pleasures audiences receive from watching *Dallas*, Ang looks at the concept of realistic illusion. In *Dallas*, Ang argues that this illusion is that a text is a faithful reflection of an existing world emerging as a result of the fact that the construction of the text is suppressed (Ang, 1989: 38). For Ang, the realistic illusion is not to be blamed on the lack of knowledge of the viewer but rather on the formal structure of the text where the thematic content plays on the subordinate role (Ang, 1989: 38). Ang cites Colin MacCabe’s proposition that a text that elicits realistic illusion is a ‘classic realistic text’ which unfolds in such a way that the viewer is unaware that the narrative has a narrator (Ang, 1989: 39). According to MacCabe, it is the constructed illusion of reality which is the basis of pleasure. It is pleasurable to be able to deny the textuality and the fictional nature of a film and to forget it. The viewer feels a sense of comfort as they allow “the narrative to flow over them without effort” (Ang, 1989: 40). Ang then deduces that the pleasure in *Dallas*, could be regarded as the pleasure in the apparent meaningfulness of the ups and downs of the Ewing family. It is the form of the narrative that produces the pleasure (Ang, 1989: 41).

In the letters, Ang also observed that some fans call *Dallas* 'realistic'. She further explored what was 'real' in this fictional storyline. She found that a text can be read at different levels. The first is the denotative or the literal level in terms of the discussions between the characters, their actions and reactions (Ang, 1989: 41). An extract from a letter Ang received from a viewer on the subject illustrates the point:

It is a programme situated pretty far outside reality. The mere fact that a whole family is living in one house comes over as rather unreal. What happens in this serial you would never run into in the street or in your circle of acquaintance: very unreal events. The family relationships that are so weirdly involved: this one's married to the sister of the enemy of his brother etc. (Letter 41) (Ang, 1989: 41-42)

Ang interprets the letter to indicate that *Dallas* at a narrative level is not exactly regarded as realistic. In the letters received, the literal resemblances are scarcely seen. Therefore many *Dallas* fans experience the programme as realistic as a paradox (Ang, 1989: 42). A text can also be read at a connotative level. This refers to the associated meanings attached to elements of the text. Letter 41 also states that:

The nice thing about the serial is that it has a semblance of humanity; it is not so unreal that you can't relate to it any more. There are recognisable things, recognisable people, relations and situations in it. (Ang, 1989: 42)

What's interesting here is what was at a denotative level deemed unrealistic is now at a connotative level not seen as unreal but in fact recognisable (Ang, 1989: 42). Ang's participants also indicated that the 'structures of feeling' were familiar, especially because of the family setting, the focus on sibling rivalry, marital relations, parental authority, the centrality of the mother figure in Miss Ellie as moral compass, and the gender roles associated with feminine emotionality and masculine rationality. So while the scenario of *Dallas* was far removed from the everyday realities of Dutch viewers, the fans of the show projected echoes of their own ideas about family and relationships onto the show, and 'recognised' the familiar in the strange and far-fetched.

Reality television by its very nature attempts to create meaning and the sense of the 'real' through the illusion of transparency. Even though these programmes are highly constructed and edited, they give the impression of being more 'real' than other television programmes. In the case of *Candid Camera*, discussed earlier in Chapter Two, the programme announced its commitment to objective representation. In the attempt to capture life in a 'real' and unguarded moment, *Candid Camera* used the codes of the documentary filmmaking tradition, which are now used in popular factual programming (Clissold, 2004: 48). *Candid Camera* seemed more 'real' in part because of the hidden camera, which creates the illusion that the material shown gives the viewer an insight into how people 'really behave' when they feel themselves to be unobserved – an element that still distinguishes the types and experiences between the various reality television programmes (Clissold, 2004: 50). However, while *Big Brother* also shows the viewer exactly what is happening in the house, the housemates are aware they are being watched, they have willingly put themselves in that position and also know where the cameras are placed. *Big Brother* cannot stake a full claim to the 'real' as *Candid Camera* did as its subjects did not know they were being watched. It must be noted that even in shows like *Candid Camera*, some choices were made about which filmed scenarios to broadcast, some of this dependent on producers' ideas about entertainment value, and some of it dependent on those 'ordinary people' agreeing to being part of the show after the fact. Audiences would never get to see the material of those who behaved in ways not deemed suitable for broadcast, or the footage of subjects who refused to sign the release to have their clips broadcast. However, one cannot deny either that that the action on the screen is live and the reality of the housemates who have put themselves in that position. Particularly on the 24 hour channel of *Big Brother*, the seemingly unedited access to the behaviour of the housemates underwrites the producers' claims to 'realism'.

Fisher (2002) argues that the media are filtered by professionals who decide what the viewer needs to know. She notes that while the footage is real as it has not been digitally manipulated, there are elements of editing and crafting tasks to entertain an audience, and which frame the view on the world of the televised text the audience is given access to. This editing could thus be seen as a form of manipulation of raw data which also hides the fact of such 'selection and construction'. Producers and editors manipulate the stories that define a reality television show's success; *Survivor* in the United States was specifically targeted by critics for this. Fisher adds that editing a reality television show is most challenging. Editors and producers work closely to make story decisions and select the footage that make the final

programme that viewers at home think constitute the whole action. According to Nancy Stern, executive producer of the reality programme *Lost*, even though many hours of footage are recorded, editors sometimes struggle to find the perfect frame, shot or angle and an editor “makes his or her magic and turns it into something” (Fisher: 2002). This ‘turning it into something’ is manipulation, a weakness of a media genre that claims to be real and unscripted. Stern writes:

It’s not about scripting, it’s all about access and people being real and being game to participate. In these reality shows, if you’re not rolling [recording onto tape], then it never happened. So you roll on everything. It’s better to have it. Tape is cheaper than a moment (in Fisher: 2002).

According to Stern, while every action is recorded not everything is revealed to the public, which was certainly the case in *Big Brother South Africa*’s highlights package. Johannes Weuthen (Fisher; 2002), video editor for the reality television show *Temptation Island*, says that there was a lesson to be learned by the producers and directors of the show, as members of the production team were under the impression that they would have control over the content and were aiming for a ‘docudrama’ reality experience. However, they discovered in the editing of the programmes that a team had to make the filmed images interesting and, in constructing a specific version of reality, production teams conducted intensive selection procedures. Weuthen contends that the most important thing about reality television programmes is the cast and having the right combination of people (in Fisher, 2002). The observations made by Fisher, Stern and Wethuen reinforce MacCabe’s argument that the constructed illusion of reality is often the basis of pleasure in film and television text. The premise that the producers’ and editors’ decisions on visuals becomes the form of the narrative that produces the pleasure, is in line with Ang and her understanding of the pleasures audiences get from a programme they enjoy watching.

In reality television there are ostensibly no written scripts and Fisher says it is important to maintain story arcs to capture an audience without the conventional script (Fisher, 2002). Fisher refers to the video editors as the scriptwriters of a reality show as they craft the show. According to Carl Fischer *Big Brother South Africa* had almost one hundred hours filmed material captured by the various cameras per day, which had to be packaged into 24-minute segments. These had to have a storyline in line with the format of half-hour episodic television series – a beginning, middle (which is usually the climax) and an end, which left the audience wanting to know what happens next (Fischer, 2002). The production team

behind the scenes of reality television shows thrives on the moments that sell the show to its audiences. Directors, producers and video editors wait for those so-called ‘moments’ that will ensure high audience ratings. These examples further strengthen MacCabe and Ang’s argument that the constructed illusion of reality forms the basis of the audience’s pleasure.

3.5. The Celebrity of Big Brother

Aside from reality television’s promise of the real or access to the real, the *Big Brother* format has also introduced the idea that ordinary people can become celebrities. The next part of the discussion will look at the concept of celebrity. This issue also helps us understand if it is one of the reasons that attracted viewers to the first season of *Big Brother* South Africa. Holmes (2004: 11) observes that with the arrival of reality television came an increase in the number of ‘ordinary’ people appearing on television. There are strong views on this issue regarding the ethical, political and cultural implications of this (Holmes, 2004: 111), which this study does not need to go into in details. Holmes argues that it is the issue of fame that gives reality television its inherent triviality – in that it shamelessly encourages and accelerates a celebrity culture where people are well known for the “well-known-ness” (Holmes, 2004: 111) This adds another dimension to the discussion of realism, as we are forced to wonder if the *Big Brother* housemates are acting to become celebrities at the end of the series or do they become celebrities purely because of who they really are in the house; also, the extent to which casting resulted in the choice of extroverted individuals keen on the pursuit of celebrity must be considered. Obviously the emergence of reality television is not solely responsible for thrusting ordinary people into the public domain via television broadcasts; news and actuality genres have done this for much longer. Genres like news, game shows and documentaries have relied on the role and presence of ‘real’ people as opposed to actors or performers (Holmes, 2004: 113); when these genres departed from this use of ‘real people’, they were felt to be betraying the trust of the audience in using ‘actors’. The spectacle of the ‘real emotion’ or behaviour that appears ‘live, uncontrolled and expressive’ has since characterised the value and appeal of such appearances. Couldry (2000: 46) points out that reality television has blurred the distinction where ‘ordinary’ people are not expected to *be* “in” the media at all, but only to *appear* “in” the media – which in essence is blurring the boundaries between the ordinary person and the celebrity.

The issue of celebrity is tied in with Biressi and Nunn's (2005) argument that reality television has contributed to the establishment of 'new realism'. These writers argue that reality television promotes and caters for the desire to be observed and to have one's existence validated through observation (2005: 102). For Biressi and Nunn, this new realism is founded on the individual subject's self-revelation and their interaction with others as the marker of authenticity. This revelation is declamatory and has to take place in the public forum – it must attract viewers through a process of identification and voyeurism (Biressi and Nunn; 2005: 102).

One cannot ignore the issue of celebrity in reality television programmes and in particular in *Big Brother*, especially when one considers the events around eviction night at the *Big Brother* house. There are screaming crowds, waving banners and flashing cameras when a house mate exits the house after being evicted (Holmes, 2004: 117). Holmes notes that there is little precedent for the type of fame and celebrity in factual programming that we see in reality television. This is due to a number of factors, which includes the hybrid nature of reality television and the increasing personalisation of factual programming based around character and narratives and performances (Holmes, 2004: 114). Celebrity in reality television is part of the effect of the fact that 'ordinary' people gain access to more than their "15 minutes of fame" (Holmes, 2004: 114). *Big Brother* has moved away from any conventional documentary space in which performance and display rather than observation predominate (Holmes, 2004: 115). The issue of celebrity is certainly something to consider when trying to understand the reasons why viewers were attracted to *Big Brother South Africa*. In Chapter 6 it will become clearer whether celebrity is part of the illusion of reality and the popularity of the programme.

3.6. *The reality in Big Brother*

As noted in Chapter 2, the reality television genre involves the recording of events in the lives of individuals or groups, supposedly as they happen. The material is then edited into an attractively packaged television programme, which is promoted on the strength of its 'reality' and its conformity with the narrative codes of episodic television. The success of these programmes is largely due to the strength of the editing; clips are carefully selected and presented together so that an interesting and gripping story line is developed, such that the 'reality' programme echoes some of the conventions of other episodic television programmes that viewers may be more familiar with. However, it does not mean that the clips the viewer

sees are not 'real'. In *Big Brother* the housemates are constantly recorded. During the 24-hours long live broadcast, directors decide which camera will reveal images, while in the M-Net Open Time slots the events that happened in the house during the last 24 hours are further edited and re-interpreted in a summarised 24 minute version of the programme. This is no longer the case as DSTV has a designated channel for Big Brother. After these 24-minute programmes are aired, other media, such as newspapers and radio talk shows, analyse what happened in the house. What has happened on the television programme is then discussed in other media forms like online debates, radio shows and in blogs.

The aesthetic and technological style of the reality television form together with the setting and context also play a role in framing the way reality television participants become known to us (Holmes, 2004: 116). *Big Brother* offers a scenario where contestants are de-glamourized and 'in the raw' when filmed through the unflattering aesthetic of reality television and this facilitates the programmes' claim to realism (Holmes, 2004: 116); simultaneously and paradoxically, the very de-glamorisation also enhanced their appeal as 'ordinary', and in some cases, contributes to their 'celebrity'. Roscoe (2001: 483) observes that *Big Brother's* simulation of the everyday engages the audience in watching the housemates cook, eat, sleep, wash and clean. It is within this framework that the audience learns details about personal habits, favourite phrases, their family life and so on (Roscoe, 2001: 483). Holmes stresses that a crucial element in the appeal of the programme comes from watching 'ordinary' people. Despite the acknowledgment of celebrity and performance in *Big Brother*, the 'ordinariness' remains integral to the programmes claim to the 'real' (Holmes, 2004: 117), which is inherently the reality of a show like *Big Brother*. The very selection through casting reveals an interest in people who are 'ordinary' (like the imagined viewers as well as like the putative viewers, using phrases and style choices of the projected audience), but at the same time, more likely to reveal themselves as extraordinary for lack of inhibition and for an extraordinary ability to reveal to the world their beliefs and private emotions.

3.7. Conclusion

In support of Ben Elton's presentation of the manipulation in *Dead Famous*, this chapter has shown that the production scenario of *Big Brother* is not a far cry from the manner in which

reality television programmes are produced. This chapter began with the introduction of *Big Brother* to South Africa. It continued with a discussion on the technical production of *Big Brother South Africa* – which was considered to be ground-breaking, giving us an idea of some of the reasons why viewers were attracted to the programme. The chapter later looked at the issue of realism with reality television and described the relationship between the producers and broadcasters of the programme and the various decision-making processes made in the production of the programme. The chapter also focussed on the culture of celebrity emerging alongside the reality television genre and its impact on the access to the real.

Chapter 4 - Reality television and its Audience

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I undertake to explain why audiences watched South Africa's first reality television series, *Big Brother*. It is therefore, important to define the textuality of reality television and to examine it as a text in order to gain an understanding of why audiences watched the programme. The chapter begins by examining what a text and its audiences are, how the main research traditions outline the relationship between these, and proceeds to review theorists' explanations of the attractions of popular media texts. I then explore other areas of audience appeal, including realism, voyeurism and the appeal of live television. I conclude by examining the specific relationship between text and audience in *Big Brother South Africa* 2001.

4.2. The Text

In media theory the term text is used mainly in two senses. The first refers to the physical message, which takes on many forms for instance a television programme, a newspaper or a movie. For Fiske, text describes the consequence of an encounter between the content and the reader which echoes Hall's theory that a message must be perceived as meaningful discourse and be meaningfully de-coded before it has an effect, a use, or satisfies a need.

For Fiske a television programme "becomes a text at the moment of reading, that is, when its interaction with one of its many audiences activates some of the meanings and pleasures that it is capable of provoking" (Fiske; 1987: 14). For Hall, reception theory emphasises the reader's reception of a literary text or media. This approach to textual analysis focuses on the scope for negotiation and opposition on the part of the audience. This means that a 'text', be it a book, movie, or other creative work, is not simply passively accepted by the audience, but that the reader / viewer interprets the meanings of the text based on their individual cultural background and life experiences. Therefore the meaning of a text is not inherent within the text itself, but is created within the relationship between the text and the reader. A basic acceptance of the meaning of a specific text tends to occur when a group of readers have a shared cultural background and interpret the text in similar ways (Hall: 1980). Fiske notes that while a programme is developed by the industry, the various texts of that programme are derived from the audience, meaning that we can't speak of a text but of textuality which is the meaning that arises when the text meets the socially located reader.).

He further argues that a single programme or text may result in different meanings or readings thereby making it polysemic (Fiske; 1987: 15). For Mikhail Bakhtin, messages are complex and there a 'structured polysemy'. He adds that that multiple voices speak in a message, multiple meanings exist. According to Fiske, a polysemic text is an essential feature of a truly popular media culture. Ien Ang (1985) demonstrated this with how Dutch viewers interacted with the programme *Dallas*. Different groups watched the same television programme, however the interviews with viewers revealed different readings of the same text. Ang's study is of forty-two letters she received from *Dallas* viewers in response to an advert she put in a magazine. Her respondents were not necessarily fans, with some fans claiming it was nonsense, but watched it anyway. The more meanings a text generates the greater the appeal to a wider audience who may belong to different social groups. The uses and gratification theory indicates that different consumers of media may also different meanings from the same texts (Fiske; 1987: 15).

However, while a text may be polysemic, there are discourses of media content that may control or direct a meaning. Stuart Hall (1980) refers to this as the preferred reading that is encoded in a text. Hall defines the preferred reading as the meaning, which the producer of the message would like the receiver to obtain. Morley adds that the preferred reading model 'was to insist that readers are engaged in the productive work but under determinate conditions' (1989: 19) and that those determinate conditions are supplied by the text, the producing institution and the social history of the audience (1989: 19). In keeping with Fiske (1987), Hall (1980) and Morley (1989), Fourie (2001) concludes that a text can take on different meanings. While on the one hand it refers to the mass media messages received by the reader, on the other hand it also refers to the form and content of the message itself which takes on the form of oral, written or graphic presentation (Fourie; 2001: 3). Given Fiske's position that the text comes into being at the point of reading and thus needs an audience to realise its potential for meaning, the next part of the discussion focuses on the theoretical conceptualisation of that audience.

4.3. *The Audience*

In the 1920s and 1930s the idea that the media constituted a powerful social and political force gathered momentum. The political propaganda of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany,

showed how ordinary citizens were persuaded in ways not thought possible prior to an age of mass media (O'Sullivan et al. 1994: 168; Brooker & Jermyn 2003: 5). Audiences came to be seen as a mass of individuals vulnerable to the influence of new media such as cinema and radio by critics such as Walter Lippman. In this regard Ang observes that:

Some early theorists were concerned that the media – especially very popular media such as movies, radio, and later television – were acting like ‘hypodermic needles,’ injecting messages directly into the veins of their completely defenceless viewers and listeners. More generally, the mass audience was often looked down upon as being composed of people with low taste and intelligence. (1990: 157)

Similarly for McQuail, but is also part of everyday use and recognised by the media public as an unambiguous description of themselves (in Hoijer, 1999: 179). The audience is viewed as a collective entity (Hoijer, 1999: 179); for example, broadcasters do not view a single person as an audience. Hoijer argues that audiences are regarded as commodities rather than experiencing subjects (1999: 180). Hart (1991: 31) identifies the audience as vital in media communication. It is for the audience that the media are constructing and conveying information, and if it were not for audiences, the media's products could not be read as texts. The complex relationships between the media and their audiences has been the subject of debate since the media were first seriously studied (Hart, 1991: 31). Hart continues that audience “comes in all shapes and sizes, in large numbers at a sports event or alone at home listening to music” (Hart, 1991: 37). These variations occur according to the manner in which a medium addresses its audience and the way the audience reacts to the medium as well as the way the audiences interact with each other. While different media address the audience in the different way, audience members are not strictly separable from the act of the consumption by which it is constituted (Hart, 1991: 37).

As Ang (1991:13) also points out, several theorists try to define the concept of an audience in order to create a discursive space for new understandings. While Ang observes Allor's radical suggestion that we do away with the concept of audience altogether, she argues that Allor's notion cannot account for the powers of the ‘institutional point of view’ which is predicated on the existence of the television audience as a category to be controlled. This relates back to Hall's notion that the encoder and decoder establishes the act of communication. It is about the ‘reality’ of the audience. Ang asserts that the audience inhabits a real and crucial space, which came about as soon as television broadcast became an institutional practice (Ang, 1991: 13. Television broadcast institutionalisation shifted between Ang's research of network

US television, its broadcast in state and public television in Europe, and the privatisation and corporatisation of television broadcast and production which led to Endemol and reality television, and the writers' strike which constitutes the political economy in which 'reality television' first exploded beyond the experimental and cheap formulae of Europe into the US and then the world market.

Ang provides the theoretical distinction between two realities of an audience: Firstly the television audience is a discursive construct and secondly there is the material reality within which the audience consumes a television programme (1991: 13). The material realities of the audiences include the practices and experiences which are conceived as 'watching', 'using', 'receiving', 'consuming' and 'decoding'; these are all part of people's everyday engagement with television (Ang, 1991: 14). Broadcast television cannot afford to take its audience for granted. Unlike other social institutions such as school or family, television does not have the means to coerce people into becoming members of its audience (Ang, 1991: 18). To be a television audience member is optional and voluntary. Therefore the television institution is dependent on people's un-coerced desire to want to continue to watch day after day (Ang, 1991: 18). This seems problematic as the success of the television industry in a market economy is based on securing large audiences for its broadcasts. Activities like publication of TV guides, advertising, media interviews with TV personalities and previews of programmes all encourage audiences to watch television (Ang, 1991: 18). It is precisely these strategies that imply that broadcasters cannot take their audiences for granted. They can try to influence the audience but cannot on the whole control them in any direct manner (Ang, 1991: 18). Media theorists have long shifted from the propaganda model of media consumption to the uses and gratifications approach which seeks to explain why and how people are constituted as audiences and of the power dynamic between encoders and decoders of mass communication.

As a result, there is a constant sense of uncertainty in television as there is no way of knowing in advance whether an audience will tune in and stay tuned. So there is the constant need to 'catch', 'capture' or 'lay hold of the audience' (Ang, 1991: 18). As McQuail notes this makes the task of how-to-get-an-audience difficult for television broadcasters (McQuail, 2000). This means that the audience needs to be constantly enticed and lured. This predicament is taken into account when any television programme is about to make its debut on the screen (Ang, 1991: 18).

Over the years, the television industry has developed a range of techniques and strategies such as the use of fixed formats and genres have been developed to synchronise the audience's viewing patterns (Ang, 1991: 19). There are also no guarantees that the audience will comply with the codes designed by the industry. As the generic conventions of reality television programming have become more established we see the growth of what Gitlin and Andrejevic call "savvy" consciousness on the part of the viewer (in Andrejevic, 2004: 133). Gitlin examines the rise of 'meta-news' coverage, which, and in doing so, produces viewers who are flattered by knowing this and as viewers "remain sovereign" (in Andrejevic, 2004: 133).

All this leads to the problem that it is impossible to fully know the audience. This certainly does not mean that no knowledge of the audience is produced. On the contrary the formal and informal knowledge of the audience is produced in the process of television broadcasting (Ang, 1991: 19). According to Howard and Kievaman 'know the audience' is the first basic principle every handbook for commercial broadcasting teaches the would-be programmer (Ang, 1991: 19). This knowledge comes in the form of audience research, it also comes in the form of a range of discursive practices like, meetings, informal conversations, discussions about programme ideas – practices that in one way or another come to terms with the television audience (Ang, 1991: 19). This does not account for rogue successes in the television industry for example even the programme that Ang researches was only originally intended for a 4 part miniseries. Its massive appeal somewhat caught the industry by surprise.

This discussion of 'knowing the audience' as driving television's output certainly holds true for the Dutch production company Endemol in the late 1990s, as producers sought new ways to capture an audience's attention. This is also related to the commercialisation of the television broadcast industry across the world through the 1980s and 90's. Commercial television broadcasters relied on production companies like Endemol to give them access to a larger share of the audience as their commercial viability depended on their ability to sell their market share to potential advertisers, their primary source of income. It is in this environment that the *Big Brother* format was developed and then syndicated all over the world. Audience statistics, revealed the success of a new format that had never before been seen on television. Having discussed both the text and the audience separately, the next part of the discussion will look at the relationship between the text and the audience. This

discussion helps this study further understand why audiences of the first South African series of *Big Brother* watched the programme and continued to tune into the programme on a regularly as will be further discussed in chapter six.

4.4. The relationship between the text and the audience

Strelitz observes that since the 19th century, scholars of mass media concerned with the relationship between texts and their audiences and the effects of the media on their moral, political and economic lives (2002: 12). He provides an overview of the competing theories in addressing the relationship between the text and the audience. Starting with Hall, who notes that the competing attempts to make sense of the text / audience relations are due to the differences among theorists about how to analyse the social formation as a whole (Strelitz, 2002: 12), and citing Bennett who argues that the assumptions made about the structure of society within different bodies of theory determines the kinds of questions posed in relation to the media and the manner in which those questions are pursued, Strelitz offers a useful map for engaging the history of audience analysis. While the Frankfurt School theorists focus on the role of cultural industries as ideological tools that serve dominant social interests (Hart, 1991: 31), American mainstream theorists believe that value consensus is embedded in society and the best the media can do is reflect an already achieved consensus. Adorno and Horkheimer use the term culture industry to describe the commodification of cultural forms that had resulted from the growth of monopoly capitalism. They argue that this culture industry, plays a role in cementing its audience to the status quo, and had transformed culture itself into an ideological medium of domination (in During, 1993: 31). This difference is the result of the Frankfurt School's reliance on Marxist theory, while the American approaches draw on liberal pluralist philosophy's to analyse their concerns (Strelitz, 2002: 13).

Strelitz acknowledges another way of looking at competing approaches is to “distinguish between those approaches stressing the determining power of the media and those that highlight the interpretative freedom of audiences” (Strelitz, 2002: 13). He considers the ‘effects’ tradition which draws of the ‘hypodermic’ model of media influence. Theorists working within this tradition share the views that the media are able to “inject” to the audiences with messages and therefore affect their behaviour (Strelitz, 2002: 13). Strelitz further acknowledges Johnson and du Gay, in a third way of classifying the competing theories of text / audience relationship that is to examine the ‘moments’ they emphasise in the

‘circuit of culture’ (Strelitz, 2002: 14) Johnson identifies four moments in the circuit of cultural products – production, texts, reading and lived cultures. Strelitz notes that theories that focus on media power in the determination are grouped around the ‘production’ and ‘text’ moments of the circuit. Strelitz underscores Du Gay succinctly, and notes that in attempting to get to the meaning of a ‘text’, we need to acknowledge the moments of production, text, distribution and audience consumption (Strelitz, 2002: 14).

Instead of the media being seen as an all-powerful force working on the audience, there emerged the view that audiences are active in interpreting media content and that they comprise individuals whose membership of social groups should not be ignored (O’Sullivan et al, 1994: 152; and Ang, 1990: 159). The uses and gratifications tradition researchers found the media are functional for people and therefore using media gratifies certain needs and wants (Ang 1990: 158). In line with these assumptions, the process of media selection was described by Katz et al (in McQuail; 2000: 425) as being concerned with:

the social and psychological origins of needs which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources which lead to different exposure resulting in need gratification and other consequence (1974: 20).

Researchers interested in audience activities study media reception and are concerned with the ways in which people ‘interpret and make sense’ of media texts. Here the audiences are thought of as active readers rather than passive recipients; they engage in meaning making actively. The meaning drawn from media texts is something that the audience has co-constructed rather than something pre-determined by media producers. This bares out Hall’s work on the relationship between decoders and encoders. A large body of research demonstrates that media audiences are active interpreters of meaning. As Croteau and Hoynes (2003: 266) put it, “real people with lives, histories, and social networks are the audiences for mass media products.”

According to Morley (1989) the shift from a passive to an active audience in media studies followed the rise of the psychology of personality which emphasises that differences in personality were responsible for how people use the media. However, while acknowledging that the audience is active and chooses what to watch, the uses and gratifications approach also has its limitations. Some argue that the perspective is individualistic, in that different responses or interpretations are attributed to individual differences of personality or psychology. One may concur with Morley that, clearly the:

uses and gratifications theory does represent a significant advance on effects theory, in so far as it opens up to the question of different interpretations. However, it remains severely limited by its insufficiently sociological or cultural perspective, in so far as everything is reduced to the level of individual psychology (1989: 17).

As my study seeks to determine the reasons why audiences were attracted to *Big Brother South Africa*, it's important to understand and recognise, as Strelitz has done, the key competing approaches in trying to determine the relationship between the text and the audience. Hall provides "some middle ground between the notion of a text having a determinate meaning and the equally problematic notion of a text being completely 'open', upon which the reader projects his/her own meaning" (Strelitz, 2002: 19). In 'Encoding/Decoding' (Hall, 1980), proposes a separation of the encoding and decoding moments in textual production and reception. The model is concerned with power, specifically with the idea of encoding a 'preferred meaning' into media products (Alasutaari, 1999: 3). He argues that while the text had the power to propose or suggest ideological readings, the audience should be seen as active decoders who will not necessarily accept the positions being offered (Alasutaari, 1999: 3). Hall identified four positions from which decoding of a televisual discourse maybe constructed by an audience:

The first position is the *dominant* or *hegemonic code*, within which the connotative level of the message is decoded in terms of the dominant or preferred meanings; the *professional code* is what the professional broadcaster employ when transmitting a message which has already been signified in a hegemonic manner; the *negotiated code* contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements and finally the *oppositional code* is a position where a viewer perfectly understands both the literal and connotative inflection given to an event (Hall; 1980).

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University applied Hall's perspectives in the analysis of television texts and audiences (Moore; 1993: 19) in its project *Nationwide*. Morley put the emphasis on viewers (as active producers of meanings) and on media consumption (as a site for potentially different readings). Morley argues that reading should not be theorised as an isolated relationship between one text and the implied reader. He continues that in the encounter between the text and the subject there are other discourses at play besides that of the text – the subject's cultural discourses (Moore, 1993: 19). Morley observed different responses to selected clips of information to see whether they would construct dominant, oppositional or negotiated readings, Hall's three categories. The

Conclusions drawn from the *Nationwide* study highlighted the fact that people are not passive in meaning construction and that in order to understand media interpretations, it is crucial to examine both the text and the social and cultural experiences contributing to meaning production (Williams, 2003:197). Therefore, reception theory allows researchers to investigate the readers' negotiation with texts in the process of interpretation against the background of their social and cultural circumstances.

In her research in the way Dutch audiences engaged with *Dallas*, Ien Ang found precisely this. Some audience members opted for the preferred reading, others negotiated a meaning and still others offered oppositional readings in line with Hall's original outline. These differences often related to the social and ideological position of individuals in their lives which was evident in Ang's focus groups.

This discussion of the relationship between the text and audience is relevant as it helps this study to further understand what discourse of realism attracted audiences to the programme – at the denotative or connotative level. It's evident by the discussion that there are many theories on how audiences respond to and interact with the media. Abercrombie (1996) emphasises the importance of the producer, text and audience and reiterates Hall's opinion that all three, and the relationship between them, are vital in the process of media communication. By reviewing the different theories on the way audiences receive and interpret media messages, one can see that there are various ways in which the audience can be viewed. The emphasis on audience in the encoding / decoding model is advantageous for a number of reasons. As Andrew Hart states (Hart, 1991: 53) "the meaning is not in the text, but in the *reading*". By understanding how the audience members construct meaning and make sense of texts, audiences may be steered towards the preferred meanings.

4.5. Appeal of live television

Flitterman-Lewis (1987) and Benjamin (1969) suggest that technology plays a role in defining the target of audience members. Film studies focusing primarily on texts, suggests the texts offers heroes with whom audiences identify with through production technique. The camera provides the viewpoint for the audience and determines the target of audience identification (Cohen, 1992: 257). According to these theorists the identification with the camera is determined by the director of a film through the positioning of the camera. The

different camera angles and cinematic shots provide the possibility of identifying with the camera telling the story or with the character of the text chosen by the director (Cohen, 1992: 257). Film theory focuses on textual dynamics, whereas television studies increasingly, drawing on reader-response criticism in literary studies and on sociological and anthropological methods of research, related to the audience not just the text.

Film theory is not adequate to explain television viewing. While useful to explain how individuals engage texts, film theory does not address the ways in which television production and its implication in a market economy requires television producers to engage the collective audience and not the individual (Cohen, 1992: 257). This is particularly the case in live television broadcasts and even more so for reality television programmes.

In his assessment of the reality television, Couldry (2002: 286) asserts that media events need the quality of ‘liveness’. It is the appeal of live television that enables media audiences to get the sense that they are following an event from within the event itself as participants.

Couldry argues that the ‘liveness’ of an event does not require every element to be broadcast live. The work in the construction *Big Brother* as a large-scale live production event was apparent. Particularly on the nights that housemate were evicted. In addition to the ‘liveness’ of *Big Brother* on television, is the show’s website, where footage from the house was broadcast simultaneously (Couldry, 2002: 286). Ruth Wrigley, the executive producer of *Big Brother UK* said, “I wanted it to look live and interesting ... this was not meant to be a polished drama. We were filming it for real, and it was a virtue of the programme that viewers understood that” (quoted in Ritchie, 2000: 11). Wrigley goes on to say that, “nobody can keep up an act all at the time in front of the cameras – the world was going to see them [the participants] as they really were” (quoted in Ritchie, 2000: 26). The issue of live television as an appeal to audiences is a significant consideration ahead of the focus-groups discussions that will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Couldry writes there were two types of performances in the *Big Brother* shows. Housemates were viewed from a mediated front stage – in front of the other contestants – to a mediated back stage – when they are alone in the diary room, nominating a fellow housemate to leave the house. All these ‘performances’ are done in full view of millions of viewers (Couldry, 2002: 288). It is here that the sense of drama is heightened and audiences experience the different

personalities of the housemates. Couldry notes that audiences in the UK were further attracted to *Big Brother* due to its event-like status (2002: 288). He points to two factors that contribute to this notion. The first is the media's underlying authority to represent reality and second, the hierarchy between media people and non-media people (Couldry, 2002: 288) as discussed in Chapter 3. While *Big Brother* was a game there were wider truths revealed. *Big Brother UK* managed to convince its audience that it provided access to an aspect of our social reality. While *Big Brother* was a game there were wider truths revealed through the way the housemates played the game (Couldry, 2002: 290).

4.6. *The audience and text in Big Brother*

As discussed in Chapter 3, there are different ways for the audience to participate in a television programme from their living rooms: audiences can vote by dialling a number that appears on a screen, or in the case of *Big Brother*, viewers can log onto the Internet and join discussion groups or even send text messages via mobile telephones. The emergence of interactive reality television featuring a combination of live camera footage, 'ordinary' contestants and audience participation presents an interesting question for cultural studies' idea of the active audience (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 252). Tincknell and Raghuram explore the text / audience relationship within *Big Brother*. A crucial dimension of the programme *Big Brother* is the innovative use of audience interaction. This is focused on two areas: first the audience is invited to vote for a housemate to be evicted from the house, and the second is the regular tasks that had to be completed could be set by suggestions from the viewers. These elements clearly structure the audience participation (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 253). As I established in Chapter 2, *Big Brother* also drew from popular genres which depend on audience participation: the 'reality' show, the television talk show and the game show. These genres have challenged and changed the relationship between the audiences and texts in different ways, and the addition of mobile phone technology and the internet have added to the dimension of interactivity with live television broadcasts (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 253).

Then there is the voyeuristic nature of *Big Brother*. Scopophilia is the technical term that psychoanalysts use to the erotic gratification derived from looking. In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger (1972) cites the painting 'Susannah and the Elders' as an example of pictorial voyeurism. It's

about two elderly men spying on Susannah while she bathed naked. This picture provided an example of a trope by which male artists construct the gaze in ways structured for satisfying men's desire to enjoy female nudity (Walker and Chaplin, 1997: 101). *Big Brother* creates an artificial community in which the participants are strangers to each other. The *Big Brother* household is effectively constructed through the relationship that the participants have with the television programme itself (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 256).

Tincknell and Raghuram, argue that reality television programmes at one level represents a return to the 'basics' of television and a re-simplification of aesthetics and subject matter in a technology driven age, while on another level the narratives focus on dilemmas and conflicts (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 257). Also in the case of *Big Brother*, the 'proof' that it is 'real' lies in the technology and space used which opens up the area for the audience to inspect (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 257).

As Fiske suggests, all texts have intertextual dimensions which inform or supersede the circulation of meanings about them – and the role of the audience in organizing these meanings in central (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 261). M-Net (Lombard; 2012) note that *Big Brother* programmes around the world presented as popular successful programmes. The nature of *Big Brother* intertextuality suggests that the audience was extended and dislocated. It was not confined to viewers who actually watched the show, nor did it depend on the audience presence at a specific time. For the first season of *Big Brother South Africa*, there were many ways in which the audience could watch the programme. In South Africa, in addition to the 24 hour *Big Brother* channel, there was a 30 minute 'highlights' package aired every day, *Big Brother* offered visual access to the house via webcams, and the official website offered regular discussions and offered fans links to related sites (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 261). The *Big Brother* concept exceeded the confines of television in terms of how mobile telephones and its use in *Big Brother* is being incorporated in other genres like games shows. The use of social media platforms allows the audience to engage directly with the programme which could alter the results of the show. Audiences could either access the live feed from the 24 hour *Big Brother* channel, or they could watch a summary of the day's events during the daily highlights packages, or audiences could access video on demand or the live feed from the internet. The audience could 'tune in' to the programme whenever they chose to, to get an update on the programme. This multimedia approach of *Big Brother* changed the way television was presented to an audience. This multimedia approach further

enticed an audience to watch this programme as will be further revealed in Chapter 6. The success of this has now been applied across the television broadcast industry and has been applied to a variety of genres and not just the reality television show.

The text of *Big Brother* is polysemic. It was also taken up by the other media, outside the control of the *Big Brother* producers. Newspapers and websites became a source for the development of the meanings of the programme (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 262). A preferred set of meanings was offered by the voice-over commentary and the experts that often appeared on the show on the night of eviction. Viewers also offered their views and opinions in online discussions. All these elements contributed to the wider text of *Big Brother*, while also developing contesting meanings about the programme (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 261). After a *Big Brother* season ended, participants would appear in other television shows, including other reality television formats. This helped to further extend their ‘celebrity’ status and help recirculate knowledge about *Big Brother*. This further influences the possible readings available to the audience as well as altering the boundaries and the form of the text itself (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 262).

Given the multiple levels of audience access to *Big Brother*, it is difficult to ascertain precisely who the audience might be. The technology allowed producers to research and define the audience more narrowly, and more recent developments, shifting from analogue to digital, and the technology of dissemination via the internet of television programming and its cross-referencing with consumers’ other media consumption habits have increased the accuracy of audience definition. This in turn shifted the kind of programming producers are likely to aim at the market. It is possible that the viewers of the television programme are not the same of those who consume the product online (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 263); this means that there are now multiple audiences of the same texts through a variety of media and media theorists may need to re-think traditional understandings of the audience. This certainly applies to South Africa as not all the viewers who had access to television sets in 2001, had access to the internet. It is also important to note that the media itself was a consumer of *Big Brother*, since the newspapers, other websites and television shows monitored the activities in the house and helped structure and organize meanings about what was happening (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 263). The *Big Brother* audience is not defined by clear spatial and social locations, and the participatory elements afforded by new

technology (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 264); means that how audiences are constituted has shifted. The audiences could operate by processes of 'self-selection' around which elements to view and when given that it is unlikely that anyone watch the 24 hour live channel, the highlights package on television and follow the webcam simultaneously. The multiple audiences this constituted and their agency are confirmed through the ability of choice (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004: 265).

4.7. Conclusion

After examining the relationships between the audience and text from a cultural and media studies perspective, and focusing on the text and audience of *Big Brother*, one is able to understand the popularity of such a reality television format more comprehensively. The notion that the audience identifies with the programme plays a major role in sustained viewing on the show as well as the appeal of live television. In discussing the polysemic nature of *Big Brother* it can be deduced that *Big Brother* is a popular text due to the many meanings it generates as a text and its appeal to a wider audience who may belong to different social groups. These issues form the focus of reception theory which is the – the general theoretical and methodological framework guiding this study.

Chapter 5 – Research methodology

If we, as academic researchers, are interested in understanding how people experience media content, we have to use a research approach that enables us to explore the processes through which people actualise media meanings and incorporate them in meaningful ways into their daily lives. (Schroder et al. 2003: 122)

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the research methods and procedures used in this study. Qualitative audience research methods through focus groups and in-depth individual interviews were used to inform this study. My interest in the study of reality television began in 2002 when reality television programming was included across the various TV channels. I conducted online research and accessed articles from news sites and other independent websites that provided extensive coverage on reality television programmes that were broadcast, in particular, *Big Brother*. This chapter will discuss the methodological approaches used in line with the theoretical framework and their relevance to the aim of the study.

5.2. Research design and procedure

5.2.1. Qualitative Research Methods

The methodological approach in this study is principally qualitative. Jensen (1984:4) observes that it is the qualitative empirical methods of data gathering which are most often associated with reception analysis. The goal of qualitative research is to access “insider” perspective characteristic of members of a culture (or subculture) (Priest 1996: 103). As this study seeks to understand why audiences watch reality television and in particular *Big Brother* - it employs qualitative methods of inquiry (Taylor, 2005: 91) to understand the reasons why viewers were drawn to a certain type of programme. The need to study the consumption of media or social behaviour within social context as underlined in qualitative research is fundamental to reception theory. Lindloff (1992) also underlines the need by qualitative researchers to explain what observed behaviour or verbal utterances mean in context. He writes:

The analytic task is to show the meaningful coherence of these expressions, as it is experienced by the people who are studied. These arguments are then used to construct theoretical propositions which, in the case of media studies, may address such domains as the interpersonal negotiation of media content....(1992: 25)

Qualitative research involves various methods of acquiring data. Its method is an interpretive approach to the subject matter (Trumbull, 2005: 101). Bryman notes that qualitative research has a commitment to viewing events, actions, norms and values from the perspective of the people who are being studied (1988: 61). Qualitative research involves the use and collection of empirical data including case studies, personal experiences and interviews, interactional and visual texts (Trumbull, 2005: 101). The approach is inductive with the purpose to describe multiple realities and develop an understanding and capture human perspectives (Trumbull, 2005: 101).

I established that qualitative analysis through focus groups would generate interpretations and discussions of a qualitative nature in order to gain an understanding of the audience reception of South African reality television and to determine why audiences are attracted to this type of programming. When conducting any research, the choice of methods used should reflect the purposes and objectives of the study to be carried out (Hansen, 1998: 260). Many factors such as convenience, availability of resources and time was considered when choosing a research method and in some cases these factors determine how to approach a particular problem (Hansen, 1998: 260). This study used a percentage of students at Rhodes University as subjects for the study. I chose to use students at Rhodes University for two reasons – firstly I was based at the institution and had access to the students and secondly – this study sought to determine what attracted audiences to watch the first reality television programme in South Africa –and the students at this institution all had access to the satellite channel as well as access to the internet and newspapers.

5.2.2. Reception research

Reception research is the study of social production of meaning in peoples' encounter with media discourses. It combines a qualitative approach to media as texts, producing and circulating meaning in society, with an empirical interest in the recipients as co-producers of meaning (Jensen. 1988:3). Reception methodology also differs radically from the methodology of survey research as it does not expose people to a finite set of questions with pre-given response options. Rather, it explores media experiences through the medium of

extended talk (Schroder et al. 2003: 147). As with other methodologies in audience research, the data and findings of a reception study should be seen as discursive constructions produced jointly by the researcher and informant's interaction in the research encounter and by the researcher interpreting the interview transcripts (Jensen & Rosengren 1990: 218). Reception research is as adamant about securing good data as any methodological approach (Schroder et al. 2003: 147). Reception analysis also involves comparing the discourses of the text with the discourses of the audience for that text – making sense of why different categories of audience make the particular sense of a text that they do.

5.2.3. Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups are semi-structured group interviews which will allow the researcher to determine the dynamics of the audience. For Hansen group interviews groups allow the researcher to observe how the audience makes sense of media through conversation and interaction with each other (Hansen, 1998: 258). Since the early 1980s, the use of focus group discussion as a qualitative research method gained popularity for analysing media audiences (Deacon *et al.* 1999: 55). Focus group research “involves bringing together a group or, more often, a series of groups, of subjects, to discuss issues in the presence of a moderator” (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996: 8). The method captures the way in which participants ‘naturally’ talk about, make sense of, reason about, and generate meaning in relation to specified issues, topics, and phenomena – but these should be limited to ‘representative illustrations’ (Hansen, 1998:281).

Focus groups allow the participants to talk about issues with other participants giving the researcher a detailed account of the audiences ‘media experience’. This method allows for the use of ‘natural’ vocabulary with which people formulate meanings about the issues (Hansen, 1998: 260). In a focus group, participants are forced to become more consciously aware of their perspective (Hansen, 1998: 260). However, it is very important for the researcher to consider group dynamics so that some participants are not ‘overpowering’ within the discussion as this could marginalise dissenting views. The researcher has to make a concerted effort in trying to have a balance of group dynamics (Hansen, 1998: 263).

I used the following steps as summarised by Stewart and Shamdasani in Hansen (1998: 283);

- Identify the problem and formulate a research question
- Identify the moderator
- Generate interview guide
- Recruit the sample
- Conduct the group
- Analyse and interpret the data
- Write the report

5.2.3.1. The Interview Guide and My Role as a Moderator

Reception research predominantly uses in-depth interviews for the empirical study of how people make sense of a media product. It follows then that the researcher must have a certain amount of knowledge about this media product, in order to be able to conduct a meaningful and focused conversation with the informants about it (Schroder et al. 2003: 154). I conducted semi-structured interviews with the focus groups. As Jensen notes, in-depth interviewing, “with its affinities to conversation, may be well suited to tap social agents’ perspective on the media” (1982: 240). He further points out that the spoken language remains “a primary and familiar mode of social interaction and one people habitually relate to the technological media” (1982: 240). Similarly, Bryman argues that the semi-structured interviewing method is useful, as it requires the researcher to show minimal guidance and allows “considerable latitude for interviewees to express themselves freely” (1988: 46). In line with this interviewing technique, I operated within a loose collection of themes. I wanted to give the participants of the focus groups an opportunity to speak freely without constraint. I drew up an interview guide to ensure that the focus group discussions and issues were relevant to my research (Appendix 1). I did not strictly adhere to the interview guide which is in line with Morgan’s view (1998: 56) to allow the discussions and interviews to continue uninterrupted and see where the discussion would lead to. I was also very aware of my role as a moderator to facilitate and stimulate the discussions and not dominate the proceedings. I then compiled narratives from the focus group discussions and followed up on the thematic issues raised during the group discussions (Hansen *et al.* 1998: 272 and Morgan (1988: 57). I administered and facilitated the focus groups. In my role as moderator, I found that the participants talked about issues with other participants and it gave me, the researcher, a more detailed account on the audiences ‘media experience’. I did encounter some difficulties in terms of the type of students involved. Almost all the students were studying journalism and media studies,

which meant that they were adapt to terms like ‘filtered’, ‘the real’ and ‘voyeurism’. However the strengths of this were that I did not have to labour on these concepts at the start of the focus group. I also had to consider group dynamics so that some participants are not ‘overpowering’ within the discussion as this could have marginalised dissenting views. As suggested by Hansen (1998: 263), I made a concerted effort in trying to have a balance of group dynamics.

As a moderator, my task was to make the participants feel at ease with the situation before starting with the interview guide, the intention being to make them speak freely from the discursive resources available to them in the area of study (see Schroder et al. 2003: 143). It was also made clear that the study is after the participant’s personal experience and reasons why they watch *Big Brother*. As the moderator my role was also to ensure the conversation in the group did not stray from the key question in the research, which was to interrogate the reasons why the participants watched *Big Brother*. To record the data in the focus-group proceedings, a tape recorder was used.

5.2.3.2 *Finding the audience*

As the interviews must define a narrow audience for study, sampling and recruitment of the groups was critical. This meant that individuals invited to participate in focus groups had to be able and willing to provide the desired information and be representative of the population of interest (see Hansen 1998: 264). As suggested by Ruddock (2001: 133), guidelines for sampling within audience research are more flexible and situational, the choice of participants is determined by criteria that are appropriate for a specific study and the number of participants chosen is also situational.

Geraghty (1998: 145) notes that some of the most common ways of ‘finding an audience’ for television fieldwork is through advertising and informal social networks. I used the advertising method and produced flyers and posters. Invitation to join the focus group was advertised at the university residences, especially those that had access to M-Net and DSTV. Flyers were also circulated at the Oppidan office – a university office that supplies information to registered students who do not live on the University premises. I pinned up

posters on departmental notice boards and made use of electronic mail listservs and mailing lists to advertise the focus groups to large amounts of students on the Internet. All the faculties allowed me to advertise the focus groups – these included the faculty of Commerce, Science, Pharmaceutical studies and Humanities. Most of the respondents were journalism students. I had emphasised that in order to participate in the focus the respondents had to watch *Big Brother*. Most students in the commerce and science departments said they did not have the time to watch the programme. Students selected were interviewed on their willingness to participate and their availability. At the time of the data collection I was a teaching assistant at the University and made announcements of the focus groups at the end of the various lectures I delivered. I also made use of the informal social network by telling friends and lecturers about my field of study. The flyer explained that I was a post graduate student looking for participants in a focus group. I only invited students who watched *Big Brother*. Colleagues and friends would in turn tell people they knew who enjoyed watching *Big Brother* about the focus group. The posters had a deadline for which possible focus group participants could reply within.

After a month of advertising and using informal social networks, a total of 14 people responded to the call to participate in the focus group. These respondents contacted me via my e-mail address that appeared on the posters and flyers. Once I had received all the details of the respondents, I contacted the individuals and told them about the time requirements. Three dates were selected for a two hour discussion per focus group on three separate days. The participants were grouped according to dates that were convenient for them. I did not put the students together based on culture, race or gender.

Although Hansen et al (1998: 268) argue that one should have a minimum of six focus groups, until comments begin to repeat themselves and little new material is generated, for this research, three group discussions were held. This was due to the resources available to the researcher and the number of readers willing to participate in the sessions. However in qualitative research, scientific validity is obtained through systematic collection and interpretation of data, not by generalising findings to other groups, nor quantifying into an overall truth (Hansen, 1998: 268) In other words ‘it is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something’ (Geertz in Pitout 1998: 74).

The participants were regular viewers of *Big Brother* and as Chapter 6 will show the interactions among the group discussions sparked dialogue that would not normally arise during individual interviews. As Hansen *et al.* point out: “It is precisely the group dynamics and interaction found where several people are brought together to discuss a subject that is seen as the attraction of this mode of data collection over individual interviews” (1998: 262). Further, there were occasions when the participants were more forthcoming in the group discussions than during the interviews. It has to be noted here, however, that some individuals dominated the discussion and other members were silenced. Hansen *et al.* (1998: 263) caution that participants in the group discussions tend to move towards ‘consensus’ and dissenting or different views might be marginalised. As the moderator I had to ensure that all participants were included in the discussions.

5.2.3.3. *Focus Group Location*

The focus group interviews were conducted during the second season of *Big Brother – South Africa*. The interviews were held on the October 2002 – at a seminar room in the Journalism and Media Studies department at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. Each focus group lasted for about two hours. Respondents signed a consent form to participate in the study and have the discussions recorded on an audio tape recorder. Three discussion groups were held. The first two groups had five participants each and the third had four participants. I had to be mindful of the time as the students were not willing to give up more than two hours of their free time.

5.2.3.4. *Data Analysis*

Once the focus group sessions were concluded, all interviews were transcribed and then the responses were sorted according themes or questions. As the interviews produced data in the form of verbatim transcripts, it was my task to interpret the meaning of the data (Jhally & Lewis in Ruddock 2001: 138-139). The analysis essentially progressed by way of undertaking what Fiske (1987) calls ‘ethnography of discourse’ – an analysis of talk about the experience of watching *Big Brother*. Thematic coding was used as the mode of analysis. As Jensen aptly explains:

...loosely inductive categorisation of interview...extracts with reference to various concepts, headings or themes. The process comprises the comparing, contrasting, and abstracting of the constitutive elements of meaning. (1982: 247)

By definition content analysis is a technique used for gathering and analysing the content of texts and how they are combined. Content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes or any message that can be communicated (Deacon et al. 1999). Qualitative content analysis adopts an interpretative approach that seeks to explore the ways in which language and images are presented, combined and used in complementary fashion. This involves exploring the meanings that are embedded in the representations as opposed to looking at the frequency of particular themes as a reflection of particular phenomena which is characteristic of quantitative content analysis. Neuman observes that:

Qualitative content analysis allows the reader to probe into and discover content in a different way from the ordinary way of reading a book or watching a television program (1997: 273).

My task was to report those sections of interviews that shed most light on the research question at hand. The data was then written in narrative form with pertinent quotations used to illustrate major findings of the study. In analysing the discussion, Hansen suggests the researcher categorise the responses under certain headings (Hansen, 1998: 285). Following the focus group sessions I analysed and categorised the responses under various topics, selected quotes to illustrate key findings that pertained to the study's research question and then cross referenced these findings to my literature review in earlier chapters.

5.3. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research design and procedure used in this study. The methodological approach chosen for the study was qualitative. The next chapter will present the findings from the qualitative analysis of analyses of the focus groups in line with the research issues and assumptions. The chapter also highlighted the sampling procedures employed in the study. The next chapter presents and analyses the findings of the research.

Chapter 6 – Research Findings

6.1. Introduction

The research presented in this chapter is from a focus group study I conducted, when *Big Brother* was first aired in South Africa. The research aim was to analyse the reasons why audiences watched South Africa's first reality television series. South African television audiences were introduced to the reality television genre in 2000. The series *Survivor* (an American reality television series) was aired on South African public television during prime for one hour a week for two months. The audience ratings prompted programme buyers to purchase more series in this genre, making it one of the fastest growing genres in the history of television. Until the 26th of August 2001, South African audiences were only exposed to international reality television programmes. The phenomenon of reality television has given rise to much debate. At the heart of this debate is the audience – why do audiences watch reality television? What is the 'real' that the programmers claim to deliver? This chapter focuses on the possible reasons why viewers watched *Big Brother* and if audience pleasures came from the claim that reality television represents reality? The participants in this study are those who watched *Big Brother* on a daily basis. In an analysis of their responses and in consideration of the literature review, 4 major patterns emerged.

6.2. Judging the Real in Reality Television

Respondents said they were curious as *Big Brother* received much media coverage. Most of the participants say they began watching *Big Brother* as soon as it aired. At the outset of the focus group discussion, I wanted to establish the participants understanding of the real as well as the term reality television. Here are some of the responses regarding the 'real':

LN: *Something that is unfiltered. It's a director's reality.*

LISA: *Reality is different for everyone. It's your surroundings and what's real to you.*

STU: *I think that the term real is specific term for each individual. From my perspective reality is the paradigm in which you live in and the way you relate to everything else with using your own personal experience."*

SG: *I think reality for the person is just the way they experience life generally. So when it comes to reality television they want to take a bunch of people who have not been exposed to the acting industry and put them in another situation that might be foreign to them - but the reality bit comes in the way that they react in a situation. There is nothing realistic to be stuck in a house to win a million – that's a very constructed situation. The situation may not be real but the people placed in those situations are real.*

NJ: *When I think of Big Brother I feel it's a complete compromise of reality. For example I look like a wreck first thing in the morning. On Big Brother the housemates looked remarkably healthy and hale first thing in the morning.*

STU: *I would put reality television as something very different from reality or from television. I think there is a combination of two different worlds and the result is we are getting the reality of what it is to be on television and not the reality of what it is to lead a normal every day.*

It's clear from these responses that the focus group participants were questioning the issue of 'the real' in reality television from the moment they watched day one in the *Big Brother* house. The groups were generally aware of the highly constructed and mediated representation of reality presented within *Big Brother*. While Kilborn asserts that one of factual television's major concern has been to "show things as they really are" (1994: 422), *Big Brother*, according to the responses above, failed to do so due to the highly constructed nature of the programme. However, the respondents seemed to have agreed in part with Baker, that while the attraction to watch *Big Brother* stems from the 'real' portrayal of events and people (2000: 12), they unanimously agree that what they are watching is not real as the environment is set up. The respondents made the attempt to watch because their curiosity was piqued by the media hype around the programme.

The respondents were all aware that hidden cameras were capturing events as they were happening. In essence the camera was capturing an essence of the 'real'. In Reality Television the process is happening because it is going to be on television – implying that a 'reality' is constructed solely in order to produce a representation.

6.3. *A Constructed reality*

All the respondents agreed that *Big Brother* was a highly constructed portrayal of reality. Most participants pointed to the fact that the camera remains part of the *mise-en-scene*, constantly reminding the house mates that they are being watched by millions of viewers, which puts them on strategic guard so that viewers do not vote them off and they stand a chance to win R1 million. Following this discussion I asked the respondents for their understanding of reality television;

TS: *Reality television shows where the cameras are supposed to be and the people interact with each other without responding to the fact that there is a camera there. Big Brother is confined to a house – so it's easy to hide the cameras.*

JT: *I don't think reality television has anything to do with the camera. I think it has to do with no scripting. There is no script and nothing is planned.*

SG: *I take reality television to be an unscripted presentation of a situation where there is no pre-determined outcome. The only limitation is the running time placed on the programme. Ordinary people in society who may not necessarily have acting experience are expected to behave as naturally as possible in an unnatural, constructed environment by production companies.*

RD: *In Big Brother there is an intended outcome that the housemates are heading for – a big cash prize. So the term reality television is misleading. There is nothing real about these situations. It's entirely constructed environment and people aren't going to behave in a way that would be natural in the outside world I don't think.*

VW: *It gives you a window into someone else's life. You always want to see what your neighbours are doing and now you can in your television screen and for me that's what's appealing. I'm quite inquisitive and I like to know what happening next door. The first and only reality television programme I have watched is Big Brother.*

The respondents are aware that what a viewer sees in *Big Brother* is a selection of images that a director or producer decides on from the many control monitors available to that director or producer. However, for VW, reality television had nothing to do with its technical construct but rather the opportunity to look into someone else's life. Her voyeuristic sense encouraged her to tune in rather than to disclaim the 'reality' of reality television. These respondents know that they are sharing the event via the eye of a camera and that the live transmission is giving the viewer the impression that what they are a witness to an event in real time. There is a consensus in the group that the developments in front of a camera are a result of the decisions taken by a television crew, as is evident in the responses below;

TF: *In packaged programmes of reality television – the editor and director choose which half hour they want you see. So you don't even get to see things as they happened or the way you would interpret them.*

SP: *Everyone watches Big Brother for different reasons. I think the directors focus on the housemates they like or think the audience wants to see.*

HT: *I don't think that the media can ever represent reality but I think the media can strive to represent a truer version of reality. In Big Brother you have a group of producers who construct a situation with a group of people. They construct a situation and manipulate the people so that you can get an audience. Over and above that you still edit down 24 hours of footage a day into half to – one hour packages. It's just not reality and it's a mediated form of the unreal.*

Participants were drawn to the claims of the 'real' in reality television and there are elements of *Big Brother*'s content which suggest to the viewer that it is 'real'. For the most part of the discussion it was unanimous that *Big Brother* achieved its realism by placing ordinary people in a contemporary middle class house, where they act and speak in ways that are recognizable to audiences. From the initial responses, the focus group respondents had an understanding of realism. However, they did not see the ways in which all forms of realism are constructed, nor did they share a code with the producers on what realism is, and how it is constituted. They are giving the preferred reading and are willing participants in the suspension of

disbelief, and as students of media would be expected to understand the world of television production and media broadcast.

Having discussed the ‘real’ and the technically constructed nature of *Big Brother*, the group had become more aware that what appears on the screen is a constructed reality. *Big Brother* offers a mediated reality, but its construction as a television programme, particularly the 24-hour channel, tries to convey a convincing sense that the what the viewer sees is unmediated. Although *Big Brother* was mediated (as discussed in earlier chapters), it is still less mediated than pure fictional programmes and this may account for its popularity.

KN: You can't represent reality. When I think of Big Brother I think 'that's not reality because those people don't come from that house. If you scrutinize it they are living in the lap of luxury. Of course they have to budget - but it's still a luxurious lifestyle. Every person in the house may not come from that lifestyle so why do they have to exist in that lifestyle and call it reality.'

This comment by KN reveals her understanding of reality. As a student of media studies, she seemed to read the relationship between ‘reality’ in a television programme and the material reality of the world. While it would have been expected that she would have a ‘knowing’ approach, clearly indicating how constructed even ‘reality’ television is given her training in media production, she too, like other participants, read the relationship between mediated ‘reality’ and her material world as seamless.

HT: Producers are deciding their version of reality based on how they think the audience is going to react and what spinoffs the plot will have. I think they are storytelling.

HT is attempting to respond to the ‘insider’ commentary of others in the focus group, who, as students of media with some experience in production from vacation jobs, were constantly referring to the ways in which production techniques ‘construct’ and elide the processes by which ‘realism’ is achieved for viewers. However, when probed, HT, was, like other viewers, as fully immersed in seeing the world of the *Big Brother* house as ‘unmediated’. The participants were not consistent in their readings of and reports on the relationship between

reality and ‘television realism’.

6.4. Voyeurism

In assessing the responses, the students watched *Big Brother* for numerous reasons; curiosity, boredom, pop culture and peer influence. However, the issue of voyeurism seemed to trump all reasons. *Big Brother* positioned its audiences as voyeurs. In the following selection, the group is responding to what enticed them to watch *Big Brother* in the first place;

TF: *If want to see what other people are going to do? How will they interact?*

Elzaan: *I feel that the peeping Tom issue is present. Why would someone watch someone else taking a shower? I think it's to fulfil some kind of curiosity.*

LN: *In terms of voyeurism – if I walked past an opened window – I would look in. I wouldn't think twice about it. My head would turn in that direction. I wouldn't read someone else's diary but the impulse is there. There is a fair amount of curiosity.*

The premise of *Big Brother* requires the individual to place themselves on public display and forfeiting their privacy for some fame and possibly financial gain. From the responses it's clear that reality TV allows for a sense of exhibition on the participant and voyeurism on the part of the viewer, which is clear from LN's response;

LN: *We watch them. They can't see us. We have the upper hand.*

SP: *I think a lot has to do with the fact that you would like to know if people are suffering in any way as you are or having troubles like you are or even happy in the way you are. I like to think there are people out there going through similar experiences and situations as I am.*

LN and SP's responses both point to an invitation by the programme to receive intimate access to the dynamics and relationships in the house. The audience is invited to the gaze of

the object. SP's response further emphasises Baker's observation that scopophilia is one of the major attractions of reality television (2000: 15). The respondents claimed that reality television advertising put an emphasis on real people in real-life situations which for them exemplified the scopophilic nature of televised images. These responses support the notion that reality television's attraction lies in its voyeuristic appeal.

In his study of the evolution and development of the voyeur in American film, Denzin suggests that Hollywood's treatment of the voyeur has passed through different phases: realism, modernism and post modernism (Denzin, 1995: 8). For realism, the voyeur is represented as naïve and innocent. Modernist cinema distanced voyeurism from everyday life, whereas postmodernism returns to the blatant voyeur of the realist era, where the audiences are openly drawn into the voyeurs activities, where the gaze is openly acknowledged and treated as commonplace (Denzin, 1995: 8-9).

During the focus group discussions on voyeurism, some participants questioned whether or not the act of watching was truly voyeuristic:

LN: *But voyeurism is when you are peeking and the person doesn't know you are peeking?*

SP: *It can't be voyeurism because I feel that in a way they manipulate us and they know we are watching. They just don't know exactly how the outside world is reacting.*

These responses seem symptomatic of the respondents need to 'cover over' their unease, and reconciling their visceral pleasure at enjoying the text with their conscience about a moralistic discourse by which they would judge others engaged in such behaviour in 'real life'. *Big Brothers* viewers become voyeurs who gaze into the lives of the housemates, who are rendered public. Baker suggests that an important attraction of reality television programming is that viewers are exposed to "social artefacts that previously have been protected under the right to privacy" (2000: 12). It was clear from the respondents that even as an audience, they are outside the house, they are still able to participate and influence the narrative of *Big Brother*.

The parallel programming on TV and online occasionally converges as in the case of *Big Brother*, which attempted to merge television and the internet. Thanks to the technology, *Big Brother* was both a TV show and a webcam site with live camera feeds available 24-hours a day. This convergence on TV and the internet was certainly picked up by members of the focus group;

RD: Big Brother producers try to breach the whole distance of audience and housemate. You can leave messages on a number and the housemate will receive them. I think it's weird when you have been watching people intimately and then you have a chance to send messages and also meet them when they are evicted from the house. I think it's a weird dynamic after being exposed to them intimately.

This response is indicative that perhaps the audience itself needs to be redefined. In bridging the gap between television, technology and the internet, reality television is creating a more fragmented audience. The audience is no longer passive as is presented in the hypodermic needle theory.

6.5. Audience Pleasures

Due to the fact that the students could not watch *Big Brother* all day every day, the respondents enjoyed the Sunday night shows which also gave them insight as to what transpired in previous days.

STU: I think people want to be famous want to be known, want to have people swooning over them, they want to be chased – it's one of the pleasures that many of us don't have access to and wish we could. I think Big Brother shows are people like us who are not famous and then are going to make them famous. We have discussions like if I got into the house, I would do this and would do that. It gives us access to a type of fame that we don't normally have access to.

Roscoe suggests that part of the attraction of watching *Big Brother* is the possibility of gaining pleasures from looking at people who “look a bit like us”, because the housemates are “real and ordinary people, not professional actors, and there are possibilities for identification” (Roscoe, 2001: 479). The potential for identification in *Big Brother* increases as the housemates look ordinary, and don’t have wardrobe stylists or make up. This certainly proved true in the following responses:

KN: *For me the draw card of reality television is ordinary people – there are no big names or famous actors. Once they are in the house they start to get fame but from the start you don’t know who they are – you don’t know anything about them. It’s a new experience for me to watch it. My favourite bits were the drunken bits because you were guaranteed that there would be something entertaining whether it was some type of conflict. There are some boring bits but when people were drunk they let down some of their pretences and be more comfortable and that was entertaining.*

From KN’s response, it would seem that the audiences were duped into watching *Big Brother* as people either chose to read the participants as ‘ordinary’ despite their choice to enter a house where their most intimate activities are going to be broadcast, which already makes them extra-ordinary; also, while the focus group participants are aware unaware the selection process by producers, it seems in these responses they chose to ignore or suppress that knowledge.

STU: *Big Brother gave us something new on South African television – something we never experienced before. It was something new and different to look forward to. I wanted to look at how people behave and see what they are going to do. And also the whole voyeuristic act – seeing someone and listening to them but they can’t see you and don’t know who you are, was also fascinating. It allows you private access into someone else’s life is a very pleasurable thing.*

TF: *I think that it was more the fact that something could happen. That’s what attracted me to it. So it was more the possibility of something that could happen that intrigued me.*

Respondents like TF, when they indicate that “something or anything could happen”, demonstrates the argument Roscoe (2001: 478) proposes about the pleasure of watching. However, as the discussion proceeded, TF ameliorated his view, because STU outlined how processes of selection of housemates and placement of cameras at strategic points in the house may have ‘scripted’ the entertainment value. STU’s remarks illustrates that not all audience members consumed the text with the same level of sophistication about the processes of television production, but that they all professed enjoyment as their primary reason for engaging the ‘reality television’ text.

The possibilities for identification also relate to the uses and gratification theory discussed in Chapter 4. Most of the participants enjoyed *Big Brother* not only because it was entertaining but also because it was a game, and they wanted to know who would win the one-million Rand prize. Fiske (1989: 133) notes the popularity of quiz and games shows in the United States and Australia, where they are heavily scheduled. The commercial attraction of quiz and game shows to broadcasters and sponsors have contributed to its success as a genre. SP, for example, was one of the respondents attracted to the game show format of *Big Brother*;

SP: Personally I would never have watched – even if there were a million rand up for grabs. It is real because it’s a real game. It’s not real life but it’s a real game and how people would play a game and there is nothing they wouldn’t do because there is a million rand at stake.

SP offers contradictory impulses in his statement in that he wouldn’t have otherwise watched *Big Brother* but justifies the reasons for watching it.

JT: I like the fact that we are watching people compete. Big Brother is based on competition and especially when things happen. But I think Big Brother and other programme like Survivor is a biased competition because the strongest gets kicked out first.

The game show genre is one the reasons that informs JT’s reason for consuming reality television. The reality game show draws on the techniques of *cinema verité* to convey a sense of the real. The everyday interactions between the housemates are recorded and edited in

order to show narratives of conflict, betrayal, competition and even romantic alliances in the house. It also presents the concept of ‘survival of the fittest’. Those housemates who know how to survive in the *Big Brother* house will escape eviction and eventually win the game.

TF: *I think it's more of a game than anything because the person who wins is the person who lies best. I think they warp their interpersonal skills. I don't think that people can only be with 12 people for two months without manipulating a situation. But viewers are also encouraged to vote and participate in the game because they don't want the bad people to win the game. They will vote for the person who they think deserves the money.*

VW: *These people entered because of the game. I would not enter even though it was a million rand just because it doesn't interest me. The housemates entered they wanted to be in the game and they were selected.*

This statement reveals strongly what VW's knows about realism. Her argument is in line with Grodal (2002: 68) who asserts that realism means the relationship between relationships and a physical and social ‘reality’. Here VW has assessed the reality status of the fiction and non-fiction content. Grodal writes;

The experience of ‘realism’ is linked to the perpetual specificity, but also linked to mental schemas that provide typical and familiar ‘recognisability’...Some types of realism focus on external reference, whereas other forms want to portray the general ‘essence’ of things, yet other forms activate subjective-associative reference (2002:67).

KN's response below shows that realism can mean something real, it can appear realistic but the viewers' experience of reality has led this participant to question the realism of representations in fiction or non-fiction.

KN: *I agree that it's a real game. In Survivor you know it's a game because of the alliances and the voting. Big Brother does not allow for any discussion about strategy – there are instances when they are having a deep and meaningful conversation about their family you are sometimes reminded that this could be the strategy to getting the money – even though it could be heartfelt stories.*

NJ: *In Big Brother there is just one human emotion – greed. These housemates want to win a million rand and they want to be famous. At the end it's a game.*

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter presented the responses gauged from three focus group interviews conducted. The discussion provided various reasons why audiences watched South Africa's first reality television series *Big Brother*, chief among them was the programme used ordinary people as opposed to trained actors and actresses. Voyeurism as a reason featured strongly among some of the respondents. This chapter further explores which discourse realism the participants identified with, and discussed if audience pleasures came from the claim that reality television represents reality?

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

Reality television has become a global phenomenon gaining much popularity since the early 2000's. Its various formats have firmly occupied a space in contemporary television culture. *Big Brother* has been made popular by people who consume them because they meet the needs and desires of those audiences, ranging from voyeurism to investigating the claim that reality television represents 'reality'. This was highlighted in the research discussion about what the appeal of 'reality television' was, how those appeals were established, and how 'producers' could and can even more so now, work out the appeals and predict what is likely to appeal to as wide an audience as possible? The producers of the first season of *Big Brother* South Africa had no idea if the programme would succeed in South Africa until it was aired and audiences consumed the product. The first season saw an audience rating success for M-Net which allowed it to be reported across other medium like radio, print and digital media.

Big Brother as a programming format is easy to replicate and implement, and the audiences enjoyed the opportunity to watch and criticise. A decade after embarking on this study Endemol (the makers of *Big Brother*), saw profits soar by 30% in 2010. Reality television catapulted the role of so called ordinary people playing in the television landscape. When responding to the first season of *Big Brother* as a reality programme, the focus group participants interrogated the authenticity of the content. In assessing the truth claims, the participants showed an awareness of the restyling of actuality as is shown in *Big Brother*. Reality television has been perceived by this group as having the properties of a feral genre. They view the programme as format that upsets the normal expectations in the contract between the audiences and the programme producers. Participants in my study showed an amount of distrust when viewing *Big Brother* in that it is a construction of reality within a hybrid format.

Then there is the act of looking. There is increased surveillance in our lives, from shopping malls to major highways and it seems that *Big Brother* in some way normalises that surveillance through entertainment. Part of its success may lie in its attempt to position audiences as voyeurs. *Big Brother* provided audiences with opportunities to legitimately watch a group of people who wanted to be watched or were selected because they presented

as the sort of people who were either keen to be watched or were unperturbed at being the objects of distant, anonymous gazers'. According to the focus group discussion, this made them objects onto whom the audience could project moral judgement and with whom they could also sometimes, paradoxically identify' as borne out by some of the responses in the focus groups.

Some of its appeal may lie in the fact that it is a hybridisation of genres which was a television novelty in the early 2000s. The labelling of *Big Brother* as a reality game show may have forced audiences to question the claim of the real and perhaps then question the claims of factual television programming like news and documentaries. Even though I began this study a decade ago, the debate surrounding *Big Brother* as a reality TV games continues. Audiences have become more sophisticated in the consumption of media products and are actively engaging and making meanings of such programming. It seems that participants in my focus group could connect with this 'new genre' precisely because it contained all the codes familiar from existing genres, whether competition/sport, game shows, situation comedy, soap opera and drama. However, a limitation of the study was that it only included university students and most of these were Journalism and Media Studies students. As a result, they understood some of the nuances of television production as they applied to Reality Television.

Big Brother continued to be aired in South Africa with two more seasons produced. Season two was produced from 28 July 2002 to 13 October 2002. Its success prompted a celebrity version of show in 2002, which ran concurrently with season two. M-Net and Endemol expanded the franchise and produced *Big Brother* Africa. Nine seasons have been produced of this show and includes participation from about 14 African countries including South Africa. In June 2013, M-Net announced that its local brand, Mzansi Magic, will produce another South African edition of *Big Brother*, with the show being rebranded as *Big Brother* Mzansi. It aired in January 2014. The past decade has seen a major technological shift in television programming. Television has traditionally been a passive medium from the viewer's perspective. The viewer sits in front of the television receiver and absorbs what is presented. Reality television now engages with the programme, by participating and now just observing.

More than a decade after I began this study, reality television has changed the landscape of television with its own hybridised codes and conventions. More than 115 different shows have been produced mostly in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. Some of formats have been used for South African versions of the programme like *Masterchef South Africa* and *Idols*. Among the most popular reality television programmes in the history of the genre include; *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, and the most recent being *Kourtney and Khloe Take the Hamptons* which was produced at the end of 2014. There is no doubt there will be more shows on the horizon as the genre's popularity continues to increase.

Technological shifts since the first 'reality television' work means new questions have emerged, and new issues need explication and accounting. This research focused on the first programme reality programme produced in South Africa in order to see how in its historical moment, it worked based on the material available to both producers and viewers at the time. *Big Brother South Africa* Season 1, set the tone for the success of other reality television shows consumed among South African television viewers. *Big Brother* changed televisual life since the late 1990's. *Big Brother* not only put people together in a house but also paved the way for certain performances of the self that we now consider synonymous with reality TV. The world of reality television revealed, as evident from focus group participants, the mediated subject to be positioned somewhere between personal agency and the public gaze. Producers have kept this formula in mind and while reality television formats have changed and developed in the past 15 years, it attracts audiences in their millions.

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APPENDIX 1:**FOCUS GROUP – INTERVIEW GUIDE**

7 – 11 October 2002 – 18h00 to 20h00

1. What is reality TV?
2. What do you understand by the term reality?
3. Do you think the media can present reality?
4. Is *Big Brother* a reality?
5. How often do you watch *Big Brother*?
6. Do you watch it on DSTV / M-Net encoded time?
7. What attracts you to the programme?
8. Did advertisers associated with the programme encourage you to watch *Big Brother*?

APPENDIX 2: M-NET / ENDEMOL QUESTIONNAIRE

Endemol

1. How did the idea of *Big Brother* come about?
2. Reality TV is a growing genre. What do you understand by the terms reality TV and reality programming?
3. Why is *Big Brother* considered to be reality TV?
4. Why do you think audiences are attracted to the programme?
5. How do you understand the reasons for the popularity of the programme?
6. Do you think that *Big Brother* is interactive and a cross media entertainment reality? Substantiate.
7. What is this concept of having a *Big Brother*?
8. Please elaborate on *Big Brother* International?
 - a. The countries that have broadcasted *Big Brother*?
 - b. What were the successes of *Big Brother* International?
 - c. What were the failures of *Big Brother* International?
 - d. International Statistics – audience ratings.
9. What made you bring *Big Brother* to South Africa?
10. Did you think *Big Brother* South Africa was a success?
11. How are housemates selected?

MNET

1. Why did your company invest in the idea of a South African *Big Brother*?
2. What is the relationship between Endemol and Mnet?
3. Reality TV is a growing genre. What do you understand by the terms reality TV and reality programming?
4. Is *Big Brother* considered a reality?
5. Why is *Big Brother* considered to be reality TV?
6. Why do you think audiences are attracted to the programme?
7. How do you understand the reasons for the popularity of the programme?
8. Do you think that *Big Brother* is interactive and a cross media entertainment reality? Substantiate.
9. What is this concept of having a *Big Brother*?

10. Explain how the company began branding and advertising the South African *Big Brother*?
11. What is the selection procedure?
12. When did the selection process begin?

Production:

13. Construction of the house.
14. What are the rules?
15. Are the rules the same as International *Big Brother*?
16. Who is *Big Brother*?
17. How does *Big Brother* determine the conditions in the house?
18. Explain the concept of the diary room
19. Weekly tasks
20. Technical
 - a. How many cameras
 - b. How many microphones
21. Production
 - a. How many Directors? Role of the Director. Is this a directors reality?
 - b. The role of the producers
 - c. How does one justify editing a “reality”?
22. What were the successes of *Big Brother*?
23. What were the failures of *Big Brother*?
24. There are also presenters associated with *Big Brother*. What was the brief when selecting these presenters? Do you think that this affects audience ratings?

Xolisa Mwrebi – Publicity – MNET (October, 2002)

1. Audience ratings from *Big Brother One*
 - a. Audience stats of DSTV – *Big Brother* 24 channel
 - b. MNET – open time
2. Do the audience study results have any projection toward *Big Brother 2*?
3. How did the mainstream media react to *Big Brother*?

4. Was there negative publicity toward the show? If yes, please elaborate.
5. Why do you think *Big Brother* is so popular in South Africa?

APPENDIX 4: FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTIONS

FOCUS GROUP ONE

Tim Forshaw (TS)

Selvan Pillay (SP)

Elzaan Lees (EL)

Jan Thomas (JT)

Loren Naish (LN)

1. What is your understanding of reality TV?

TS: Reality TV is show where the cameras are supposed to be there and the people interact with each other without responding to the fact that there is a camera there. I don't think the camera has got to be in full view. If you look at the different types of reality TV that you've got. There's Big Brother with hidden cameras and Survivor – you know exactly where they are because a cameraman is present with a camera. It also has to do with the setting of the show. BB is confined to a house – so it's easy to hide the cameras. Survivor is out in the open to follow where the participants go.

JT: I don't think reality TV has anything to do with the camera. I think it has to do with no scripting. There is no script and nothing is planned.

LN: Loren agrees with Jan and says that is the difference with what she perceives reality TV to be and what voyeurism is. Voyeurism is when the person is unaware that he/she is being watched. If I were home alone. There are things I would do – that I would not do if I knew there was a camera anywhere – even if it were for a hundred days and I was meant to act natural.

EL: When you watch BB – they know where the cameras are. If they stand in the shower they look and know where the camera.

SP: The participants figure out where the cameras are.

TS: I agree I think the participants know where the cameras are. But in the virtual volt - show the participants thought there was no camera – but there was one. So they started to behave how they really felt as opposed to how they would behave when they know there are cameras around. I think that was much more real than when they were in the house – because they were behaving according to their belief that there was no camera present.

LN: My idea of what is real is different to what we are seeing. What I am watching is watching is what that cameraman / shot chooses to show me. We don't choose what we look at. It's not real in the truest sense.

SP: The BB channel offers four camera views at a time so to a certain extent the viewer gets a chance to select what he / she wants to watch.

What is the real?

LN: Something that is unfiltered. It's a director's reality. I think it is far more streamlined but when I first started watching that wasn't my perception at the time. It's very covert. I was very reluctant to watch Big Brother at first because I thought the concept was a load of crap. But afterwards I was hooked. After my social activities I would return home to see watch the housemates were up to. I became obsessed and it was a good thing I returned to campus (where there wasn't DSTV at digs) otherwise I'm sure I would be like those couch potatoes / addicts.

TF: I have to agree with Loren. At first I did it was a load of hogwash but then after surfing TV channels and looking for something else to watch, I would come across the BB channel and see the housemates doing something stupid. I think that was the entertainment value to it – seeing other people making absolute monkeys out of themselves. It's fun to laugh at someone else.

Do you think that the media can represent reality?

TF: I don't think so because it is still a director's cut. Some is still having a say over what you see. I remember when I read an article where someone said the directors chose who to put on. If they are choosing who to put – what criteria are they using to not put other people on? So I think it's not a complete reality. I don't watch it because it's called a reality –I like to watch it because they make fools out of themselves. And it's fun to watch them when they do make idiots of themselves and it's interesting to watch how they interact with each other.

LN: I have a problem with the term reality because it is such an unnatural situation – throwing these random people you wouldn't ordinarily choose to make friends with or interact with and now you have to live with these people. And you are also acting to the camera to be entertaining because you know the public at the other end is voting whether or not you are popular enough

/ sexy enough / or explicit enough / or funny enough to stay on. It's not real as opposed to someone putting a camera in my bedroom or in my house because there's the element of voting on the other side. So it's not reality because it's an unnatural situation.

JT: I think there's a difference in the word reality. There is reality as in what we experience and also the reality we see on the news. So even though the news is cut and edited it is something that happened. But what's not reality is when the director chooses what we need to see. So I think there are many ways of looking at the term reality.

I'm not sure if the news is a constructed reality. But when I watch the news and I know that something is happening – I know that journalists are going to bring us his news objectively and so there will not be any bias. The fact that if I am watching Big Brother and the director decides to move the camera. Like the one time me and my mates were watching and we had the choice of the cameras and we were watching the oaks in the room and then two people in the room started 'getting it on' and then we were like – CHECK THIS OUT – and the camera moved. So I think there is bias in that.

TF: I think that the whole thing is you can never be truly objective. It's always going to be bias towards someone or something. It's impossible to get a completely neutral stance on anything because we always have some underlying reason to do something. I think the same applies to the news. It's run by whoever and that persons got their own interest – even if the side-line their interest they can't ignore them – it will come through in how or what they report.

LN: I didn't read about the media debate on reality TV – analysing the reality TV concept. If I didn't read up on it I don't think I would've have even considered a lot of the aspects like the director's cut and people acting up to the camera. I don't think I would've considered things like as a normal audience member watching it and being engaged. Coming out of an educated response, I understand that what I am watching is not reality.

Why do you enjoy reality TV?

JT: I like the fact that we are watching people compete. Big Brother is based on competition and especially when things happen. But I think Big Brother and other programmes like Survivor is a biased competition because the strongest gets kicked out first. I enjoy watching it

because it's something to talk about with your friends – especially when something is kicked out / leave – the game changes and it's something to talk about.

TF: I agree with Jan and that's where I think the people went wrong in Big Brother. It is a competition and yet they pretended to be friends and that brings a fake element to it – so it's not a complete reality. Very often as soon as a housemate leaves – who they were supposedly big mates with – they would suddenly be friends with someone they previously did not get along with.

ELAZAAN: But Tim isn't you generalising a bit because some of them were actually friends.

LN: How can one analyse if indeed they were friends – because there is a million rands at the end of this. You will want to make friends in the house. I don't think you can have a friendship in a house where there is a lure of a million rand. It's all made up for the sake of the competition.

JT: I tend to agree with Loren. It's still a game. Even if you did sincerely make a friend and him / her goes you have no choice but to continue playing the game. It's all part of the strategy to be-friend someone else. You are not really making friends. It's all an act. Not a scripted act. At the same time they've got strategies and they are employing their strategies because they want to win a million rand.

TF: Jan you said that even though it's not a scripted act – IT'S STILL AN ACT. So how real is anything that we've been watching.

SP: I think you got to pretend to be someone's friend if you are going to stab them in the back. That's basically all that it comes down to.

Is Big Brother a reality?

Elzaan: I don't think that it is a reality. The people go in there knowing that there are cameras and that people are watching them. So they are not going to act like themselves. They are going to try and impress everyone else in the house. Even if the virtual volt – they are not acting like themselves. Because they have been acting like someone else for however many days they have

been in the house so have gotten used to acting as that person. So even if they go into the virtual volt – they are going in as they person they are acting as.

LN: I think that Elzaan is right. The housemates come into the house with what they are calling strategy. They discuss it with Big Brother. They are admitting in that way, indirectly, to acting.

TF: I agree with Loren and Elzaan. I think it is a really portrayal of people acting. I think the housemates try and suppress whatever bad character traits they might have. Sometimes they might slip up and then you realise that this person is not what they appear to be.

What attracts you to BB?

JT: I only watch Big Brother if there is nothing else to watch just to check out what the housemates are doing. I think they are a bunch of losers and if you watch Big Brother and see on the bottom of the screen they sms that viewers send – you suddenly realise that there are certain types of people that watch Big Brother and you don't want to be classified with those people. I really like Survivor though – because it is not South African and it is more professionally done.

LN: I am self-confessed soapie addict. I often read ahead of the soapies to find out what's going to happen. Now in Big Brother – there is the element of surprise. You have no idea. You cannot read ahead. You have no idea what is going to happen. The social interaction every day when you watch – Did you watch? Did you see what happened? Just to see the social dynamics. Big Brother was a new concept so people were curious to watch what was going to happen.

ELZAAN: I was attracted to BB because it was different, it was new. It was different to the other reality TV SHOWS. It was also local. Curious to see what's happening.

TF: For me the initial attraction was the possibility of conflict. If they did get angry with each other there would've been a fight scene. They could've been a war of words.

SP: I agree with Tim. All of us watch TV and you actually get to watch people fight with someone else. People throw punches but there is never really an exchange of words.

LN: For me the big element was sex. Will they? Who is going to do it first? Will they actually go that far?

JT: I think that one of the biggest downfalls of BB was that there were not any varying age groups. There were a whole lot of young people. They were lost out on the fact that an older more mature person could make it more interesting.

TF: I think the reason they don't have older people is because they will be voted out straight away. They might not be fun.

What urged you to continue to watch BB?

JT: I wanted to see what kind of people were picked for the show. They picked people who would bring conflict. Most of the people were alcoholics who drank and sat around. I wanted to watch to see them making fools of themselves. Watching these people makes me feel better about myself because I wouldn't act like that. I do drink and I would love to spend my time chilling in a pool but I would be myself. I don't think I would be immature like the housemates.

ELZAAN: I disagree with Jan. Because the housemates have no idea what the environment is going to be like until they are in the house.

JT: Elzaan would you streak for a million rand?

LN: I don't think she would streak for 90 days running.

JT: It's a million rand.

TF: Jan you said that you wouldn't act like that. Sometimes people only do really stupid stuff when they are drunk. In the Big Brother house they spend most of their time drinking. And I'm sure most of the stupid stuff they do is a result of their drinking. I drink – I do stupid stuff when I am drunk.

SP: Getting drunk with friends is different because you know the whole of South Africa is not watching you and there's no camera rolling. So you can do whatever you want to do.

What pleasures do you receive from watching BB?

LN: Social interaction the next day. In the digs I live – there are five boys and listening to the comments they make. They like the guys they identify with. The comment on the women in the house. It was a local production so I identified with it being South African. New concept. I heard about the international concept and was interested to see what the South Africans can produce. The novelty starts to wear out. Shower hour is not as fun anymore. The not knowing factor also is exciting because you can't pre-empt the script – you have no idea what is going to happen. I often put myself in their shoes and ask myself – would I do that? How would I react? Well-advertised. Most well-known radio and TV personalities were talking about it. So I was really curious to see what the fuss was about. The social interaction was a plus. My mom started watching because I started watching when I went home for the vacation. When I came back to varsity she would phone me and give me updates.

ELZAAN: I enjoyed it because it made me laugh and it made me cry. It was sad to see people leave. Especially when housemates were affected. Also the housemates were re-united with their family. Happy and sad tears. Friends also made me watch BB. They would come to lectures and say have you started watching BB? Did you see what happened last night. That spurred me to watch.

SP AND TF: Agree with Elzaan.

JT: My sister was involved in the production so I wanted to see what the outcome of the programme was. I wasn't that interested. I was a stooge at Kingswood and the girls only talked about BB and that started to irritate me.

SP: I think a lot of my initial interest had to do with the fact that they showed previews from other BB's from other countries so people actually expected to see what they had seen on the promo clips. That was one of the main reasons I watched. I expected to see people fighting. The male female interaction. It was interesting to see people's silhouettes from inside the constructed tents then full on sex.

LN: The participants are really aware of the camera and that's why they throw a bed sheet over themselves. They were aware of the camera.

How often do you watch BB?

JT: Late at night – BB24 – DSTV

TF: Flicking through channels –

SP: Watched DSTV – if there was nothing to watch

ELZAAN: Watch every single day. Two hours a day.

LN: Watched when I was on vac – almost all the time. Almost every day.

What is the appeal of BB?

LN: I think the appeal for me is watching the social dynamics of human relationships. Who is getting well with whom? Who is backstabbing who? Whose is the hero? Who is the villain?

When and how do you talk about BB?

SP: Basically I would speak about it if anyone brings it up. I would join in because I would have something to say or comment. It was controversial issues. AND it's great debating with friends.

ELZAAN: My mom and I were in contact all the time about BB. Even if I did not watch she would tell me what happened. If something was on she would phone me and tell me to watch. Outside of the viewing context I would usually only chat to my one friend because she knew someone in the house. And we would analyse his behaviour and she could tell if was acting or sincere.

TF: Like Selvan I wouldn't bring it up but if someone was talking about it and I had something to say I would say it.

SP: I wouldn't start a conversation with a friend – hey do you know what happened in BB?

JT: I got irritated with people who spoke about it. At school everyone would always talk about and it was really irritating. If I missed something I wouldn't make a point of finding out.

SP: Jan if your friends were avid viewers would you watch it?

JT: Yes I would.

What intrigues you about Big Brother South Africa?

ELZAAN: I liked the fact that some of the tasks they did helped South African charities.

SP: The only thing I found South Africa about was the lingo. They really wasn't really much else.

TF: The only thing South African was that the people in the house were South Africa. I mean which South African would use a gas braai to braai food. What happened to wood and coal?

JT: I agree

LN: I liked that it was across the race. I sometimes think they were trying to introduce discursive topics like racism in the house. I think the producers knew that by choosing different people – these people might bring up controversial issues.

JT: I think there were a few racism issues brought up subtly.

ELZAAN: I agree.

SP: I think that the housemates should've been allowed to fight. It would have been much more interesting and guys wouldn't have had to turn around and walk away.

Let's talk about Produced pleasures versus innate pleasures?

JT: The produced pleasure was that it was South African and twelve people stuck in a house. It was interesting. The innate pleasure I think was so see what was going.

SP: Personally I would never had watched – even if there were a million rand up for grabs.

ELZAAN: Agree with Jan and Selvan.

TF: I think that it was more the fact that something could happen. That's what attracted me to it. So it was more the possibility of something that could happen that intrigued me.

LN: I don't think I would have watched if it was an Italian BB? It was not my culture and I wouldn't have been interested. I felt more aligned to the people I sort of identified with. Maybe someone from Durban.

Why do you think audiences want to look at people who are defined by privations?

Voyeurism / Peeping Tom?

TF: If want to see what other people are going to do? How will they interact? What they do if there is no TV?

JT: I agree with Tim.

Elzaan: I feel that the peeping Tom issue is present. Why would someone watch someone else taking a shower? Just to see. Fulfil some kind of curiosity. Natural human instinct.

LN: In terms of voyeurism – if I walked past an opened window – I would look in. I wouldn't think twice about it. My head would turn in that direction. I wouldn't read someone else's diary but the impulse is there. There is a fair amount of curiosity.

SP: I think a lot has to do with the fact that you would like to know if people are suffering in anyway as you are or having troubles like you are or even happy in the way you are. I like to think there are people out there going through similar experienced and situations.

TF and JT: I agree with Loren and the diary analogy

Is there a sense of Us and Them?

TF: Well you can see what they are doing and not what they are thinking. In terms if actions they do there is definitely is an "us and them" attitude.

LN: We watch them. They can't see us. We have the upper hand. We also decide who goes and who stays.

SP: I think that the people in the house decide how we are going to react. If they want to do things that would irritate us they would do it.

LN: But voyeurism is when you are peeking and the person doesn't know you are peeking?

SP: It can't voyeurism because I feel that in a way they manipulate us and they know we are watching. They just don't know exactly how the outside world is reacting.

Do you perceive the programme to be an edited reality?

TF: In packaged programmes of reality TV – the editor and director choose which halves an hour they want you see. So you don't even get to see things as they happened or the way you would interpret them.

SP: Everyone watches BB for different reasons. I think the editors focus on the housemates they like or think the audience wants to see.

Is it a Real game?

JT: I think the fact that they are in a closed system breaks it from reality. It's not everyday life. It can't be everyday life because it's a closed system. Everyday life is an open system.

TF: I think it's more of a game than anything because the person who wins is the person who lies best. I think they warp their interpersonal skills. I don't think that people can only be with 12 people for two months. So their inter-personal skills become warped.

SP: It is real because it's a real game. It's not real life but it's a real game and how people would play a game and there is nothing they wouldn't do because there is a million rand at stake.

TF: I think that viewers do vote and participate in the game is because they don't want the bad people to win the game. They will vote for the person who they think deserves the money.

SP: The lesser of the two evils basically.

Why would you watch someone being bored or being put in the BB house?

SP: It wouldn't be that interesting if people had something to do all the time. Part of BB is to watch people who don't know what to do with their time. They could eat all the food in the fridge. Not having stuff to do make it a bit more interesting.

JT: I agree. They are placed in a situation and they are reacting to that situation.

LN: Boredom is the mother of all invention. When you are bored you become creative with what you do with your time. Creates opportunities for things to happen.

Is the diary room part of this reality?

LN: I think what the housemates say to the person in the diary room is still important because they are aware that they are controlling how the viewer's perceive them.

TF: I agree with Loren because it's a concentrated time when they can put their views forward. Vote FOR ME I'm the good guy or I'm the victim. Here they can put their altered views forward.

JT: I think they get to monopolies the time without anyone else affecting it.

Elzaan: They are still acting in the diary room. They have been acting so much that they probably can't tell the difference between acting and what's real.

Do you follow other media surrounding BB? Advertising ?

JT: No. No time

Elzaan: I have participated in voting housemates out. I voted on who thought needed / deserved the money. I feel that the advertisers make a big deal about it so you want to know what the deal is all about.

SP: No I didn't vote. The pure reason I watched was to see what type of conflict there would be. It didn't matter to me who won or who lost. Nandos and Steers benefitted more from Big Brother than BB did from being associated with them

TF: I didn't vote because I do not have enough money to phone enough times to swing the vote.

LN: I voted. In terms of following the media I definitely think they influenced my opinion. I don't think that they affected my perception.

How is Big Brother a reality and what is its attractive force?

JT: I think that BB is reality in the sense that the people are acting to get the money. The fact that they are acting that way with each other to get the million is real. But it's also not real cos it's a close system.

TF: Real in the fact that people are acting. It can't be taken as face value as it is someone else's perception. Who is pointing the camera at what angle so you don't get the real deal.

SP: I agree with Tim and Jan. I don't think there is such a thing as reality TV in the true sense of the term. I think it's filtered before it gets to us.

ELZAAN: Before I participated in this discussion I thought that BB was real and that everything I saw was real. But after listening to everyone else I have realised that they could be acting and it's not reality.

LN: I agree with Selvan. Reality TV is a genre but it doesn't necessarily refer to something that is real. I think it cab categorised in that genre in terms of its difference to other TV formats but it's not fundamentally real. It's not objective be and not true reality as I understand it.

FOCUS GROUP TWO

SHALEN GAJADAR (SG)

STUART (STU)

PRENESEN NAIDO (PN)

REBECCA DAVIES (RD)

LISA

1. What is your understanding of reality TV?

SG: I take reality TV to be an unscripted presentation of a situation where there is no pre-determined outcome. The only limitation is the running time placed on the programme. Ordinary people in society who may not necessarily have acting experience are expected top behave as naturally as possible in an unnatural constructed environment by production companies.

STU: I think reality TV unscripted entertainment for people to relate to someone that is closer to them in a social standing and who doesn't live at the top of the food chain when it comes to social and moral values. It's taking everyday people in everyday lifestyles and putting them into a situation and allowing people on the outside who are watching it to apply certain elements to themselves. For example if I identify with someone and was put in a situation – how would I react? What would I do?

PN: I agree that it is unscripted but people go into the show with a certain idea and strategy. Once they are in the game they adjust to the personality of the other contestants on the show – just to give themselves a better chance.

RD: I agree with Prin. I think that there is an intended outcome that the housemates are heading for – a big cash prize. So the term reality TV is misleading. There is nothing real about these situations. It's entirely constructed environment and people aren't going to behave in a way that would be natural in the outside world I don't think.

LISA: I think that the producers and directors have an intended outcome. They choose what to cut and paste and edit and how they portray certain people. So it's not necessarily direct reality because you have someone basically showing you what you want to watch.

What is reality?

LISA: Reality is different for everyone. It's your surroundings and what's real to you.

PN: I think we are faced with what the contestants are faced. When you are walking on the street – you walk in a certain way because you don't want to embarrass yourself. You try to act natural or real – but actually you are not – you are adjusting to the people around you even in daily life.

STU: I think that the term real is specific term for each individual. From my perspective reality is the paradigm in which you live in and the way you relate to everything else with using your own personal experience. And this differs for people.

SG: I think reality for the person is just the way they experience life generally. So when it comes to reality TV they want to take a bunch of people who are very much South African, without having been exposed to the acting industry and put them in another situation that might be foreign to them - but the reality bit comes in the way that they react in a situation. There is nothing realistic to be stuck in a house to win a million – that's a very constructed situation. The situation may not be real but the people placed in those situations are real. It's not that we want to relate to being in a house with other people – we want to relate to a person in a situation.

Can the media ever represent reality?

RD: Certainly not. I don't think we can ever access reality directly. Everything in our lives in sort of mediated through something else – books, pictures – what we see as reality has been filtered through the conscience of someone else. So it's not as if reality TV is any more real than any other form of art that purports to be real but at the same time it's the closest that one gets to a form of reality.

STU: None of us here can pinpoint what is the real. I think it also depends on your place in society and how you access society as a whole. If you are mainstream yourself and align yourself with one of the characters in BB then it does show a reality because then one would be able to say that in the same situation this is the thing I would do. So to a degree BB shows a form of reality from the way that we all interpret reality it can be true in the sense.

SG: I don't anyone can ever reproduce reality in the media of any sort – whether it is a real life documentary in a magazine or a photo spread on someone's life. Because one you place an individual in front of the camera or make any individual conscience of the fact that they being watched or being observed you are already contaminating what is reality to them. If at a party and someone pulls out a camera and takes picture – you begin to watch the way you smile and stand and begin to compose yourself. I don't think it's any different to the media when you place a camera behind a mirror. The psychology behind BB is that after a while people forget that there is a camera but I think that the human mind is such that every time they realise that there are other people watching you – you will contaminate reality - So I don't think the media can ever duplicate what it is in a realistic sense.

Why do you think BB is considered Reality TV?

LISA: Its obviously real than people acting roles – although that people are acting in BB to a certain extent they are still playing themselves and not another character and I think this defines it as reality as opposed to a soap opera or a sitcom.

RD: Just because it provides us with an unmediated access to reality doesn't make it any less real – It's just another form.

PN: I think the people put into the house are expected to act naturally – so that's where I think the term reality for television comes out from.

STU: I would put reality TV as something very different from reality or from television. I think there is a combination of two different worlds and the result is we are getting the reality of what it is to be on television and not the reality of what it is to lead a normal everyday South African life. They are trying to make it up as they go along.

SG: I think that the terming something like BB reality TV is very flawed. You are throwing 12 people into a house and consciously telling them that they are playing for the million. So that's going to affect their character, the way they interact with other people and the way they perform certain actions that might be viewed as flawed in a public domain. And BB is placing a public sphere in a private domain. In realizing this housemates become self-conscience and it's not a reality and not a fair depiction of reality. You suddenly realise that you would not be showering in a bikini and a towel. So this is a flawed reality in a specific situation. I know someone who knew someone who worked in production and prior to BB coming to SA there was a debate for three years as to whether racism is going to be an issue in the show. What sort of reality is this when producers start debating how people are going to act before they contestants are chosen. Contestants are briefed that they are not allowed to make certain comments that they would naturally otherwise if there was no camera around. So I think the term reality TV is flawed and is used primarily as a marketing scheme.

RD: I agree – in another show Survivor they used body doubles in some shots - if you are setting to provide reality but keep in a way manipulate or direct a situation then how can that even be considered a reality.

PN: In a programme like Survivor they make it look like everyone is on an island alone – but the reality they are surrounded by cameras. Every person is being followed – everything is on camera. So I definitely don't think that's reality TV.

What was the initial attraction to BB?

Lisa: I think it's the whole hype of something happening overseas and you wanted to see what it was about when it finally got to South Africa.

RD: It's the whole futuristic element too. When a movie like the Truman Show came out at first – I said no way this would never happen. Three years down the line we have in South Africa. Also there is that voyeuristic element to see people showering every morning. I think it's a natural human impulse.

PN: I think it's interesting to note how much alcohol that the housemates are given and they get into the Jacuzzi. Some interesting stories come out of that situation and that's why my friends and I watch it.

STU: I think people want to know that they are normal. We will use a certain product. An effort for fulfilment. My initial attraction to BB was not necessarily to watch the shower scenes but rather to see what kind of lifestyle I lead by comparison. What kind of a person am I if these are the average South Africans? I am tempted to a certain extent – in terms of voyeuristic tendencies but for me that was not the initial attraction. If I wanted to see someone in the shower I would hire a porn movie. That for me is not very appealing.

SG: I disagree with Stuart. All BB did in South Africa is serve a need – a need for some sort of voyeuristic tendencies to look into the lives of other people. I think that Voyeurism is a huge draw card because of the possibility of nudity. It's not about being vulgar and watching porn. It's about knowing that these people live up the street from me and there is what they are doing.

What made you continue to watch it?

PN: At 2 – 3am there is not much to watch on TV so my friends and I switch on BB and watch. Even if they are not doing anything - It's just amazing you are sitting there and watching them sleep or talk nonsense. We usually watch when there isn't much else to watch.

RD: I think there is a sense of companionship of watching other people. Also I think once you get involved with individual personalities you want to watch and see how the plot progresses.

SG: I watch in anticipation because we could all sit around and watch two goldfish in a fish bowl for three months and we know that after a while we will get bored. I think its anticipation that something can happen in the household. That's another reason why BB has an interactive aspect to it. While people are waiting for something to happen they can send SMS's to the show.

How often do you watch?

LISA: Three times a week on Mnet when I was on campus and then I used to watch the BB24 almost all the time at home.

RD: I watched BB quite often 2 / 3 times a week.

PN: I watch it on campus very often. When I am on holiday at home I didn't really watch it.

STU: Two to three hours a week. One to 2 shows a week.

SG: Watched almost every day. And knew exactly what was happening.

Who do you watch it with? Do you talk about it outside the viewing context?

LISA: In G'town I watch it with my digs mates. At home I watch it with my brother. We only chat about it when something interesting happens.

RD: I usually watch every Sunday with my roommates but if something interesting happens. My sister will phone me to tell me about it. The newspapers also carry interesting articles so I read about that.

PN: I watch in it res. We don't really talk about after the show. Most comments happen while the programme is being aired.

STU: My whole family watched it so we had interesting debates about the housemates and the situations. My mother is an English teacher and my sister is a medic so we would have interesting conversations.

SG: Back home nobody watches BB. Where I come from people think it's terrible. They don't pay attention to it. My friends don't watch it. On campus, my friends raised money to get the

BB channel in res. When we watch in res we watch in a group of friends and we watch it we discuss contentious issues – gender / race based. So certain issues come out.

Why attracted you to watch South Africa's first Big Brother?

RD: I think that being an SA BB you would get a cross section of people with stimulating discussion. I think BB SA sadly lacked that. Maybe the producers choose people who by nature are not going have anything interesting / controversial to say. All the people selected are middle to upper class. I think that producers are robbing us of a lot of stuff that could be uniquely South African.

SG: All the producers want is a show with good entertainment value. We come from an educated background and know that this is not great programming whereas there could be someone sitting out there who loves the concept and watching BB. The house could've been great for people to discuss issues and generate debates. If that happened then the media would be quick to term them sexist or racist. The house could've been a healthy cage of discussion for what the rest of South Africa is thinking.

STU: I think producers have played it safe by choosing the people they chose to avoid major race / culture conflict.

RD: Given the history of our country some viewers want to watch for escapism rather than to view a microcosm of our society. Maybe the average viewer isn't interested in seeing that anyway.

SG: To some extent producers produce with a cautious hand but they also trying break away from certain stereotypes. Speaking as an Indian guy – when I saw those two Indian guys on BB2 – those were definitely not your average middle class Indian males. But I think when producers put in a gay Indian and an Indian male yoga instructor that they are trying to move away from certain stereotypes.

Was the advertising surrounding BB an attractive force?

LISA: No not all.

RD: I find the amount of advertising on BB to be one of the most annoying features of the show. It was a distraction. Product placements within the house cheapened the whole thing and definitely distracted from portraying a so-called reality.

PN: They were unintelligent ads. I did enjoy it.

STU: I think that adverts played an important role but I also found them to be annoying.

SG: Irritating on the show. By no means did the advertising entice me. It was just an elaborate marketing ploy.

Let's talk about produced pleasures versus instinctive pleasures?

SG: When I started watching show – they had the best snippets from BB around the world and they looked fun and interesting. What I had expected to see was that every day there would be something going on in the house. I think I was being naïve of the South African version. All I got was a bunch of guys sitting around drinking and being stupid. I think it was hyped up so well – and that was the initial attraction.

STU: BB gave something new on South African television – something we never experienced before. It was something new and different to look forward to. I wanted to look at how people behave and see what they are going to do. And also the whole voyeuristic act – seeing someone and listening to them but they can't see you and don't know who you are also fascinating. It allows you private access into someone else's life is a very pleasurable thing.

The situation defined by privations – is this fulfilling a fantasy?

SG: I think that voyeuristic – the camera prying into one's life is not a negative thing because we are all curious to know what goes on in other people's life. That's why we need something like privacy. The insight into someone else's life is information about people I want to know about and that are some of the pleasure's received.

RD: BB producers try to breach the whole distance of audience and housemate. You can leave messages on a number and the housemate will receive them. I think it's weird when you have been watching people intimately and then you have a chance to meet them and go to their eviction parties. I think it's a weird dynamic after being exposed to them intimately.

STU: I think people want to be famous want to be known, want to have people swooning over them, they want to be chased – it's one of the pleasures that many of us don't have access to

and wish we could. I think BB shows are people like us who are not famous and then are going to make them famous. We have discussions like if I got into the house; I would do this and would do that. It gives us access to a type of fame that we don't normally have access to.

Do you think that BB as a reality show illustrates everyday life?

LISA: When I watch I sometimes forget about the million – you don't really think about the outcome. Towards the end maybe you think – WHO IS GOING TO WIN? But at first I just watched it.

SG: I agree with Lisa. By no means is that house a reality TV show. That is no way a mirror of reality. If you ask those 12 people to stay in the house if there was no media and no million and I doubt that they would say yes. By being placed in the house they know that they under the influence of the media and that people are watching them and there's a million. We may not think of the million bucks all the time but I think they are thinking about it in their every action. Some viewers it might be a reality but for the housemates it's very much a game show.

PN: I was interested to see how far people would go for a million rand. In BB if you jump into the Jacuzzi one day it won't necessarily mean that you are going to win the public supports. You got to try every day to win that support.

The urge to gaze? Diary room – camera – speaking to audience.

LISA: I don't think so. Their answers are so prepared to make you like them

RD: Over time the housemates themselves – are constantly aware of the audience but they also talk about how they develop relationships with BB.

PN: I didn't watch the diary room sessions I think that's really boring. I watched one session and would rather watch the live broadcast about what's happening in other rooms.

STU: I think the diary room sessions did give the personal aspect. It did allow you to see the side of the person. I think they first got to play the game for the people around them. Then they got to play the game to be going to rid of them. So you see a different side. When they come

into the diary sometimes you see another side of the person. It does give you a scopophilic input. The diary room adds a twist.

SG: They know that what they say in the diary room – the others can't hear. They may do something in the house and say something else in the diary room. The producers have put the diary room there to vent off their feeling. But they are all playing the game. And because it's edited you won't know what really was said and what they think.

Is Big Brother a reality?

LISA: I wouldn't say I have a fascination with BB. It's more a just something to watch like a soap opera. I don't religiously sit down and watch it. It's a way to pass the time and a diversion. I definitely say that it's not reality but a form of real as opposed to fiction.

RD: Watching BB makes me feel good about myself because I think in comparison these people are so dumb and have reached such levels of moral degradation. I think that coming from an academic background I watch it with a level of irony that the average person is not going to. We watch and crit unlike the average viewer. The average person might develop obsessions with the characters and think that this reality in the true sense of the word.

PN: I don't set aside time to watch BB but I do watch it. Sometimes I watch and before I know it I realise I've been watching someone sleep for two hours. I think that the novelty of BB hasn't faded.

STU: I find that I was nor primarily interested in the representation or the emotional side of the characters. What I watched it for was their interaction of people on people and the caution in which the take. I found the actions of people in a group / society are so unique and diverse – you can discover a dark horrible side of individual people. The characters that didn't outshine anyone else – the quiet and reserved people – makes you scared of the kind of people around. It was interesting for me from a social, moral and cultural perspective.

SG: What it is meeting other people out there through BB and seeing whether they are they people you have come to hear about. In my life I have never come across meeting an Afrikaaner farmer like Ferdinan – characters in the show. Through the show I have come to realise that big Afrikaaners guys actually say OKE AND err all the time. I always thought it was a

generalisation against people and cultures and habits. BB allowed me to meet other people from contemporary South African society and I have come to realise that there are people out there who do behave and act like this. You do after a while see habits and they do talk about their personal lives and how experiences have affected their lives and sometimes after a few drinks they get really personal about their lives. That person is allowing me to step into their lives and come into contact with their personal memories and how these memories have shaped their lives. All this does to other South Africans is to turn inwards and come to realise that similar experiences have affected your life. And you come to realise that there are people out there like you and are not all actors on stage. After a while when most South Africans are in bed – the housemates are breaking down and giving their personal experiences – and you think maybe we are all not so different we may come all walk of life but the experiences that shape us are all the shape. I watched it to match stereotypes and perceptions in our society and the people on the show. I do however maintain that the producers brief the housemates on what they can and cannot talk about. I'm sure even some advertisers would not want to be associated if certain scenes were not omitted. It's in a feel good environment and trying to show a reality. No show can mimic reality. We need to realise that the producers are interesting in generating money from this BB gimmik. Who are they to decide what is reality and what should and shouldn't be edited.

FOCUS GROUP THREE

HILTON TARRANT (HT)

VICKY JANE WATSON (VW)

KIMALA NAIDOO (KN)

NATASHA JOSEPH (NJ)

What do you understand by the term reality TV?

NJ: I think it's something that tries to re-create a supposed reality which I think is difficult to do. BB and survivor try to do this where they put real people in situations that could be perceived as real and try to see how people react to those situations. The situations portrayed feel manufactured. When watching BB it feels calculated. If you put adults in a house they will become frustrated and something is going to happen. The social and racial aspect in the house feels much created.

VW: It gives you a window into someone else's life. You always want to see what your neighbours are doing and now you can in your TV screen and for me that's what's appealing. I'm quite inquisitive and I like to know what happening next door. The first and only reality TV programme I have watched in BB. Once you start watching it you get hooked and you can't stop watching it. It is reality in inverted commas. Force situations in the house. Very manufactured but in a way that's what's appealing.

HT: To pick up on Natasha's perceived reality. I think it's very much real people but quite bizarre situations. Not many people would be trapped in a house. I think that's one of the attractions of BB – it's called reality TV but everyone knows that it is not real. You know they are locked in a house for 106 days – no-one on this earth is locked in a house with cameras pointed at them. Real people in simulated situations – not reality at all.

KN: For me the draw card to reality TV is ordinary people – there are no big names or famous actors. Once they are in the house they start to get fame but from the start you don't know who they are – you don't know anything about them. It's a new experience for me to watch it. If it were famous people you would more or less know what to expect. Although the situation is not real and is manufactured there is still ordinary people.

What is reality?

NJ: I think it's difficult to pin point. My reality is not the same as Hilton's reality. I perceive things in a completely different way. We have things in common but what I perceive of reality and normality is completely different. It's according to what you have experienced in the past. What freaks me out about reality TV is if you call a show BB and you have read George Orwell's 1984, BB is not a positive concept and controlling and manufacturing your reality. That's one thing that bothers me about reality TV – I do agree that you have ordinary people in extra-ordinary situations.

VW: I think of its appeal. The reason I watch it is because you put yourself in the house and ask – how will I react in that reality. I think I'd change my behaviour. So it isn't a real

situation because you are aware that someone is watching you. Sometimes the housemates talk to the cameras. That's not real I don't walk around my house and talk to myself. BB is not a reality – it's a game they are playing to the public.

NJ: Another thing I think about when watching BB is that it is a complete compromise of reality. I also think what would I be like in the house – but I think I would've been the first person out. Living in such a concentrated environment you can't be doing ordinary things. For example you can't be looking like a wreck first thing in the morning. On BB the housemates looked remarkably health and hale first thing in the morning. Ordinary things take on this completely over-exaggerated effort. Making tea becomes a soap opera and shower hour – I often think I would've gone two weeks without showering. That's the most terrifying thought of all. It scares me that people can be so determined to haul themselves to a camera for a bit of monetary gain.

Why do you enjoy Reality TV?

VW: It's them doing embarrassing things and not me. I know that there is no way I could ever do something like that because I am a very private person. I couldn't participate in the shower hour.

NJ: Sometimes I go to the local bar (Pop-art) for a drink and BB would be on screen and I end up zoning and watching and I was fascinated by why certain people dint wash their hair. I would watch the girls and think that in everyday society they would be termed 'slut'. We would condemn their behaviour completely and the media commenting on what's going on in the house – the housemates get more publicity. I think the housemates are condoned for the time they are in the house because of their behaviour.

VW: I doubt the people in the house are the same when they are out the house. But if I look at campus and how the first years behave in the first term – just because they are out of their comfort zone – many first years go off the rails in the first term because they want to make friends, they want to be popular – and these are perceived as good. I think that's what happened with people in the house.

HT: I watch it because everyone else around me watches it. And if I don't watch it then you can't participate in conversations about things that happen in the house. There is some kind of pressure to watch it – I am not quite sure where the pressure comes from maybe my peers.

The media is constantly reporting on BB. If there was no pressure I would watch it for a laugh and watch this simulated real time type of environment.

NJ: One night I was watching BB and all the white students were glued to the TV watching BB while all the black students were playing pool and chatting and dancing. This also one of the things about BB that interests me. Why does it not appeal to all people?

Does the attraction to the show have anything to do with it being a first in South Africa?

HT: Not at all. The producers still chose who was going to be in the house and they made sure the individuals in the house would sort of cater to the viewers. It was a select group of individuals that their audience would appreciate. If people talked about race / affirmative action it would make it more real. I don't think that the housemates are representative of the South African population.

KN: I don't think it was representative – but on the other hand you can never be fully representative of anything.

NJ: I'm tired of watching anything that has to do with race. Everything doesn't have to all be about race. It might even be different if it were a houseful of varsity students.

How often do you watch BB and whether it's on MNET / DSTV?

HT: I watched it 2 – 3 days a week and whenever I had a chance to watch it. Mostly on Mnet open time. And when I had the time I would watch the 24 hour channel on DSTV. I found the DSTV one to be very boring. People were just sleeping and sitting outside and talking. The MNET open time is packaged and represents what happened in the past 24 hours in one hour and that's a nice digestible piece of information.

VW: I watched it almost every day on MNET Open time.

KN: I only watched it on MNET Open Time about 3 – 4 times a week. We have satellite in res and my mom is addicted to BB and sometimes I get these sms's or calls to watch.

NJ: I don't have a TV but when I go out to a pub – BB is on and I would watch while having a drink maybe 2 – 3 times a week. A friend of mine has DSTV so I sometimes watch at her house.

HT: I thought it was interesting that most shopping stores or any store that had a TV would have BB on and then you would stop to watch. If you everywhere and you see it everywhere you are sort of forced to watch it. My parents got me caught up in BB, partly for relaxation they would come home and watch BB and then they would phone me and tell what was happening and that's really how I started watching.

KN: My parents also had an influence in watching BB. When I went home for the vacation my parents were talking about BB instead of the latest family news.

Who do you watch BB with?

HT: When I do watch it – it depends on the situation. When I am out I will watch it with a group of friends. If I am at home I watch it with my family and if I'm at my gran's house I would watch it with her. I think it's a social programme. I don't think I would watch it alone. While watching you pass comments and discuss what's happening and also outside of that you can talk about it with friends over dinner.

VW: Because I knew someone on the show I would watch it to see him. After he got evicted I didn't watch it as often. I was interested to know how he behaved in the house, how he had changed since I met him and how he reacted to the people in the house. I thought my friends were far more outgoing in real life. I found him to be introverted and reserved in the house. I was a bit disappointed. He didn't try to outdo anyone. I don't think he went in to win – I think he just wanted the experience. I would watch by myself and sometimes my roommates would watch. They are also BB fans and we would chat about what's going on in the house.

KN: I watched in res. usually a group of people who are the regulars – we would sit and chat and pass comments. After watching and later on – BB would creep into conversations and when I watched at home my family talked about it.

NJ: I thought I was an isolated experience. Sitting in a pub with a drink everyone staring at the TV and no one would talk about it. My roommate is a psychology student and made a point not to watch it. My parents don't watch it. My younger sister who is 12 fills me in on what's going on. Most of my BB experience was following the media and not watching TV.

What is the initial attraction to BB?

NJ: I was working at the Cape Times and when BB started I was assigned to the BB reporting which was mind numbing. I used to phone the production company every day and find out who was up for eviction and as it got closer and closer to the end there were bets on who would win. In spite of this I had to watch it every day just to keep track of what's going on.

VW: My first attraction was because someone I knew was in the house.

HT: There was a big hype surrounding BB. We made a big event of it. We all got together at a friend's house and watched the first show. When I was on holiday I sat and watched BB for most of the day.

NJ: I think calling it a social experiment is nonsense.

What are the pleasures of watching BB?

NJ: It's just fascinating. Maybe in my case voyeurism is something unconscious but it's fascinating to see how people can be so willing to put themselves in the spotlight.

KN: My favourite bits were the drunken bits because you were guaranteed that there would be something entertaining whether it was some type of conflict. There are some boring bits but when people were drunk they let down some of their pretences and be more comfortable and that was entertaining.

VW: At the beginning I thought it was very exciting. Everyone was trying to prove themselves and outdo themselves and that's exciting and interesting.

NJ: I think they are characters. They cease to be people and become characters that they are not. Towards the end it becomes a soap opera. And if you want to be exciting for 106 days – that's the most unnatural thing of all.

HT: I agree with Kim because when someone is drunk they speak their mind and you do not have any reservations. You are not in full control and the viewers in a way see a truer reflection of those people. There were periods that BB was boring – and sometimes it was really exciting.

Tell us about the Voyeuristic experience?

LJ: I did in a way feel uncomfortable watching BB. You are aware of cameras. Even to have my photograph taken I am very aware if somebody at a party were drunk and someone picks up a camera and says smile. I sometimes felt creepy watching these people because I wouldn't like to be watched.

VW: Sometimes I get embarrassed when they do something. Especially if you are watching the uncut version and the housemates are dressing. I feel embarrassed.

Is the game real?

HT: I think reality TV is a real game all of the shows I have watched have a monetary reward. The phrase reality TV is not a true representation of what it is. Reality TV participants are very much aware of the cameras.

VW: These people entered because of the game. I would not enter even though it was a million rand just because it doesn't interest me. The housemates entered they wanted to be in the game and they were selected. There was an application form to fill and a selection process to go through. Producers did not just walk down the street and ask random people if they wanted to enter. I think it's nowhere near reality – it's a game.

KN: I agree that it's a real game. In Survivor you know it's a game because of the alliances because of the voting. BB does not allow for any discussion about strategy – there are instances when they are having a deep and meaningful conversation about their family you are sometimes reminded that this could be the strategy to getting the money – even though it could be heartfelt stories.

NJ: In BB there is just one human emotion – GREED. These housemates want to win a million rand and they want to be famous. At the end it's a game.

Do you think it is an edited reality or a mediated reality?

HT: I don't think that the media can ever represent reality but I think the media can strive to represent a truer version of reality. In BB you have a group of producers who construct a situation with a group of people you know because they under psycho-analytic tests and you construct a situation and manipulate the people so that you can get an audience. Over and above that you still edit down 24 hours of footage a day into half to – one hour packages. It's just not reality and it's a mediated form of the unreal.

NJ: In terms of mediated reality – the media can never portray reality because there are so many different realities. Everyone brings their own perceptions to a situation. BB is like a fish bowl of people arguing about petty issues and trying to them sounds important. I often wonder about the amount of money that is put into a programme like BB.

KN: You can't represent reality because of the diversity of reality. When I think of BB I think that's not reality because those people don't come from that house. If you scrutinize it they are living in the lap of luxury. Of course they have to budget - but it's still a luxurious lifestyle. Every person in the house may not come from that lifestyle so why do they have to exist in that lifestyle and call it reality.

VW: When you read a newspaper article you interpret even the news differently from someone else. We pinpoint different issues that are vital. When you think of BB it's also a media product someone decides the activities and how edited packages will be broadcast to the viewing public. That's definitely not a reality. Producers are producing it in a certain way for certain people in way that they can understand. Reality can never be created.

HT: Producers are deciding their version of reality based on how they think the audience is going to react and what spinoffs the plot will have. I think they are storytelling.

LJ: Good media does not make a judgement whereas something like BB makes a judgement. I think producers would just about do anything – an end justifies the means.