

Running Head: PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE AGGRESSION

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

Perceptions of Female Aggression on Reality Television

By

Kathleen Donovan

Master of Arts in Communication

Supervisor: Peruvemba S Jaya

Department of Communications

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ABSTRACT

Despite the detrimental effects of aggression, Reality Television is replete with portrayals of female direct and indirect aggression for the sake of entertainment. Direct, physical and verbal aggression may be easy to identify but indirect aggression can be circuitous and subtle such as gossiping and exclusion from the group. Victims of indirect aggression can experience long-term psychological repercussions such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and self-abusive behaviour. Exposure to indirect relational aggression on Reality Television has also been shown to increase physical aggression in its viewers.

Combining three theoretical frameworks this study draws on social cognitive theory, cultivation theory as well as feminist frameworks. Female adults were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews discussing their perceptions and influence of Reality Television clips portraying female aggression.

Keywords: indirect aggression, verbal aggression, Reality Television, mean girl, post-feminism

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Background

Returning to university at a mature age provided me with an almost ethnographic experience of current undergraduate culture (average age 18-22 years old) including the media that consumed their attention and conversation. As a female, I inclined to converse with female students who I found casually exchanged terms like “bitch” and “slut” in their conversation. However, these terms were considered strictly derogatory when I was their age and are taboo in my corporate experience. At the same time, I observed that when these derogatory terms were exchanged, no matter their casual or friendly intention, it did not seem to result in happy expressions or a sense of positivity. Instead, I saw one or two girls simply walk away from the conversation. Some remained silent, but they were not smiling nor laughing. The contradiction between intention and effect seemed curious to me.

In this initial return to university, I also quickly learned of the popularity of Reality Television programs and I became curious as to what my younger academic peers were watching. Sampling program titles that I heard them mention such as, *Say Yes to the Dress* and *American Next Top Model*, I saw similar behaviour portrayed on these programs as I did at university including the casual use of words such as “bitch”, “slut”, and “whore.” These programs also depicted similar examples of the indirect aggression toward other females as I observed on campus such as gossiping and exclusion from the group.

Though it was inevitable that time changed the culture of these young women since I was their age, I wondered how these evolutions in language, behaviour and media affected them as a group and as individuals. In that same timeframe, feminist ideas had also changed and I was curious if these young women were aware or were positively influenced by previous feminist efforts. Technology, too, had changed dramatically and media was now easily accessible in the palm of their hands through a variety of technological accessories such as phones, or tablets. Often in class, my younger female peers would secretly watch television programs and videos. This, too, was somewhat of a new observation for me.

It was through these experiences and observations that helped produce the seed of inspiration for this study. To grasp some identification and understanding of the underlying dynamics of behaviour, language and attitude, more than a single theoretical perspective appeared necessary to me. Components of aggressive language, media consumption and the evolution of feminist attitudes are addressed in the following thesis using the required research framework required to develop this study.

It was not clear to me if the repeated behaviour I observed was socially rewarded and reinforced as described in the social cognitive theory or if the repetition was part of a normalization process as described in the cultivation theory. Thirdly, the question arises of how these traditionally derogatory terms influenced current views of feminism. Thus, a three-pronged framework using social cognitive, cultivation theory, and feminist perspectives was utilized to explore the effects of watching aggressive female behaviour on Reality Television. Through qualitative interviews with video elicitation portraying

female indirect and verbal aggression on reality television, the participants responded with their perceptions, interpretations, and experience of the viewed behaviour.

Television

In 2013, the Television Bureau of Canada (TVB) reported that the average Canadian adult watches television 28.4 per week. An average of a little more than four hours a day of television watching can certainly provide some type of shared cultural and social reference. Given this investment of time, television watching and the messages and portrayals therein seem to be supported or accepted by viewers as appropriate rather than being rebuffed or rejected as counter-culture. Though television violence and aggression has been researched to show positive correlations in the emulation of the depicted aggressive language and behavior, Canadians continue to loyally dedicate their time to television viewing. This study has a particular focus on reality television wherein female casts can make up a majority of representation (Hunt, 2104) as they compete with each other for the ultimate prize, often portraying aggression and indirect aggression to defeat other female competitors. Research interviews explore female perceptions of aggressive female behavior, and to what degree do young females relate or imitate this portrayed behavior in real life experiences. Interview questions investigate how young women perceive these depictions of female aggression on reality television as a cultural influencer or a cultural mirror. As the research participants are young women (ages 18-22) the last section of the interview focuses on their perceptions of feminism and how these televised messages and portrayals affect their view of feminism today.

As integral as television to the weave of culture, community and society, debates over its negative effects, particularly concerning violent and aggressive depictions have surfaced (Murray, 2003). In his book, "The Violent Face of Television" Murray describes fifty years worth of research on the effect of TV violence on children which he claims leads to the inescapable conclusion that viewing media violence is related to increases in aggressive attitudes, values, and behaviors (Murray, 2003). Other forms of aggression, such as indirect and verbal, have received less attention perhaps because of the more overt nature of physical aggression and its demonstrable effect on children (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1963 ; Paik, H., & Comstock, G. A. 1994; Huesmann, 2007; Gentile & Gentile, 2008; Gentile, Nathanson, Walsh, & Eisenmann, 2014).

However, in their research using prime-time network television, Glascock (2008) found verbal and indirect aggression to be far more prevalent than physical aggression. Further, a content analysis based on 228 hours of British television programs by Coyne and Archer (2004) revealed that indirect aggression was portrayed in 92.04% of all episodes analyzed and portrayed more frequently than physical and verbal aggression. Females were more likely to be shown as indirect aggressors than were males, while males were more likely to be portrayed as physical aggressors. In their analysis Coyne and Archer (2004) conclude that programs that are not considered violent may still contain a large amount of other types of aggression. In a later study, Coyne, Archer, and Eslea studied the frequency and harmfulness of indirect, relational, and social aggression among 11 to 15 year olds in North West England (2006). Their study focused on determining if a relationship existed between the frequency of these types of aggression in school settings

with adolescents and the frequency of aggression on television. Considering several aggression scales used by other researchers, they developed a scale of organizing aggression into three subsets: direct aggression, indirect aggression and relational aggression. The results of their study found that though students are exposed to these three types of aggression in school, television content has a much higher frequency of aggression. Some research evidence suggests a distinction between the terms indirect, social, and relational aggression, and there is also evidence to suggest the integration of these terms. However, Coyne, Archer and Eslea (2006) encouraged researchers to stop debating the definitions of relational aggression, using their resources instead to seek solutions to this potentially harmful problem. They also found that adolescents were exposed to nearly 10 times more indirect, relational, and social aggression on television than they are in school (Coyne, Archer & Eslea, 2006).

Given these research findings, the purpose of this study is to contribute to a greater awareness of how direct and indirect aggression among females portrayed on reality television affects female viewers in terms of influencing their perceptions, attitudes and behavior as individuals and in interaction with other females. Due to the prevalence of indirect aggression in female versus male behavior, subjects recruited for this study were female only.

With an average of four hours a day of television viewing and the increasing casual use of derogatory terms and female aggression on television, this study questions the personal

effects this may have on young women, and culture in general. The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1: Does viewing female aggression on reality television influence young women's imitation of viewed behavior?

RQ 2: Does reality television drive or simply mirror culture?

RQ 3: How do these depictions influence young women and their perceptions and definitions of feminism today?

Thesis Organization

In the following pages, the literature review chapter expounds on research showing the negative effects of reality television depictions of female aggression. A chapter on theoretical frameworks follows which describes a threefold approach using two learning theories, the social cognitive and cultivation combined with feminists frameworks and perceptions of feminism depicted on reality television. The methodology chapter will describe data collection techniques, the population target and characteristics of the sample population. The second part of the thesis will describe noted characteristics of the individual participants and common characteristics in the sample group. Chapters discussing the interview results and theoretical analyses will then follow. Lastly, the concluding chapter will discuss the significance of the study and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The literature review chapter presents a background of research data and analyses for this study's exploration of perceptions of female aggression on reality television. This chapter will discuss previous research showing positive correlations with increased media exposure and imitated aggression. It will also include current examples of media increased use of female terms like "slut" and "bitch" which have been traditionally considered derogatory. A typology of aggression by Coyne and Archer (2004) is presented describing categories of direct aggression, indirect aggression, relational and social aggression and their destructive effects particularly on young females.

The Effects of Viewing Female Aggression on Women

In a longitudinal study on media exposure, aggression and prosocial behavior in early childhood, Ostrov, Gentile & Crick (2006) found support for a gender-linked hypothesis of aggression, in which identification with same-gender TV characters increases viewer attraction. These supported earlier findings by Crick & Grotpeter (1995). Longitudinal studies by Huesmann (2003) and Ostrov, Gentile & Crick, (2006) found higher number of hours of watching television were associated with prior and concurrent relational aggression, but only for girls. Coyne, S., Nelson, D., Lawton, F., Haslam, S., Rooney, L., Titterington, L, Trainor, H., Remnant, J., and Ogunlaja, L. (2008) was the first study to show that viewing relational aggression in the media can increase subsequent physical aggression. These findings suggest a need for further research exploring how media exposure may influence important early childhood training

for learning relationally aggressive behaviors, particularly for girls. Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2006) found that girls perceive these types of aggression as more harmful than boys. Growing evidence also suggests that girls respond to indirect aggression with heightened emotional and physiological distress (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006; Galen & Underwood, 1997).

The impact of indirect or relational forms of aggression may last longer and be as harmful as that of physical aggression. Research shows that the effects of indirect aggression including gossip and name-calling can cause girls to experience initial confusion which gives way to psychological pain, including hurt, loss of confidence and fear of future relationships (Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000). Effects of relational aggression such as backstabbing and social ostracism may cause victims to experience long term psychological repercussions such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and self-abusive behavior (Ladd & Ladd, 2001; Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002). These effects are corroborated by research on victims of teasing and bullying (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Kowalski, 2007).

Grills and Ollendick's (2002) study of sixth-grade children revealed that female victims experienced anxiety as a result of relational victimization. This anxiety can have negative effects on academic, social, and psychological functioning (Roberts & Coursol, 1996). A study of teenage girls by Owens, Shute, and Slee (2000) found that victims of indirect aggression such as exclusion from peer groups also developed anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression so severe as to consider a possible change in schools and the desire to commit suicide. Earlier studies such as Crick and Grotpeter (1996) reveal children's self-reports of relational aggression were related to self-reported (versus

clinical) depression and loneliness. These effects are supported with research results based on studying victims of teasing and bullying (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Kowalski, 2007).

Coyne and Archer (2004) suggest a practical typology delineating direct (verbal and physical) and indirect forms of aggression. The primary distinction between the two is that direct aggression is face-to-face and openly visible, while indirect is typically circuitous behavior, i.e., gossiping, and exclusion from the group. In studies of aggression in real life, researchers have consistently found males to be more directly aggressive than females (Richardson & Green, 1999). Although relational aggression occurs in both male and female relationships, it has been shown to be much more prevalent in females (Underwood, 2004). Research studies on observing different categories of aggression show that girls are disproportionately represented in the category of relational aggression. Girls' main form of aggression appears to be through the use of covert or indirect means (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Underwood, 2004).

First used by Bjorkqvist (1994), the term "indirect aggression" refers to the act of causing harm to someone covertly (p. 183). As indirect aggression is expressed circuitously, the aggressor often remains anonymous (Richardson & Green, 1999) and it often goes undetected by authority figures (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2004). Examples of indirect aggression include gossiping, spreading rumors, ignoring, destroying someone's property or reputation behind their back (Coyne & Archer, 2004). It can also include spreading rumors, passing insulting notes, or other ways of damaging a person's self-worth. Relational aggression differs only slightly from indirect aggression in that it focuses on hindering acceptance in a peer group or among friends (Coyne, Archer, &

Eslea, 2004). Examples of relational aggression are intentionally excluding individuals from normal peer group activity or giving the silent treatment to targeted individuals with the expressed purpose of demonstrating rejections and exclusion from the peer group.

Despite the negative effects of both verbal and indirect aggression, in a *New York Times* article, Wyatt (2009) reveals that the use of the word “bitch,” tripled in the last decade alone, growing to 1,277 uses on 685 shows in 2007 from 431 uses on 103 prime-time episodes in 1998. In the article, the creator of NBC’s network comedy, *Community*, Dan Harmon explains regarding the introduction of the word “douche”: “As a writer, you’re always reaching for a more potent way to call somebody a jerk--This is a word that has evolved in the last couple of years — a thing that sounds like a thing you can’t say.” From bitch to douche bag to hoe (whore) to slutville, more female derogatory terms are being broadcasted on prime time television. However, as innocuous as the media’s intentions may seem, Kleinman, Ezzell, and Frost (2009) provide a critical analysis of the social harms of using slurs such as “bitch”, which unlike slang terms like “jerk,” has a female referent which is also inhuman (p. 47).

This study focuses particularly on reality television that is also referred to as unscripted television. It is often filmed with only hidden cameras or at least no obvious cameras, allowing for moments of filmed spontaneity, lending substance to its ultimate claim to realism. Thus, the behavior depicted may be viewed as a realistic model (Bandura, 1963a) (Atkin, 1983) and more likely to be imitated than behavior in less realistic programs wherein scripts and film sets are evident. Specifically, current research indicates that aggression portrayed realistically is more likely to be imitated than non-realistic aggression (Coyne et al, 2008). As the acts of aggression are filmed, actors

affirm their behavior presenting relational aggression as the norm or a new norm, or simply acceptable. However, Coyne, Robinson, Nelson, Eslea, (2010) found that sleep deprivation was used to increase the drama in many of these shows. This increased drama includes displays of aggression. Emerging studies show that reality television display more aggression than non-reality TV shows (Coyne, Robinson, Nelson 2010; Pozner, 2010). Research results also show that viewing surveillance reality programs can cause increased physical aggression in the viewer's subsequent behavior (Gibson et al, 2016). However, there is a relative lack of research of the effects on viewing indirect aggression on reality television particularly for females, though research indicates that they are the more likely gender to practice it (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Reality television claims to be real although scenes are contrived for dramatic purposes. Average viewers unaware of production methods are led to believe that "reality television" by virtue of its name, is true to life.

This body of research reveals the deleterious effects, some that are long term, associated with different types of aggression. Yet, reality television continuously provides examples and models of this female behavior. These repetitive patterns may be teaching and cultivating female behavior that is destructive in real life, but is portrayed on television as entertainment. The next chapter will describe the theoretical frameworks used to test the hypothesis that viewers learn behavior through observation (social cognitive theory) and perceive and imitate the viewed behavior as culturally appropriate (cultivation theory). Thirdly, feminist frameworks will be discussed to determine how these depictions of female aggression influence young women's perceptions of feminist principles and values today.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Frameworks

Three complementary theoretical frameworks will be used in this study that is, the social cognitive theory, the cultivation theory, and feminist perspectives. These frameworks were selected as they create a theoretical foundation to explore the imitation of observed behavior (social cognitive theory) as well as the cultural effects of reality television's portrayal of female aggression (cultivation theory). Lastly, feminist perspectives are utilized to explore the effects of watching female aggression on reality television and how this may influence on female participants' individual understandings of values and behaviors associated with feminism today.

Interesting to note that research has shown the medium of television is common to all these frameworks in terms of influencing viewer behaviour. For example, Stephanone, Rosen & Lackoff (2010) evaluate that both the social cognitive and cultivation theory would have provided a sound theoretical basis for their findings linking behavior imitation with viewing Reality Television. Douglas (2010) also indicates the feminism today is embedded in our culture through mainstream media and distinctly television. The following sections will describe the main tenets and history of each theoretical framework and how they apply to this study.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory, spearheaded by Bandura (1963), posits that individuals can directly acquire knowledge through observing others within the contexts of social interactions, experiences, and media influences. The social cognitive theory proposes that in order to study human behavior, a multidirectional causation schema can identify

and explain which behavior is shaped and controlled either by environmental influences or by internal dispositions. The social cognitive theory is based on constant interaction of a triadic schema representing the reciprocal causation of personal, environmental, and behavioral determinants. For example, social cognitive theory suggests that a group of individuals observing the same interaction in the same environment may have different interpretations of the event and the symbolism each individual attributes to it. Through this symbolic interpretation, people give meaning, form and transform their observations into guidelines for judgment and behaviour. The environment that provides these observations plays a critical role in terms of existing social structure that acts as a reference for evaluating the observations. For example, in North American people shake hands when greeting each other. In Japan, they greet each other with a bow. However, in North America, bowing can be interpreted as an act of recognizing supreme authority, such as royalty. Though both are long-standing greeting gestures, symbolic interactions differ depending upon the environment. The environments need not be far apart but can be as differentiated based on demographics and psychographics. Behaviour, as the third determinant, is that which is observed and imitated or rejected or simply viewed as a social learning experience. Formal etiquette, for example, that was once considered necessary may evolve into more casual forms as the symbolic behaviour involved is less often repeated, rejected by individuals based on self-reflection and their changing guidelines in judgment of observing social behaviour. Personal, Environmental and Behavioural determinants constantly affect each other.

Bandura held that it was important to utilize this triadic approach to understand how mass media exerts its influence in human thought, affect and action as it uses psycho

social devices to constantly depict symbolic interactions. The social cognitive theory includes conditions and limitations of the influence of viewed behaviour such as a personal liking of the observed. If a viewed behaviour or character portraying the behaviour appealed to the individual, it may increase the potential for imitation. Also, Bandura expounded on the condition of self-agency wherein the potential of imitating viewed behaviour can be influenced by the individual's perception as to their ability to adopt the behaviour successfully.

Bandura's research shows that television is an important learning tool for cultivating behavior, attitudes and perceptions. To some extent the survival of our species as in much of the animal kingdom is partly dependent upon the replication of the behavior and actions observed in others. The cognitive process leading to replication can be enhanced especially when the behavior is rewarded, as is the case, for many types of aggression on television (Bandura and Ross, 1963b). Longitudinal studies show positive correlations between children's exposure to television and imitating observed behavior thus supporting the socialization theory (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski &, Eron, 2003). Specifically these studies related social cognitions such as identification with viewed characters and perceived realism to the emulation of aggressive behavior in young adulthood.

In 1961, Bandura, and his colleagues, Dorothea Ross, and Sheila A. Ross first published the article on their study on the Transmission of Aggression through Imitation of Aggressive Models that has become a classic study in the history of psychology. This study, casually known as the "Bobo doll experiment", is just as relevant today and is a classic reference in academic studies and professional fields such as psychology,

sociology, and communications. In essence, Bandura explored the cause and effect relationship of social learning and subsequent behavior after observing models of aggression and non-aggression. The study included 72 children as subjects divided into three groups each with 24 children. Two adults, a male and a female, served in the role of modeling aggressive behavior in punching a plastic doll in the presence of the groups of children in a play room. One group observed an aggressive model, another group observed a non-aggressive model, and the third group acted as the control group without a model.

The experiment tested the hypothesis that subjects learn social behavior through modeling and imitative habits as a result of prior reinforcement. The hypothesis predicted that subjects exposed to aggressive models would reproduce aggressive acts similar to those the models displayed. This control group of subjects' imitative behavior would differ from subjects who were exposed to nonaggressive models and from those who had no prior exposure to any models. The hypothesis predicted that observing subdued and nonaggressive models would have generalized inhibiting effect on the subjects' subsequent behavior. Thus, differences in aggressive behavioral effects should be notable between the nonaggressive and the control groups, with subjects in the control group displaying significantly more aggression. If this behavioral tendency was confirmed, that finding could then be generalized to a larger adult public (Millard & Dollard, 1941).

Another hypothesis included the relationship of the sex of the model and the subjects' imitation of the model's behavior. Earlier research (Fauls and Smith, 1956)

showed that children perceive distinct parental approval or rejection depending on the parents' view of sex appropriate behavior in their children. Due to different parental styles and differing levels of concern for the adoption of sex appropriate behavior, individual children will experience differing levels of reinforcement. The degree of parental reinforcement in terms of strength and frequency will shape the child's tendency to imitate the desired male and female models. These differing degrees of reinforcement will cause different degrees of habit strength for the desired behavior in each child. Generally, the hypothesis proposed that gender-appropriate behavior would be guided by the perceptions of the same-sex parent and positive reinforcement by the same-sex parent. Since social cognitive behavioral theory is largely based on imitation and reinforcement, it was hypothesized that subjects imitate the behavior of a same-sex model to a greater degree than a model of the opposite sex.

The findings were groundbreaking as the study provided evidence that supported these hypotheses. Subjects who observed the aggressive model reproduced a substantial amount of physical and verbal aggressive behavior similar to the behavior modeled. The mean of their behavioral scores were distinctly different from those subjects who observed a model of nonaggressive behavior. The control groups without any model were reported to show no imitative aggression. The prediction that exposure to aggressive models increases the probability of aggressive behavior in children was visibly confirmed. The effect of this type of exposure was found to be highly significant both for physical and verbal imitative aggression.

Bandura hypothesis that the model's sex may have a stronger influence on same-sex subjects was only partially confirmed. Boys showed more aggression than girls

following exposure to the male model and affirmed aggressive behavior to be more masculine while questioning aggressive behavior in the female model. However, subjects who observed the nonaggressive models especially the nonaggressive male model were generally less aggressive than their controls. The researchers discussed these results and the implications of these findings as they relate to the psychoanalytic theory of identification with the aggressor.

The social cognitive theory has limitations as a broad based theory of learning behavior from observation. Though the theory does not deny the presence of other influences in behavior (Sutton, 2002) the theory does not identify or measure other influences such as motivation and genetic personality or behavioral disposition (D'Onofrio, Eaves, Murrelle, Maes & Spilka, 1999). Researchers have also questioned if the theory accesses existing cognitions in the individual or creates them (Ogden, 2003). However, social cognitive theory continues to develop through a wide breadth of scholarship. For example, Bandura's article, *Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective* (2001) explores the core features of human agency such as intentionality, forethought, and self-reactiveness. Smith (2002) refers to Bandura's social cognitive theory as the theory heard around the world that is foundational to radio and television educational programs. From Mexico to China, to Tanzania, Smith (2002) describes how Bandura's social cognitive theory is utilized in creating "entertainment-education" programs featuring characters acting as role models seeking ways to improve their lives so that viewers may learn and emulate the depicted behavior. Some of these programs portray characters and storylines aimed at preventing unwanted pregnancies, reducing the

spread of HIV, promoting literacy, empowering women in third-world countries and increasing viewers' self-efficacy (Smith, 2002).

Today, social cognitive theory has a history of applications in areas of psychology, education, and communication. Recent research studies include: health promotion by means of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2004), the use of stereotypes in empathic accuracy (Lewis, Hodges, Laurent, & Srivastava, Biancarosa, 2012), and cognitive emotion regulation (Ochsner & Gross, 2008).

Despite conditions and limitations, this theoretical framework provides an effective portal for this study's focus on the effects of viewing female aggression on reality television and the degree of influence it has on the sample population's self-reflection, guiding judgments and behaviour imitation. Based on the social cognitive theory on imitating observed behaviour, females viewing aggressive female behaviour may imitate the viewed aggression and perceive the aggression as normative. The participants also express their reasoning based on self-reflection, and experience.

Cultivation Theory

Complimenting Bandura's social cognitive theory, the second theoretical framework used in this study is George Gerbner's cultivation theory.

In 1968, Gerbner founded the Cultural Indicators Research Project analyzing changes in television content and how those changes affect viewers' perceptions of the world. The identification of these cultural indicators enabled a study of the influence television viewing may have on viewers' conception of everyday reality and social

relationships. Gerbner's cultivation research focuses on television as the principal influencer in cultural beliefs, attitudes and ideologies.

Though programs, commercials, and formats change over time, television remains a consistent influence in lifestyles and outlook. Today, technology makes television a culturally shared medium that is central to our lives (Huesmann, 2007). For young people in particular, television content is now available whenever and wherever they want not only on TV sets in their bedrooms, but also on their laptops, cell phones and iPods. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation Report, 2010 shows that between 2004-2009 the proliferation of new ways to consume television content led to an increase of 38 minutes of daily viewing for those eight to eighteen years of age. Thus, television viewing in one form or another continues to dominate media consumption.

Television is an effective and efficient medium to maximize broadcasting the most news, films, television series, and talk shows to the large audiences at the same time around the world. As the Kaiser Family Foundation report shows television saturation and viewing time have increased since its inception. It is possible that the Internet and mobile technology may enhance the cultivation effect of television exposure due to more frequent and repetitive viewing along with social media designed to support various televised programs. According to Neilson ratings, the convenience of technology such as Video on Demand (VOD) deepen television penetration as households with VOD watch an average of 20 percent more live television than those in households without VOD. The same report shows Smartphone video usage increased by two hours from the first quarter of 2013 to the first quarter of 2014 (Neilson Ratings, press room report, June, 2014). As saturation and viewing time continue to increase, television dominates as the

common symbolic environment shared throughout all life stages. This deepens the penetration and integration of television viewing as a common symbolic environment shared globally (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorelli, & Shanahan, 2002).

Regardless of the device, television repeats homogenous storytelling in various ways to a diversified public. The homogeneity of media's storytelling is based on using relatively stable and common themes and images that develop into main cultural references. These mainstays of character appearance, language-use and behavior develop through regularly repeated exposure over long periods of times through television programs, advertisements, news, talk shows, etc. Likewise, narratives and story themes also regularly repeat a story line that may evolve into cultural classics or stereotypes in a system of shared cultural references. For example, television shows can be categorized into different genres such as situation comedy, drama, soap operas, etc. Different television genres are created by using an accepted and proven formula in terms of length, setting, characters, plot, humor, and values (Duncan, D'Ippolito, Macpherson & Wilson, 1996). Duncan and his team describe the template for each (pp123-126). Please see a sample of these described templates in Table A.

Table A. <i>Templates used to create television genres</i>
Genre: Situation Comedy
Length: Half an hour.
Setting: Indoors, safe, intimate, personal, cozy space.
Characters: Same characters every week who form a loving family. They are usually good-looking and financially comfortable
Plot: "Family" is challenged by confusion or change which is happily resolved.
Humor: Stock characters, stereotypes, mistaken identities, misunderstandings, jealousy.

Values: Society's pro-social values are reinforced; remaining together is a measure of success.
Genre: Soap Opera
Length: One hour.
Setting: Interiors of affluent homes, corporate offices, hospitals -forcing long waits, with intense and emotional dialogue.
Characters: Families going through turmoil but staying together. Clearly identified good and evil characters, men who dote on women, a cast of attractive white men and women, only token representation of people of color.
Plot: Diverse stories that are connected through setting, relationships. Conflict is never resolved. Family remains in chaos, afflicted by villain's manipulations.
Emotion: Extreme facial close-ups convey intensity whether that of rage, suspicion or romance. Complex obstacles block resolutions and leave viewer in constant expectation or anticipation.
Values: Reinforce the importance of emotion and relationships and idealize wealth and beauty.
Genre: Talk Show
Length: One hour.
Setting: Studio interior with live audience, panelists and host.
Characters: Strong, charismatic host draws audience and guests, guiding them through unscripted discussion.
Content: Oddities of North American culture, social controversies. Program ends with suggested solutions that may seem superficial.
Emotions: Extreme- from tears to anger and hate drawn out through host's interviewing skills.
Values: Through watching the values of guests, the audience has an opportunity to clarify their own values.

However, in the last decade Reality Television as a genre has dominated televised broadcasts and become a global phenomenon (Beck, Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2012). Reality TV programs are described as unscripted shows portraying ordinary people in their everyday life or they may act as contestants rather than actors (Nabi, Beily, Morgan & Stitt, 2003; Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). Different genres of Reality television include,

surveillance of everyday life, competitions such as obstacle courses, weight loss, talent shows, and makeovers such as following a plastic surgery patient, or rebuilding a home (Riddle & Simone, 2013). Situations can be contrived or produced and edited according to the genre, but the natural spontaneous reactions and responses of ordinary people and contestants captured on-screen are unscripted. Annette Hill (2005) describes Reality Television as a genre that blends information and entertainment, utilizing documentary qualities with unpredictable drama. Though the drama may be unpredictable, it can also be created or at least supported by social pressure the premises of these sub-genres. That is, contestants may be placed in awkward living conditions while competing in contests and challenges that are exceedingly demanding. The circumstances that define each reality television subgenre create a level of social tension and individual pressure that lend themselves to portrayals of emotional highs and lows.

Regardless of television formats whether entertainment or commercials, viewers cannot escape the subjection to repetitive, centrally produced and mass-distributed portrayals of common images, stories, and patterns that contribute to the cultivation process. It is through this repetitive exposure that a common symbolic culture is formed. This common symbolic culture will then ultimately influence viewers' individual and collective understanding of what is appropriate both culturally and socially (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986). Cultivated effects from viewing television's repetitive images, patterns and ideologies may initially appear small and indirect, but cumulative effects are significant (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). Repetitive patterns may include what is termed "media framing" which is an organization or perspective of images and events that bring meaning to the story (Goffman, 1974). The media's

organization and perspectives may or may not be contrived to influence viewers' understanding of what is televised. This type of organization in media can be used to create a more immediate understanding of an issue, or misrepresent it, creating a biased or false perspective of an issue or event.

Cultivation theory mimics theories and methodologies found in marketing and advertising research. The effects of marketing, and advertising lie in measuring attitude and behavior change among mass viewers while appealing to the largest homogenous viewer audience and attracting sponsoring advertisers. Unlike changing brands or products, the cultivation process studies the long-term effects of the massive distribution of repetitive patterns and its effects on individuals' perceptions of what is culturally and socially acceptable in everyday life. Clough (2003) suggests that the normalization process of acceptable cultural and social behavior is no longer driven by family influence but is formed and informed by a market-driven society that exchanges product promotion and audience exposure, such as television programming, number of viewers, and advertising opportunity through television commercials. Clough refers to this as the circulation of socialized attention time or socialized capacities for attention. Controlling the cultivation process are capitalistic mass markets seeking a captured audience that television programs provide efficiently, effectively and globally.

Cultivation theory, unlike marketing and attitude change, focuses on the long-term effects of exposure rather than an immediate change, such as product preference. A slight shift in the cultivation of common perspectives may change without producing an

immediate change in behavior. Instead the dominant, constant current of the mainstream creates subtle evolutions in everyday culture (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1986).

Cultivation theory argues that to understand the effects of viewing on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, we must examine television as a collective symbolic environment with an underlying formulaic structure (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shannahan, 2002). To provide optimal potential for commercial support, common themes are often shared all programs (Signorielli, 2003). These television themes then cultivate common world views and stereotypes. The constant depictions of violence is central to the cultivation theory perspective and prediction that people's conceptions about violence are more likely to reflect the messages about violence they see regularly and repetitively on television (Signorielli, 2003).

Cultivation tends to occur beyond the individual needs and wants developing into common understandings of what is acceptable in terms of broadly held cultural beliefs, attitudes, and behavior in various publics. An example of cultivation is the knowledge and understanding of what is termed politically correct. Though a person may hold different beliefs, attitudes, and behavior, they remain aware and learn from the mainstream culture of what is deemed acceptable, popular, and disliked in public spheres. Individuals or publics, without any direct form of reinforcement such as encouragement or reward may adopt these perceptions and understandings.

As a multidirectional process, cultivation includes demographics, social, personal and cultural contexts which all influence the degree, shape and scope of television's cultivating influence on individual or specific publics (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, &

Signorielli, 1986). The multidirectional influences in the cultivating process may resist the current of cultivating messages that television readily and repeatedly delivers. An individual's family history, religion, and education may be strong cultural influencers that may reject or resist television's dominant messages. Also, the intensity with which individuals experience and associate with other influences, such as religious or political views, may alter or counter television's cultivation effects through mass messages portraying cultural processes and symbolism (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986). For example, though television programs show a variety of romantic and sexual depictions, individuals with strong religious convictions governing what is considered appropriate romantic or sexual behavior may not be readily influenced by televised depictions. If the same religious viewer is a part of a religious community that teaches and support these religious convictions then the viewer may be even less influenced, as their beliefs are culturally and communally supported, enforced and reinforced. Television may no longer be a prime cultivator in this area for the individual and these television depictions may be scoffed at and rejected rather than proving to be a strong influence in subsequent behavior.

Some argue that television is a cultural driver, while others argue it is simply a cultural representative. However, statistics show continual increases in televised mass distribution and viewership making television a globally shared vehicle for cultural participation (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986). Gerbner et al, also state that television has no competitive influence and makes a distinct independent contribution to a shared cultivation process shaping our lifestyles and attitudes (1986). Shanahan and Morgan (1999) describe television's independent contribution as the

development and maintenance of cultural outlooks, attitudes and behaviors that can be traced to steady cumulative amounts of television viewing. Though television viewing may not directly cause social phenomena, social phenomena would be distinctly different without the presence of television. Despite television's unique position to exert this independent influence on attitudes and behaviors over time, individual beliefs and everyday practices can also influence television program selection (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999).

Gerbner (1997) claims that television has replaced face-to-face storytelling as a primary source of cultivation used around the world and affecting most demographics. Thus, television viewing now provides primary sources of socialization and cultivation previously provided by parents, and extended family. Gerbner and his colleagues suggest that television has also replaced preindustrial religion as it forms a daily ritual of highly compelling and informative content (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986). Furthering the analogy, Gerbner (1977) explains that both television and religion play similar roles in social functions in the continual process of patterns that serve to define the world and legitimize it through character portrayals of heroes, villains, the elderly, and various nationalities, etc. The continual process of patterns can also be seen in television's narratives based on soap operas, depictions of wealth, and happy endings.

One of the key findings in cultivation theory and research indicate different effects on light versus heavy television watchers (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, 1986, p. 21). For example, Gerbner's cultivation theory posits that heavy viewers of television violence tend to perceive the real world as a more dangerous place than lighter viewers (Morgan, Shanahan, 2010). This is supported by research in the priming process

that found that watching aggression activates certain scripts in one's memory thereby making their subsequent utilization more likely (Berkowitz, 1984). His study of relational aggression among adolescent girls found that some girls spontaneously reported that media heavily influenced their attitudes and tendencies to imitate relational aggression as seen on popular media. Priming can cause an increased sensitivity based on previous exposure to a stimuli such as language, behavior, or experience. Just as discovering that someone you know is pregnant can trigger sensitivity to stimulus associated with this experience. Without any conscious effort, babies and baby paraphernalia may seem to appear in far greater numbers than normal. Likewise, a product advertisement seen one day may create an implicit memory that stimulates faster or easier recognition of it in the store. Priming can also stimulate observed behavior and language. Willer and Cupach (2008) suggest future research designs to include observations of victim reactions to aggressive behaviors. This could lend to a possible shift in cultivation effects if reality television films more of the victims' immediate distress.

The cultivation effects of television viewing can be subtle but are a growing constant of everyday life (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Sites such as Youtube (established, 2005) offer clips and replays of popular television programs. Computer stores such as iTunes (established, 2003) offer movies, and television programs for sale per season and per episode to be stored on the individual's computer for a timeless reference. Similarly, cultivation effects can be strengthened through social media such as Facebook, established in 2004 (Phillip, S., 2007) and Twitter established in 2006 (Carlson, N., 2011). It is now common that television programs have a Facebook page wherein

viewers are invited to become Facebook ‘friends’ and comment on the current show with their feelings and opinions of the program’s contestants and content. For example, the television show *America’s Next Top Model*’s Facebook home page recorded over 7.8 million likes from Facebook visitors. The digital invitation to follow the Facebook postings for television programs that are only broadcasted weekly, are open to the public constantly. The public’s comments are vetted to prohibit profanity or slander and other legal issues allowing for a huge breadth of opinion to be publicly shared. Both Twitter and Facebook have been used for contest purposes or voting purposes by television programs engaging their audience in multi-faceted social media.

Besides the cultivation process through television’s continuous homogenized storytelling, character representation may be skewed so as to not represent the real world population. Television may be cultivating unfavorable perspectives and attitudes through negative depictions or lack of representations of minorities and women. Gerbner’s research on, *Women and Minorities, A Study in Casting and Fate*, a report prepared for the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Radio and Television Artists (1993) shows how television representation of women and minorities is skewed in terms of quantity and quality. For example, women made up about one-third or less of all characters represented in all samples studied except for daytime serials (45.5%). In game shows women’s representation was measured at 55.3%. However, Gerbner reports that all ringmasters were men. Women are either contestants or often silent assistants to the men. Gerbner calls this gender distribution in game shows a “populist patriarchy” (Gerbner 1997, p. 7). In the same report, Gerbner shows that women’s representation averaged 27.8 percent in news broadcasts and women’s rights issues were reported to

attract major televised attention but based solely on abortion issues. Further, women were reported to portray 23.4 percent of all characters represented in children's programs. Minorities such as African Americans characters were reported to make up only 8.8 percent of all television characters on daytime serials and 10.3% of major networks' prime time programming. Latino representation was measured slightly above 1 percent in game shows. Asian and Native American representations were both measured well below 1 percent (Gerbner, 1997).

Referring to the quality of character representations, Gerbner delineates between depictions of good and bad characters based on the outcomes they have been predestined for in television storytelling. Thus, Gerbner refers to the characters' "fate" as their predetermined outcomes shown on television. Good characters are depicted as experiencing success and are deemed television heroes. Bad characters are depicted as failing at their objectives and are perceived as losers and television villains. The study only used clear, unambiguous outcomes. Character outcomes that the researchers found were of mixed and unclear characterizations were ignored, and were not considered for the study. The ratio of women in "good" characterizations was five times greater for each "bad" woman characterization. This ratio is reversed for depictions of elderly women. The proportion of characterizations of elderly women depicted as bad characters is eight times that of elderly men who are depicted as bad characters. The study found that women are also more frequently negatively characterized in children's programs. In terms of gender and age, prime time romance involves more young women than young men but more mature men, than mature women.

What are cultural indicators?

Gerbner studied cultural indicators and used counts to substantiate his analysis. The following section will present current definitions, interpretations and uses of cultural indicators to measure cultural change.

In a filmed interview from the Media Education Foundation, Gerbner describes storytelling as the vehicle in which governing systems are explained, reality is confirmed, and values and choice are examined. Beyond the lessons learned through storytelling as a cultural communicator, the study of cultural indicators has evolved and gained global interest. For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is a specialized agency with an objective of promoting international peace and security. UNESCO has five main programs; education, natural sciences, social/human sciences, culture and communication/information, used to gain understanding of how these branches of study can be used to create positive outcomes for citizens of the world. In 2010, UNESCO proposed defining parameters in measuring social and cultural dimensions. These are “defined as the cultural skills and values, inherited from the community’s previous generation and undergoing adaptation and extension by current member of the community that influence how people express themselves in relation to others and how they engage in social interaction” (UNESCO 2010, p.1). UNESCO’s definition focuses on the outcomes of people’s interactions in sharing culture with each other, as well as how this interaction reflects their relations with each other in terms of depth and quality. These interactions can also reflect how a community expresses respect and acceptance for others. Likewise, they reflect to what

degree a community is unified while simultaneously empowering or supporting individual citizens.

UNESCO emphasizes the use of these parameters and the importance of identifying the social and cultural dimensions that positively influence capabilities of the individual as well as identifying and individual's criteria when making choices. UNESCO explains that their working definition of the social dimensions of culture are based on universally accepted ethical standards and are important in promoting respect of other cultures.

In the working paper, *Social Dimensions of Culture for Development*, UNESCO (2010) lists social and cultural indicators such as participation in cultural activities, interpersonal trust, and freedom of self-determination. UNESCO defines cultural participation indicators to include consumption of goods and services as well as activities within the community, which reflect the community's traditions and beliefs. On an everyday basis, cultural participation may include active participation such as going to movies, and passive participation such as listening to music (UNESCO, 2010).

Despite UNESCO's application of Gerbner's cultural indicators, representation of minorities and women on television has remained almost frozen in time. In 2014, Dr. Darnell Hunt, director of Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA and lead author of the *Hollywood Diversity Report: Making Sense of the Disconnect*, shows that minority representation on television and film has made little progress in recent decades. Dr. Hunt and his team examined 172 films released in 2011, the top 200 grossing movies excluding 28 foreign films in that category. The study also included 1061 television shows from the 2011-2012 season from broadcast and cable networks,

including dramas, comedies, and reality television, but excluding sport. Further, the findings are categorized by race and gender representation as lead actors, cast, producers, creators, directors, writers and award-winners. The study's findings show continued underrepresentation of minorities and women in almost all genres except comedy (for women). In essence the television and film industries are still dominated by white males. Very few programs show any effort towards inclusion and diversity.

In an online interview article with the Daily Mail, Dr. Hunt is quoted: 'The report paints a picture of an industry that is woefully out of touch with an emerging America, an America that's becoming more diverse by the day.' Dr. Hunt expresses concern over the under representation, saying: "Much of what we know about the world around us comes from media... So when you have a society that's becoming more and more diverse, if you have an industry that is lagging, you have a distorted view of what's going on in the world... You have a very narrow depiction of what is normal and what is American." (Lyons, 2014).

Dr. Hunt's diversity report begins by describing the historical deficiency of gender, racial and ethnic diversity in the film and television in acting, creation, production, and directing. Concern over this historical drought is based on how media messages affect and influence how we think about others and ourselves. Thus, when marginalized groups are continually absent from a nation's media and the stories it tells, inequality is normalized and is likely to be reinforced through stereotypes, prejudice and social practices. Hunt's diversity report includes minorities of various nationalities such as African American and Latinos. Women are in a separate category in terms of film and television representation. As the present study is based on viewing female aggression on

reality television and includes only female participants, the women's category in Dr. Hunt's diversity report will be discussed. For example, the diversity report shows that women are underrepresented by a factor of nearly 2 to 1 among lead roles in film. Women were less likely than minorities to be theatrical film directors showing only a 4.1 percent representation compared to 12.2 percent for minority representation in this category. However, women were more likely than minorities to be theatrical film writers with a 14.1 percent representation compared to 7.6 percent. Women only reached proportionate representation in the category for broadcast comedies and dramas with 51.5 percent representation. Women fare worse on cable comedy and dramatic lead roles with only a 37 percent representation. In the cable reality and other shows category, women are underrepresented by 2 to 1 representing lead talent only 24 percent of the time, while making up approximately 50 percent of the American population. Women gain another 6 percent in the lead talent by gender in cable reality and other shows, showing a 30.6 percent representation. The diversity report names examples of the broadcast reality shows that named minorities and women as leads. These programs include *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* (E!), and the *Real Housewives of New York* (Bravo.)

Dr. Hunt's diversity report shows that in positions behind the camera such as creators and producers for film and television, women are again underrepresented with similar low percentages (Hunt, 2014). In broadcast comedies and dramas, show creators represented 26.5 percent women. Women directed approximately 10 percent or less of broadcast and cable comedies and dramas. For cable comedies and dramas, female show creators drop to a 21.5 percent representation. However, women as show staff writers vary greatly for broadcast comedies and dramas between 31-50 percent of total writing

staff. Women gained some representation as 10.3 percent of all the reported cable comedies and drama-writing staffs were comprised of a majority of females (Hunt 2014).

Despite the many years apart and many similarities in both Dr. Hunt's report and George Gerbner's article (1994), a distinct difference in their findings is based on how diversity representation affects the return on investment for vast conglomerates and globalized media industries. Gerbner describes the abundance of television violence and the criminal depictions of male minorities as a by-product of a manufacturing and marketing process. He explains that it is marketing pressures that fuel television trends, not consumer preference nor statistics. Conglomeration and corporate profit demand a streamline production, economies of scale, and focus on dramatic ingredients most suitable for streamline and vast international promotion. However, Dr. Hunt shows that though these corporate drivers may still be in place, films with relatively diverse casts excel at the box office and in turn, excel in a return on investment. In television, Dr. Hunt reports that broadcast comedies and dramas with diverse casts also excel in ratings. However, despite this finding, recipients for Oscars (film) and Emmy's (television) awards are predominantly white male showing a 90.5%- 100% representation in the report's comprehensive award categories.

Lauzen (2014) reported on diversity in both behind-the-scenes employment and on- screen women in Canadian prime-time television. In general, statistical representation of women on Canadian broadcast network programs is strikingly similar to Hunt's American report on diversity. For example, from 1994-2013, women's representation in positions such as creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography as a conglomerated category rose only

6% from 21%- 27% (Lauzen, 2014). Likewise, female characters are younger than their male counterparts, with a 59% majority ages 20-30. The majority of male characters (58%) are aged between 30-40 years.

Diversity representation for women only 74% of female characters were white, 14% were African-American, 5% were Latina, 6% were Asian, and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity (Lauzon, 2014) which is only slightly higher than Gerbner's statistics from 1969.

Though additional technologies may further television's influence, the cultivation theory has been criticized for its focus on television as a predominant cultural influencer (Meyer, 1989). Other researchers question whether repeated exposure deepens cultivation effects or desensitizes heavy television viewers of violence (Englander, 2003). However, in studies by Hammermeister, Brock, Winterstein & Page (2005) as well as Gidwani, Sobol, DeJong, Perrin, & Gortmaker (2002) showed positive correlations between increases in television viewing and increases in cultivation effects. North Americans invest substantial time in television viewing making it a mass culturally and socially shared medium and understanding its cultural effects remain pertinent to research.

The cultivation theory is particularly useful in this study to explore the connection and influence of watching reality television and its cultivation effects particularly in watching female aggression on reality television. This theory helps to understand individual processes from viewing aggressive behavior, appropriating it as normative or culturally acceptable or not, and adopting or rejecting similar behavior. Exploring these cultivation effects on young women provides a platform to record their perceptions of

viewing female aggression on television and their individual real life experiences. The depth of cultivation effects can then be taken further in exploring how television depictions influence young women perceptions of feminist behavior today.

Feminist Theoretical Perspectives

The third complementary theoretical framework uses feminist perspectives that posit equal power relations among the sexes through social interaction at the micro (individual) and macro (institutional) levels (Abbot, Wallace, & Tyler, 2005). These principles aim to relieve oppression by promoting acceptance, inclusion, and respect for diversity amongst all members of the society (Sue & Sue, 2007). Feminist Perspectives defend and promote women's and marginalized groups' role in decision-making processes upholding values of free choice and collaboration. Feminist theoretical perspectives promote equal power relations among the sexes through social interaction at the micro (individual) and macro (institutional) levels. It aims to relieve oppression by promoting acceptance, inclusion, and respect for diversity amongst all members of the society. A core value of feminism is information sharing and education to assist in goal attainment. Feminist counseling research shows that friendships considered egalitarian are perceived as more fulfilling, growth fostering, and mutually beneficial, compared to relationships where power inequality exists (Knickmeyer, Sexton, & Nishmura, 2002). Feminist frameworks address society's impact on relationships in the form of inequalities such as sexism, racism, and classism that may be deleterious to the individual, and the fostering of positive relationships. It is through information sharing, education and social relationships that feminist values are learned and passed down from one person (or

generation) to the next, impacting society as a whole. For purposes of this study, feminist frameworks will include third wave feminism and post-feminism as these are the current stages of feminism. Based on a timeline of evolution, the participants between the ages of 18-22 will most likely have some familiarity with third wave or postfeminism as opposed to earlier stages of feminism from decades ago. A brief review of feminism's evolution includes highlights of feminist struggles, achievements and the underlying principles that remain constant in feminism perspectives.

A Brief History of Feminism

It is commonly held that the first wave of feminism began in the suffragette era between 1900-1929 (Library of Congress) when leaders such as Susan B. Anthony led American women to rally for their right to vote, and recognition as legal persons who also had the right to own property and enter contracts. With great determination, the Suffragettes accomplished these goals, but the momentum of their activism was greatly hindered as World War I developed followed by the stock market crash and the subsequent Great Depression of the 1930's.

The second wave of feminism surged in the early 1960's heralded by women leaders' such as Betty Friedman. Her book, *The Feminine Mystic* (1963) resonated with large groups of women as they described what many women of the era felt but were unable to express, as they conformed to the era's oppressive stereotypes of the happy homemaker (Reese, 2013). Friedman described women of that day as feeling hopeless, bored, and unfulfilled in narrow cultural and social dictates often limiting women's choice in education, marriage, and career. In 2011, Louis Menand of *The New Yorker*

Magazine focused on *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) in the “Books as Bombs” article paying tribute to books that changed the world. The article describes how, throughout the 60’s and 70’s the author Betty Friedman became a significant figure and a dominant voice in the second wave Feminist movement. The article claimed that the women’s movement needed this book as well as Friedman’s leadership and names her contributions to the movement. Friedman became a founder of the National Women's Political Caucus and of the abortion rights organization now known as NARAL-Pro Choice America. She also was responsible for the concept of the effective Women’s Strike for Equality. At the time of Friedman’s death in 2006, *The Feminine Mystique*, had sold over 35 million copies. Many magazine publications featured excerpts such as *McCall’s* and *Ladies’ Home Journal*, with a combined readership of thirty-six million. Appealing to a broad audience, the second wave of feminism encouraged the expansion of societal values of women in their traditional roles as housewife and mother to include their contributions as independent and self-satisfied professionals.

The development of the second wave of feminism paralleled a popular theory of reasoning in the mid-sixties known as poststructuralism. Williams (2005) describes poststructuralism as a movement in philosophy that began in the 1960s, and applies to many subjects such as literature, politics, art, cultural criticisms, history and sociology. This movement offered new and more subjective perspectives and meanings to once traditionally assumed definitions (Harcourt, 2007). Poststructuralism encouraged the deconstruction of literary and cultural terms to allow individual freedom in interpreting and redefining cultural and social meanings. It allowed a certain freedom from the traditional and previously shared social agreement of definitions, their meanings and

structures. For example, as the poststructural era developed individuals exerted more personal freedom welcoming the opportunity to define what “work” or “home” or “family” meant to them as well as defining the structures these cultural concepts would take (Vitanova, 2010). Thus, the definition of a family nucleus has evolved in North America from the two-parent with a stay-at-home mother and children to include blended families of divorce, remarriage, and nontraditional gender roles. These various forms of families are now as equal and as appropriate as the previously traditional definition and meaning.

In terms of feminism, the poststructural era supported opportunities for women to exercise more personal freedom in their life choices. For example, the launch of *Ms.* magazine (1972) by author, attorney and feminist spokesperson, Gloria Steinham, lent positive qualities to the public image of a feminist, helping to normalize the movement as opposed to previous severe and unattractive stereotypes of that time. This magazine format delivered feminine philosophies and politics to the average woman far beyond elite academic circles.

The first *Ms.* magazine’s cover depicted a woman with eight arms, each holding some device such as an iron, a telephone, a clock, and steering wheel. The cover names feature articles within such as, Jane O’Reilly on “*The Housewives Moment of Truth*” and *Ms.* magazine co-founder Letty Pogrebin’s article on “*Raising Children Without Sex Roles.*” In 2011, as the magazine’s fortieth anniversary in publication approached, Gloria Steinem revisited the making of the first issue of *Ms.* magazine in an online interview for New York magazine with Abigail Pogrebin, journalist, author and daughter of Letty Cottin Pogrebin. Steinem explains the figure used on the first cover: “It had a

universality because it's harking back to a mythic image—the many-armed Indian God image. And it solved our problem of being racially “multibiguous” because she's blue: not any one race.” (Pogrebin, 2011).

In the interview article, Letty Cottin Pogrebin explains that naming the magazine “Ms.” was inspired by the search to find an equal prefix to “Mr.” which does not reveal marital status nor culturally symbolizes availability for mating, whereas Miss and Missus do. “Ms.” became the female equivalent to “Mr.”, especially for feminists looking to avoid socially advertising their desirability or availability as potential mates. Mary Peacock, co-founder, editor (1971-77) of *Ms.* magazine tells of the initial difficulty with the name being recognized and understood. Peacock recalls that originally when answering their office telephone, many callers heard “mzzzzz magazine” but had no understanding or social reference to grasp the name of the magazine. So *Ms.* Magazine staff began answering telephone calls by saying the letters separately: “M” “S” magazine. In the interview, Peacock speaks of the “watershed” moment when “suddenly, you could say Ms. and everyone knew what you were talking about.” (Pogrebin, 2011).

Throughout the 1970's televised depictions also took a marked turn from portraying female characters as the 1950's ideal housewife in programs such as *I love Lucy* (Oppenheimer & Arnaz 1951-57) and *Leave it to Beaver* (Connelly et al, 1957-62). Female characters began to exchange house-dresses for suits, and housework for paid work. Television's ideal housewife and mother morphed into an unmarried, attractive, career woman depicted in sitcom programs such as *Mary Tyler Moore* (Brooks & Burns, 1970-77), named after the principal actor. The program won 29 prime time Emmy awards. Similarly, *The Carol Burnett Show* (Power & Jones, 1967-1978), a variety

comedy series won a total of 25 prime time Emmy awards. Throughout the 70's, television viewers seemed to welcome the changing image of women, and their talents in ways not seen before. In that era, women of color also shared television's spotlight but to a very limited extent. Largely, North American television depicted Caucasian actors for all televised programs including newscasts, talk shows, game shows, comedies, show hosts, and commercials. One groundbreaking series "Julia" (1968–1971) featured the actor, Diahann Carroll, who portrayed a young African American widow working as a nurse while supporting her only son. Previously, television series portrayed women of color in stereotypical characters such as in the first television sitcom series, *Beulah* (1950–1953), named after the principal character, a Negro domestic. In a *New York Times* article, the author, Meagan Fox recounts how Hal Kanter, the program's director and producer told *Time* in December, 1968 that: "The racial aspect of 'Julia' is only incidental... To me, the news is that a Negro family is featured, and they're not choppin' cotton and they're not on relief, but they're part of what some people consider the mainstream of American life." (Fox, 2011). Though the program *Julia* captured an estimated audience of over 14 million viewers in 1968, and despite Diahann Carroll's acclaimed beauty and popularity, the show ran for approximately four years and was cancelled. Since then, television portrayals of women of color remain few and far between.

The second wave of feminism also coincided with the civil rights movement and protests against the Vietnam war in the United States. James Williams (2005) describes these events as symptoms of the poststructuralist era marked by the decentralizing of political, social, religious and traditional authorities as citizens clamored and rallied for

more power. The second wave of feminism brought women together in purpose and politics. The legalization of abortion in Canada (1969) and United States (1973) coincided and was publicly promoted and endorsed by this wave of the Feminist movement. At this time, interest was rekindled in the successful passing of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), before Congress's ratification deadline in 1979. Thirty-five out of the required thirty-eight states (U.S.) ratified the ERA bill but falling short, a new ratification deadline was set for 1982. The ERA amendment has still not been ratified in all 52 states of America. In Canada, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), section 28 guarantees constitutional rights of freedoms equally to both male and female. Section 15 was added three years later and guarantees the equality of every individual, specifying racial equality, sexual equality, mental disability, and physical disability. In 1987, the Pay Equity Act was passed. At that time, the gender wage gap was 36% favoring male earnings. However, Statistics Canada (2013) show that the gender wage gap in Ontario, provincial home to parliament was 26% for full-time, full-year workers with a national average of about 25%. On the Pay Equity Act website the ongoing gender wage gap is associated with cultural practices rather than existing legislation.

Lower wages may reflect a woman's personal decisions to leave work to raise a family. Also historically gender segregated, low paying and undervalued services such as childcare may still underpay. Statisticians for Pay Equity Commission estimate that as much as 10 to 15 % of the gender wage gap is due to the systemic gender discrimination in workplace compensation practices though Canadian federal and provincial legislations address gender discrimination in compensation practices.

In the United Kingdom, the Equal Pay Act came into effect in 1970, which prohibits any less favorable treatment between men and women in terms of pay and conditions of employment. It has since been superseded by the Equality Act 2010 which implies a sex equality clause automatically into an employment contract guaranteeing a woman doing the same work as a man in the same employment, equality in pay and other terms and conditions. The Act ensures that her contractual terms are no less favorable than the man with whom she is claiming equal pay who is known as her comparator.

In summary, these political and cultural events may have been supported or driven by the era's poststructuralism philosophy of critical thinking in redefining legal systems to better represent the changing socio-cultural perspectives and values of the era. In particular, the second wave of feminism rekindled the principles and public rallies for equal rights for women as demonstrated by gaining attention for equal pay for equal work reforms. Further, the political gains of the second-wave feminism such as equal pay and rights to abortion as mentioned, challenged specific legal, social and cultural constraints relevant to women.

In the 1980's technology afforded freedom from temporality for larger publics moving further from a central hierarchically structured basis to supporting individual choice. The at-home office became more common and global distances were diminished as technology provided access regardless of time and space. The Feminist Movement seemed to ease off public demonstrations for equal rights, as new technology brought new meaning to the concept of globalism culturally, economically and politically.

As the children of first and second wave feminists matured, the new generation of feminism was birthed, named third wave feminism. Research attributes this new

generation of feminism as a breaking away from parental origins and positioning itself as distinct from previous feminist activism. O'Brien (1981) likened these generational transitions in the feminist movement as similar to Darwin's theory of evolution. With each generation comes a more complex mature and sophisticated structure responding to the issue in the current stages of cultural and social evolutions that surround them.

In fact, some of the most visible faces associated with third wave feminists were indeed the offspring of leaders of the second wave. For example, Rebecca Walker daughter of feminist trailblazer, Alice Walker, writes in an article for the Daily Mail (2008) said that she loves her mother very much, but she has not seen her or spoken to her since she first became pregnant. Nor has she seen Rebecca's son, Alice Walker's only grandchild. In the interview, Rebecca Walker ponders, saying: "My crime? Daring to question her ideology." (Walker, 2008).

The title of Rebecca Walker's article in *Ms.* magazine, *Becoming the Third Wave*, (1993) has been credited for the popularity and coinage of the term "Third Wave Feminism" (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003). In her book, *To Be Real, Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, Walker wrote of her fear of rejection from her mother and her Godmother, Gloria Steinham, for breaking away from their feminist ideologies. (Walker, R., 1995). Walker was one of many offspring from the Second Wave of Feminists who reaped the benefits of their predecessors' activism, but searched to redefine and re-interpret what feminism meant for them as individuals and a generation. Other feminist scholars such as Browne (2014) suggest that generational interests should not come before political interests to learn from the wisdom and experience of previous feminist activism.

In Canada, American-born author, Amy Friedman (1992) published a book exploring third wave feminism using Queen's University as a model. In it she wrote that she was no longer comfortable identifying with what the movement had become. She asserts that over three decades of feminism, the movement has lost its ability to recognize differences among women, and has not retained the sacredness of the individual (Friedman, 1992). However, Steenbergen (2001) writes that third wave feminism is represented by a generation of young women actively addressing the complexities of women's everyday experiences in the personal, structural and relational spheres. Steenbergen defends third wave critiques of past feminist movements as conducive to moving forward (Steenbergen, 2001).

Though Steenbergen mentions categories of interest of third wave feminism, specific goals are not identified. This contrasts to the past feminist movements who united in large numbers and publicly obtained the right to vote, legalized abortion and rallied for equal pay for equal work. Pinteric (2001) explains that as previous Feminists movements have accomplished these achievements, young women of the third wave may experience subtler but insidious forms of sexism, racism, homophobia, and classism that are more difficult to identify and quantify. On the *Everyday Feminism* website (www.everydayfeminism.com) the foremost principles of third wave is gender equality, sharing knowledge, ridding bias from linguistics, listening, and equal opportunity (Lueptow, 2014).

In the 1990's, another form of feminism emerged known as postfeminism. Theorists such as Bacchi (1999) attempt to explain that the term was created in the act of naming this powerful political and social movement in its current influence and activity

as it matured from its early suffragette history. Bacchi says it is through the process of discovering and acknowledging the maturing of the feminist movement that lent to redefining the movement with the creation of its new name: postfeminism.

However, Hall and Rodriguez (2003) counter the idea of postfeminism as a myth and product of popular culture with no comprehensive definition. The researchers employ informal content analysis of popular articles to identify four claims of postfeminism:

(1) overall support for the Feminist movement has significantly decreased as (2) some women are increasingly antifeminist, believing (3) the Feminist movement is irrelevant, and (4) have adopted a dual attitude to feminism, agreeing with the benefits but denying identification with the Feminist movement. They then researched empirical support using existing public opinion data but found little support for all four postfeminist claims (Hall & Rodriguez, 2003).

As the idea of postfeminism continues to exist and evolve with modern media, culture and technology, research shows that the issue of girls' aggression is complex and contradictory (Ringrose, 2006). Gonick (2004) posits: "the vulnerable girl has recently been replaced by the mean girl in the public consciousness" (p. 395). Ringrose (2006) suggests that media's sensationalistic scenes of female aggression in popular culture attempts to pathologize female aggression while redefining more traditional meanings of femininity. Yet, popular media today increasingly show women modeling unhealthy examples of friendship, relational aggression, and conniving competition. Particularly, some of the most popular reality television programs according to the Nielson ratings, such as *America's Next Top Model* (Banks & Mok, 2003-2005), and the various versions of *The Bachelor* such as *The Bachelor Pad* (Fleiss et al, 2012), routinely depict women

backbiting and name-calling. These depictions exemplify and model negative stereotypes of women as jealous enemies versus collaborative allies. As repetitive negative models, these popular depictions perpetuate negative female role models for young women to learn from and imitate just as they learn from their observations of other females in their daily lives (Pipher, 1994).

Though some researchers of indirect aggression in females have studied participants as young as in grade school, (Grills & Ollendick, 2002; Hammermeister, Brock, Winterstein & Page, 2005) this study targets females, 18-22 years as they become young adults, leaving school for the working world. They are also developed enough personally to articulate changes in their own thinking processes, opinions and biases as they mature from girls to young women. Particularly, feminist perspectives provide tenants and decades of history as a social movement as a comparative reference of female thinking and behavior for participants viewing female aggression on reality television. Further, the participants as young women themselves are encouraged to express their perceptions of feminism as they apply them today.

In summary, these theoretical frameworks intersect and compliment each other providing a dimensional lens to explore and respond to this study's research questions of how depictions of female aggression on reality television act as a role model for young women. Perhaps, television acts dually as a cultural driver and a cultural mirror. These depictions seamlessly infiltrate popular culture and are accepted as entertainment. Do young women consider them entertaining or derogatory? Is it possible that a duality exists - that they may be considered both entertaining *and* derogatory? How does that cultural shift affect young women's perceptions of Feminist Frameworks upholding

principles of equality for all people? Is there duality in perception of viewed female aggression? Or is it simply conflicting and offensive? The following section of the thesis describes the study's methodology including recruitment, population sampling and data collection.

Chapter 4. Methodology

As this is a qualitative study seeking to explore media effects, the following sections discuss the basis for the study's approach to sampling, data collection, the selection of Reality Television clips, the targeted population and sample population. The first section will describe recruitment and sampling approaches and procedures that were chosen to best suit the study's aim and making effective use of resources. The description of the data collection process will follow explaining why and how semi-structured interviews were chosen among other data collection options. The selection of reality television clips utilized for this study will then be described, explained and substantiated as an important component of this study. Lastly, a section on the targeted population and sample population will describe their general characteristics and why they were targeted as rich sources of information on the effects of watching female aggression on reality television.

Recruitment

Recruitment was made at the University of Ottawa, one of Canada's largest universities allowing for cultural and individual diversity. Probability sampling was used through recruitment posters affixed in areas of the University where student circulation tends to be high such as the University cafeteria and gym as well as bulletin boards in hallways. The recruitment posters indicated criteria for sex (female) and age (18-22 years). This criteria was based on the study's focus on the effects of watching female aggression on reality television, including perceptions and feelings of young women who

are of age to express themselves independently, and have some maturity as individuals. The poster also indicated that familiarity with the proposed reality television programs was not necessary. Potential participant-candidates initially contacted the researcher via the University's email and were sent a recruitment document detailing the study followed by a mutually appointed time for the interview in a private room on campus. Participants were given consent forms to review and sign before the interviews began.

The recruitment process was repeated in three cycles. Each cycle lasted approximately three sequential weeks in the winter, spring and summer semesters. Initially, posters indicated a search of ten female participants but was changed in subsequent recruitment posters as applicants initially inquired if the total number of participants had already been filled. To welcome a greater number of possible recruits, the number of desired participants was deleted. Though the total number of recruited participants totaled eight, and findings could not be generalized, the group was made up of different ethnicities, and backgrounds providing a fairly heterogeneous sample for this qualitative study. The final sample of eight participant interviews did fulfill the study's aim to explore and elaborate on particular and specific individual experiences and effects of watching female aggression on reality television (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

Probability sampling was chosen over all types of non-probability because any subjectivity on the researcher's part could influence participant recruitment and their responses. In non-probability sampling such as convenience sampling wherein the researcher has some control over participant selection, this selection could be unintentionally skewed, resulting in a less natural and less bias selection than found through open recruitment (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Further, though a particular

population was sought after, i.e., females between the ages of 18-22 years, the University of Ottawa has a population of approximately 21,400 female students (University of Ottawa, 2012) making the criteria easy to fulfill without requiring selective recruitment. Probability sampling also allowed an objective platform in which researcher and recruit could meet without expectation in terms of interview responses and expressions of attitudes and perceptions.

Though snowball sampling may have hypothetically eased the recruitment process as one participant refers a peer as recruit, it was rejected on the basis of possible skewing as close peers may share same viewpoints (Mason, 2002). Again as the targeted population was local, highly visible and large in number, it was not a difficult or remote population in which snowball sampling was necessary (Cohen & Arieli, 2011).

Another form of collecting data that was considered was through surveys to gather statistical information on a targeted population, but this would limit participant responses to preset options. Thus, participants' self-expression of their own perceptions, feelings and experience related to the effects of watching female aggression on reality television would be limited.

Semi-structured interviews questions were chosen to pursue more in-depth and personal responses without peer influence (Adair, 1984). Participant views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are essential properties of the social reality of the media effects this study's research questions are designed to explore. The interviewer encouraged participants' comments on their individual perceptions and reactions to the female aggression portrayed in the selected reality television clips. Interview questions explored their perceptions of the normative process

this media has or has not played in females' increased use of what was once considered derogatory female terms such as "bitch", and "hoe" in media and real life settings (Mason, 2002). Though time intensive, semi-structured interviews were the chosen methodology for specific reasons. First, it allows participants to have face-to face-interaction with the researcher and remain in their natural campus setting (Creswell, 2007). It also provides a private and confidential platform that is free from peer influence to explore participants' reactions, feelings and behavior (Bushman, 1998; Adair, 1984). Participants provided expressions of multiple perspectives while identifying influencing factors in their viewpoints and understandings. Essentially, for the purposes of this study, semi-structured interviews are the most feasible method of data collection in asking people about their perceptions, experience through talking and listening to them, in order to obtain the meaningful responses (Mason, 2002). Combined, participant responses will help form a more holistic view of female reactions to observing female aggression on reality television.

Semi-structured Interviews with Video solicitation

Semi-structured interviews were combined with reality television clips so that the researcher and participant watched the same specific examples of this shared cultural medium depicting female aggression on reality television programs. Not only did this shared watching provide specific examples of the research topic, it also provided a platform for easier rapport development and interactional exchange (Mason, 2002). After each clip, the researcher and participant discussed the corresponding interview questions. Though more time intensive than circulating surveys with general questions, this

approach produced actual televised clips from popular reality television with current representations of female aggression. Interviewer and interviewee watched the same specific clips of popular Reality Television programs depicting female aggression from which the interview questions were based. This helped to ensure researcher objectivity as all participants watched the same sequence of clips and responded to the same corresponding interview questions asking them to describe their own perceptions of each clip. Semi-structured interviews also allow the respondent time to reflect and elaborate as they respond to questions.

The semi-structured interviews were combined with video elicitation that provided current records of Reality Television portraying female aggression while also incorporating gaze, expression, body posture, and gesture in communication and interactions (Jewitt, 2012).

Roth (2009) discusses the value of video elicitation as it may prompt both discussion and recall while providing a dynamic visual reference for contemplation. Tochon (2009) finds that participant contemplation or reflection can be supported by video to stimulate a reconstruction of previous thoughts and perceptions, while also reflecting on present and future activity. Schubert (2006) discusses the importance of video elicitation alongside interviews especially in a field unfamiliar to the researcher as it can capture the everyday activity of any environment. Video elicitation provides a visual microcosm of these interactions and phenomena that are so subtle as to go unnoticed but are significant in their short and long term consequences (Schubert, 2006).

Tochon (2009) suggests techniques when using video elicitation as a research method: select a video sample for detailed discussion, ask about perceptions of the

viewing, pause the video to elicit comments in response to specific scenes. All of these techniques were utilized during the participant interviews and specific video samples created a basis for discussion. Video elicitation proved to be very helpful in the interviews as individuals were encouraged to share their individual perceptions and interpretations on the female aggression viewed. As described earlier, indirect aggression is often subtle but identifiable. Likewise, the subtleties of everyday culture can be more easily observed in the visual microcosm the video screen provides. Lastly, the use of videos added clarity and a sense of confirmation of participant responses and interpretations. Participants were also free to ask questions about the clips, which could then be replayed, and context issues were discussed.

Interview Questions

Opening questions included a time estimate of individual weekly television viewing and the degree of familiarity with selected programs to create a basis for the application of both the social cognitive and cultivation theoretical approaches. The last segment of the interviews explored how each participant interpreted the viewed behavior as relating to Feminism or Feminist behavior according to their own understandings and definitions. To avoid bias and ensure neutrality, the interviewer asked open-ended questions based on subjects' impressions, perceptions, affective responses and recall based on the clips viewed (Pannucci, Wilkens, 2010). The questions started with more general interest questions and moved to more probing questions used to clarify and invite affective responses, as well as different angles of the subject. Along with a small digital recorder, observations on body language, facial expressions and verbal responses were

noted manually. Semi-structured interview questions proposed for this study can be found in Appendix 1.

Scheduling allowed for approximately a half-hour (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree, 2006) for a viewing of seven clips ranging with a duration of two to seven minutes each of reality television programs such as *Say Yes to the Dress*, *America's Next Top Model* and the *Bachelor Pad*. Each interview was scheduled to last approximately one hour to allow for a relaxed conversational pace and participant reflection in responding and were recorded and transcribed. All participants watched all of the seven clips creating a clear basis for categorizing and comparing responses and were free to diverge in responses. The clips and subsequent questions were designed to explore different themes and perceptions such as the realness of reality television, different forms of aggression according to gender, opinions on how women's intra-gender interactions are depicted. The interviews were then categorized according to common repetitive responses and themes (Deacon, 2007). The transcribed interviews were also scanned for repetitive words noted during each participant interview in order to scan repeated key words such as "friendly", "derogatory" and "public." Repeated descriptions, comments and themes were flagged to identify key findings. Qualitative findings will be discussed further in the results and discussion section.

The Selection of Reality Television Clips

One reason these reality television clips were chosen is due to their length of time on air and viewership. All three reality shows chosen have a history of several seasons of television and are starting new seasons. In 2015, not only is *America's Next Top Model*

starting its 22nd television season, it also spawned franchises of the same program in various countries such as *Korea's Next Top Model*, *Germany's Next Top Model*, etc. Likewise *Say Yes to the Dress* (Gallagher, 2012-present) has over a dozen seasons behind them and recently spawned a Canadian version of the same program. The Bachelor has begun its 19th season in the United States. Their histories of continued demand throughout multiple seasons make participant's previous exposure to these shows more likely. The continued demand reflects solid and even growing viewership as reported by Neilson ratings and television seasonal renewals.

Another quality these reality television programs bring specifically to this study is that many, if not all, show participants in the same age range and gender (female) as the participants of this study. For this study, show participants refer to the group of competitors or contestants who applied for the respective castings. This would not include the host nor any professional related to production. These television show participants also appear physically attractive which may increase their persuasiveness as influential role models (Brumbaugh, 1993; Debevec & Kernan, 1984). The clips chosen also showed some cultural diversity depicting Caucasian females and women of color.

Finally, the clips chosen depicted similar behaviors in terms of aggression intensity. All included indirect aggression, which as previous research suggests is found predominately in females. Clips included behavior such as name calling, talking behind another's back, and starting rumors about another female.

Participants: sample population

Due to cultivation theory's core principle that effects of heavy viewing versus light viewing will have a marked difference on participants for this study, females 18-22 years, are a choice population to study for various reasons. First, most will likely have grown with television and have experienced the rise of personal technology as well as Reality Television. Most are also likely to own different technical devices which makes television and the culture it portrays, portable to view almost any time, almost anywhere. However, these suppositions will be confirmed with preliminary questions at the interview, along with questions on the frequency of their television viewing.

Recruitment was accepted on a first come/first served basis. Scheduled interviews were appointed favoring the participants' desired time. This allowed some randomization of the targeted population, while being time and cost effective. All participants who responded were female and in the required age range. The participants represented a variety of ethnicities including Arab, Indian and French and Anglo-Saxon Canadians.

Chapter 5. Results and Discussion

The following chapter will discuss the results from the eight participant interviews, including one section describing the four emerging themes and another section on applying the results to the research questions. The participant responses utilized in this section have been retrieved from interviewer's notes and the transcribed interviews with the participants' prior written consent. Preliminary questions were asked regarding television and social media habits in order to have a basic knowledge of the time and exposure to Reality Television, and television in general. Based on participant responses, four central themes emerged and will be discussed under separate subtitles, i.e., Contradictory Responses; A Matter of Race, Culture and Demographics; Reclaiming the Derogatory; Reality Television as a Role Model.

The first emerging theme is based on conflicting participant responses describing the acceptance of the casual usage of traditionally derogatory terms despite reporting negative feelings or experiences related to their usage. For example, some participants described casual situations wherein being called a "bitch" or "slut" had hurt their feelings. Participants also reported incidents wherein their own casual use of these terms had insulted or angered a friend unintentionally. Yet, the participants who reported these negative experiences also upheld the cultural trend to casually use these terms as acceptable and a fast-becoming norm. A second theme arose in participant attributions to the origins of these trends of casually calling women "bitch" and "slut" to certain demographics such as black culture and lower socio-economic classes, whereas previous research of the universal mean girl describes her as white and middle-class. This is then

followed by the third theme based on the reclaiming, redeeming and redefining of traditionally derogatory female terms. Participant responses varied as to whether the reclaiming of derogatory female terms by creating a norm through their casual use could eradicate or perpetuate their traditional definitions and demeaning intentions. The fourth theme is based on participant perceptions of Reality Television portrayals serving as role models. The last section of this chapter addresses the research questions based on the interview results.

Data Analysis

The participants were ages 19-22 with an average age of 20.5 years. Based on preliminary questions on viewing habits, the participants viewed an average of 2.43 hours of television per day. All had some familiarity with the Reality Television programs from which the selected clips were retrieved. A few participants reported that they sometimes watch program highlights on Youtube, but most participants did not use social media at all in connection with these Reality Television programs. Throughout the interview process, the participants seemed pleased to have their opinions sought and valued on the topic of their perceptions of media and the popular culture it portrays. They smiled, laughed and were glad to share their personal feelings and experiences as they explained their interpretations of the clips shown. Despite a visible age difference between myself as the interviewer and participant, the participants seemed appreciative for the interest shown in their perceptions and were comfortable in their responses.

To explore participant perceptions of viewing female aggression, short video clips were shown followed by interview questions and participant responses. There were a

total of six clips depicting different forms of female aggression such as name-calling, glaring, talking behind another female's back, and spreading rumours. The interview script was designed to ask specific questions first, ending with more general questions regarding participant perceptions of Reality Television as a mirror or a driver of culture as well as their perceptions of these portrayals of female relationships. Participants were first asked to describe their thoughts and impressions of the clip and then were asked if they had had similar experiences in their own lives.

The interviews began with showing participants two short segments from the reality show, *Say Yes to the Dress* (Gallagher, 2012) based on a storyline of brides-to-be finding and purchasing bridal gowns in a wedding dress store. Often entourages consisting of a small group of family and friends wait in the store while the client tries on gowns in a large dressing room. All people filmed are non-actors. The first short clip is from the episode "Rocker Brides" (Gallagher, 2012) depicting a sales lady showing a client a dress chosen by her entourage of friends that is 10,000 dollars over the client's budget. Responding to the sales lady, the client refers to her friends as "hookers gone wild" and explains to the sales lady, and then separately to the camera: "We definitely call each other hookers all the time....I need a dress that stands out that I am Queen Bee Madame Hooker." The second clip shown to participants depicts a scene from the episode "Staying True Before Saying I Do" (Gallagher, S., 2102). In this episode, a bride-to-be is trying on a gown that was altered. As the client pulls back the dressing room curtain, her friend exclaims, "If I was watching you, I'd be like who's that freakin' slut over there?" These clips were followed by more clips depicting other forms of female aggression, mostly social or relational aggression such as name-calling and

exclusion from the group. For example, clips portray a group of young females criticizing another female peer referring to her as bitch, outside of her presence, while another clip portrays the same group of girls deciding to give one girl the “silent treatment.” Another clip portrays rumour-spreading as one female contestant starts a rumour that another female contestant had sex in order to remain in the competition.

At first, most described these portrayals as joking or teasing among friends. They then described different social contexts wherein its use would be considered acceptable. Most participants said they used these terms to express teasing and joking amongst friends. Although never asked directly, these participants reported that they never had any derogatory intention in their own usage. Yet, some participants reported negative interactions with the use of ‘bitch’ or ‘slut’ in their personal experience. One participant responded that she had unintentionally offended someone. Another reported feeling hurt by their use, which she says “is the problem with using terms with their opposite meaning.” A third participant reported a situation in which the use of these terms was intended as a joke but was perceived as an insult and a public fight ensued. Another simply said these terms were a “turn off.” As the interviews progressed central themes emerged.

Theme I. Contradicting Responses

These participants seemed unaware of the contradiction in reporting negative personal feelings and experiences involving these derogatory terms while expressing acceptance of the trend. Though their responses revealed potential offense, hurt and the possibility of physical provocation, it seems they prefer to uphold the trend as a way to be

humorous in social settings. Despite their negative feelings and experiences, participants generally found that the use of these terms to be acceptable if they were intended as joking or teasing and were used within narrow contexts and situations. No matter their own negative experiences, instead of forgoing the use of these terms themselves, several participants upheld their use as the norm, and then indicated conditions of their use. However, even when participants specified conditions that they felt ensured cultural appropriateness, responses differed greatly. For example, one participant said they should be exchanged only in private social settings. Others said that they tend to be casually accepted in public spheres when socializing with a group of friends, in a bar, and in school areas. Some believed that these terms should be used among women only. Some believed that it was acceptable for both men and women to refer to each other as “bitch” in casual teasing. However, Participant 1, a proponent of this belief immediately recounted:

“I have a male friend, like I called him a “bitch”, he responded more, like offensively, like I didn’t mean it like an insult or something. Like he was being annoying, he was being kind of rude. And, yeah, I don’t know any males that would refer to themselves as bitches.”

Note that in calling her male friend “bitch” she does not seem to be joking or teasing with him as she describes him as annoying and rude. The interviewer’s next question asked if the male-female use of the term “bitch” is a new development.

Participant 1 reasserted its acceptability: “Like, even last year you didn’t call men bitches, but I think like now, especially in my group of friends, we’ll say it, we’ll hang out and no one will bat an eye.” Yet, when asked earlier how she felt about females

calling each other “hooker,” she replied she felt uncomfortable. Another participant who likewise described “bitch” and “slut” as forms of teasing said that she was embarrassed to admit that these words are used amongst her mother, her sister and herself. If, indeed, these derogatory terms are considered lighthearted, her expression of embarrassment seemed to contradict her acceptance of this type of usage and her description of it as joking. These contradictions naturally occur within a few sentences of participant dialogue. It seems that they could not recognize aggression and its effects such as offence and embarrassment. Yet this recognition is key to changing aggressive behaviour to pro-social behaviour that avoids victimization. (Goldberg, Smith-Adcock, & Dixon, 2011).

Though human experience can be a powerful teacher of our social worlds, it seemed to me that some participants preferred to accept the trend rather than basing their judgment on their own experiences and feelings. It seemed as if the momentum of the trend was beyond their control making acceptance their only option. Perhaps the trend is being formed and informed by female aggression portrayed in the media, particularly on Reality Television. Thus, the cultural wave created by powerful mass exposure and repetitive portrayals of stereotypes may appear too great for them to consider the weight of their individual influence in cultural or social resistance. Denying or mitigating their life experiences and feelings may seem easier and more rational than resisting the influx of social and cultural trends delivered by television and other devices with a global outreach and constant availability.

As mentioned all participants denied that they ever used terms such as “slut” and “bitch” in a derogatory fashion. Yet, at least one reported an experience wherein she

offended someone unintentionally. This response indicates the possibility that other participants' usage of "bitch", "slut" or other traditionally female derogatory terms, may also have been unintentionally offensive but they were not aware. Or, they may be unable to recognize their own aggression in their usage. For example, Participant 2 insisted that clips using these terms such as "slut" were funny, explaining that these terms intended in any negative fashion would be like "taking five steps backwards" compared to the forward strides made by feminist movements in gaining female equality. However, later in the interview at least one of her responses to a television clip seemed to contradict this stated opinion. The clip showed a female contestant who scowls and stares at another contestant. The second contestant asks her to stop staring because "it's so rude." The scowling female contestant then describes to the camera that this is her signature scowl that she refers to as her "Bitch, please" look. As rumours surface that the scowling contestant was aggressive, a younger contestant confronts her and asks if the rumours are true. In response, the scowling contestant denies using her signature scowl and dismisses the younger contestant as ignorant: "you don't even know what happened." Yet the program's mass audience saw both her intentional use and her own description of it. After viewing this clip, Participant 2 responded:

"It was so hypocritical, how are you going to act like you are super tough, and Miss Bitch, and then when someone calls you out on it, you just completely back down. Like if you are going to be tough, or be bad bitch, then own up to it."

Participant 2 did not appear to be joking or teasing in expressing this opinion. There was nothing light in her tone of voice, nor was she smiling. Her facial expressions appeared serious and stern. She appeared somewhat angry with the scowling contestant referring

to her as a tough “Miss Bitch.” The name “Miss Bitch” seemed to express a negative sanction for the contestant by renaming her and associating her with a negative stereotype. As it was apparent that she was not being humorous in her response, calling the contestant a tough “Miss Bitch” or “bad bitch” seemed critical or punitive. It was interesting that in this case both the participant and the television contestant denied intentional aggression. This denial was explored through previous research on negotiating feminine power. For example, Landry (2008) discusses the longstanding social and cultural feminine attributes, such as being nice, pretty and popular, that are held as desirable and powerful in attracting male attention and gaining social power. Currie, Kelly & Pomerantz (2009) describe these desirable traits as primarily upheld among the middle-class, demanding a feminine standard for all things nice, whether in appearance or behaviour. Therefore, when females attempt to exercise their individual power through different forms of aggression, they may later deny the behaviour in public so as to keep face and resume the standard, but perhaps oppressive feminine ideal.

Theme II. A Matter of Race, Culture and Demographic

As none of the participants reported their use of terms such as “bitch” and “slut” as derogatory in their personal realms, participants attributed derogatory usage to other social classes or cultures. Participant 1 said:

“I think in the media it’s still kind of portrayed as something, that’s like, almost like, a lower class term, that like people that call each other bitches, are really unsophisticated, and always use it in, like, a secret backstabbing kind of way-“

Participant 6 attributed the derogatory usage as typical of “street service people” whom she described as belonging to a certain culture or demographic. Two participants attributed it to black culture. One attributed the trend to rap music and the other participant drew a parallel between using “slut” and “bitch” amongst women as similar to black people casually using the word “nigger.” Participant 8 and Participant 4 rejected the trend. Participant 8 described herself as the offspring of immigrant parents raised in an “ethnic enclave” wherein this type of speech would not be tolerated. Participant 4 likened the use of female derogatory terms as similar to using derogatory terms in reference to different races. She said:” ...it’s not ok for one race to call another person’s race, like, different derogatory terms, so why is it ok for a girl to call each other (derogatory terms)?”

It is interesting that some participants attributed derogatory usage to other ethnicities, demographics or cultures outside of their own. This attribution to the Other or the outsider may be partly due to participant denial or a lack of recognition of their aggression in their own use of these expressions.

Nonetheless, these attributions to other influences are contrary to the image of the universal mean girl described in previous research as white and middle-class (Ryalls 2011; Ness, 2004; Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004; Simmons, 2003). Presumably, the universal mean girl was born into an advantageous lifestyle with no experience of personal struggle to gain greater opportunity, social respect, or resist racial bias. This allows her to develop a playful lexicon using words like “bitch” and “slut” in reference to other women, yet she is protected from feeling the social sting of disrespect and stigma these words express.

Though household salaries were not questioned in the participant interviews, these university female students gave no obvious indication of being outside the middle-class mainstream. Neither was nationality discussed but at least half of the participants were fair-skinned. Other participants had more olive complexions, possibly from an Indian or Hispanic descent but none had any apparent characteristics indicative of African descent.

Despite possibly matching the characteristics of the mean girl stereotype, participants attributed derogatory terms used among women as something “lower class” and possibly influenced by black culture. It would be interesting to explore attributions made to categories of social class however contestants in each of the selected clips were filmed in a large residence created for the show. The residences are upscale with attractive décor that make for pleasant television viewing. Specifically, in *Say Yes to the Dress* and *American Next Top Model*, even the clothes are not their own. Respectively, contestants try on wedding dresses or showcase the newest fashions so there is no visual indication or standard dialogue that reveals a contestant’s social class unless described by the contestant themselves, which did not occur in any of the clips used for this study. To explore attributions to other races, a combination of carefully chosen clips was formed representing women of colour and Caucasian women as both the aggressor and target of aggression. In searching for samples of Reality Television clips for this study, depictions of women of colour, particularly black women, aggressing with each other were abundant and easily captured. The final selections were then carefully chosen to portray a balanced representative of both black women and Caucasian women. The term “women of colour” is used here to acknowledge the variations of darker skin tones that may or may not be

African or African-American. The pool of Reality Television clips from which this selection was made, did not show any obvious Latino, Indian or Arab characters, or any indication of those cultures. The table below represents the mix of races portrayed in the final six clips chosen for this study.

Table B. Races Depicted in the Selection of Reality Television Clips	
Race of Aggressor	Race of Aggressor's target
Woman referring to friends as "hookers"	Caucasian woman to Caucasian group
Woman referring to friend as "freakin' slut"	Woman of colour to woman of colour
Woman describing her "bitch, please" scowl	Woman of colour to Caucasian woman
Woman pities and threatens contestant	Caucasian woman to woman of colour
Women deciding on implementing "silent treatment"	Caucasian women to Caucasian woman
Woman spreads rumour about woman	Caucasian woman to Caucasian woman

This first pooling of potential Reality Television clips for this study gave an impression of a rather homogenous depiction of women of colour, particularly black women, as loud and aggressive. Recent research confirms this impression. For example, Warner (2015) reports that Reality Television franchises such as VH1's *Basketball Wives* (Emmerson & O'Neal, 2010–present), and *Real Housewives of Atlanta* (Hersh, et al, 2008-present) are successful entertainment partly due to the precarious and bombastic lives led by their cast made up of predominantly African American women. Warner attributes their false bravado to their deeper fear of exposure as average women, while maintaining an appearance of wealth and glamour, worthy of televised entertainment.

Thus, these African American women must show themselves as outrageous, aggressive and worthy of camera time. This results in portrayals of perpetual female rivalries including name-calling, taunting, and physical threats.

Black female actors have voiced their concerns of how black women are represented on Reality Television. In an online interview for *Newsweek* with journalist Allison Samuels (2011) Diahann Carroll, the first African-American woman to star in her own television show, *Julia* (1968), said; “What I see now on television for the most part is a disgrace, as far as how we’re depicted.” Phylicia Rashad, who acted as a lawyer and wife in the 1980s comedy *The Cosby Show* said; “I won’t and don’t watch it.” Later in the interview, Rashad says that the late NBC executive Brandon Tartikoff told her that “it was going to get much worse before it got better in terms of diversity.... He was right.”

These findings lead to other questions as to whether the white middle class mean girl stereotype has morphed into an aggressive black woman via depictions on Reality Television. Perhaps both stereotypes co-exist but via different television genres.

Theme III. Reclaiming the Derogatory

Half of the participants expressed a positive intent in reclaiming the meaning when referring to women as “bitch”, “slut” and “whore.” For example, Participant 2 said:

“ And they are taking back the word, and what it’s supposed to mean, and they are making it into something that they can use, well not on a daily basis, but something they can use and take power of it....but I think it’s a good thing, they

are taking back the word, I think it's supposed to be funny, like a term of endearment, like: "Hey, slut." It's funny to me...not hooker, cause that is too far, but slut, yeah, it's just funny.... When girls use it as a joke, when you are in control of the word, and you can use it as a joke. You know it's not serious, you know you are obviously not a slut, or whatever, so you know it's not like a serious thing."

However, Participant 6 said: "...feminist movements, the whole 'taking back slut thing', which I find weird, but...(participant drifts in thought)... I mean, I don't think there is anything to take back. 'Slut' has never been a word that is supposed to be, you know, reaffirming or positive."

Between these polarized perceptions, some participants expressed uneasiness in the full acceptance of the trend. For example, after showing a clip in which "Hooker" and "Slut" were used among female friends, Participant 4 said: "Maybe, not the exact term, 'hooker', but it is, I think it is becoming more common, like, even like, 'slut', and stuff like that, saying different things about women. As almost in a jokingly fashion, but like, it's not a joke." This response may represent the middle of the road public who despite common usage and an intention to jest, feel uneasy as traditionally derogatory terms can be delivered and received with serious and hurtful effects. In general, these conflicting opinions are reflected in conflicting opinions expressed in current online media such as newspaper, magazine and blog articles.

However, research on the cultural effects of using these terms appears more unified in discouraging their use. In researching the casual usage of "slut" in female

interactions, Lim and Fanghanel (2013) discuss how the term is used to control a woman's sexuality, possibly instilling a fear of social stigma. Armstrong, Hamilton and Seeley (2014) reveal that women use the word "slut" to distinguish social class among females. Their findings showed that in the dominant social scene, high-status women may be identified as attractive and sexy, whereas low-status women risk being marked as a "slut" even when behaving or dressing similarly. Lenora Tannebaum, feminist speaker and author of *"I am Not a Slut"* and *"Slut: growing up with a bad reputation"* published an article on her site (www.lenoratannebaum.com) declaring that women should not reclaim the word "slut." She writes that women encouraging this casual use amongst other women is not an act of radical protest, but actually confirms negative and demeaning female stereotypes. Thus the increased usage of derogatory terms in a joking or casual manner makes it more difficult for women to represent themselves in positive ways using positive images. Similarly, Alivia Hall's online media article (2013) pleads with her readers to stop this labeling as it hurts feelings, damages reputations and scars a sense of self-worth. Aligning with a plea for disuse, Danica Johnson (2014) of the online magazine, *Everyday Feminism*, explains how using the word "slut" still implies negativity surrounding female sexuality. Johnson encourages women to choose more empowering words to describe themselves and each other.

Further, Kleinman, Ezzell and Frost (2009) discuss the social harms of women attempting to reclaiming the word "bitch" by using it casually among female friends. Unlike, the female power Participant 2 believes casual use conveys, Kleinman, Ezzell and Frost (2009) find that women who declare themselves "bitches," or call other women "bitches" in a friendly way, are reinforcing sexism, patriarchy, and the use of a feminine

slur that hurts all women. This perspective is echoed through online media in articles such as Drexler (2015) who presents arguments on how the B-word is used to keep women repressed and oppressed. In the article, Drexler claims that the word “Bitch” is still entwined in its derogatory origins and likens a woman to a lesser creature; a female dog.

Gates (2015) provides an opposing view suggesting that negative images of black people, portrayed on mass media, naming Reality Television, in particular, should be embraced. The excessiveness of these negative portrayals disrupt the hegemonic norms of race and gender. The marginalization of black women in these negative portrayals can thus represent and express their experiences, feelings and cultural identity (Gates, 2015). Instead of reforming television’s negative representations of black women, these portrayals can express a form of cultural evidence of their marginalization substantiating feelings and experiences of cultural oppression in their own lives. These portrayals may be negative, but Gates suggests they may be more realistic than more respectable portrayals fabricated for more reputable television programs.

The future of the casual exchange of terms such as “bitch” and “slut” particularly among female friends is uncertain. However, academic research reveals no distinct benefit, nor encourages the use of “bitch”, nor has increased female power and the usage of these terms been substantiated. Likewise, sites dedicated to feminist issue and social media such as individual blogs, or vlogs reviewed for this study did not show any support for the use of the word “slut.” In fact, journalists and authors who describe themselves as feminist, discourage their use. Besides the adoption of lexicons viewed on Reality

Television, interview questions further explore the imitation of viewed behaviour.

Theme 1V. Reality Television and Role Models

Most participants expressed concern that these portrayals may act as a negative role model, particularly for those who watch Reality Television almost exclusively and for younger women. Participant 5 explains;

“People that like, watch it are usually like, in high school, or like, younger, and that’s when like, their attitudes towards other people are developing, right, like their social skills and like how they deal with people that are different ... so I feel like that kind of glamorizes the alpha ... which made me sad, cause I don’t know if she’s like the best role model, because I don’t know how far she would go...in the real world like, with relationships, because how do you trust someone like that after seeing this show? Like, if I met her today, would I be best friends with her? I don’t know.”

Participant 5 continued expressing a concern that younger girls are influenced by aggressive female behaviour portrayed on Reality Television:

“...it even affects how they deal with problems, like in their problem solving...when they watch shows like this, and if they’re watching episode after episode and their friends are also watching it, and everybody sees how these people deal with problems, then it creates this whole sub-culture of like, alpha female, and there might be those who feel as though this is the way to deal with things. “

Participant 1 responded on the flow of cultural influence initially coming from television and then imitated in real life:

“...maybe it does influence some people to mirror what they see on TV, but I don’t think, I don’t think it goes from, like, reality to TV, I think it would go from TV to reality, in terms of, like, making your life more general, more substantial.”

Participant 1 then described how the viewers inspired to imitate the viewed behavior might believe that their imitation will bring them the glamour or heightened attention portrayed on Reality Television thus making themselves and their lives “more substantial.” Participant 1 said the depictions of female aggression could have a priming influence in readying the viewer “to fight with someone.” The participant furthered explained that watching these television portrayals can be perceived as light entertainment but imitating this aggression in real life would likely be perceived as expressions of anger and frustration. Participant 6 felt that Reality Television has an even more direct effect on culture. She explained:

“People in my peer group, and younger generations look at these shows, these quote, unquote ‘Reality TV shows’, um and think, well, that’s the way I should be acting. And as people watch these shows, more and more girls start taking on these kind of, you know, either really weak and, you know, protect me, kind of, sob story personas, or these, you know I have to take on the world, (gestures with quotation marks) alpha personas. “

Participant 6 says she feels girls may be more influenced and affected by these depictions than boys: “since most Reality TV shows are directed toward girls. Um, but as it

influences reality, it will also start to mirror reality, because it's kind of changing the way that people will interact." It is important to note that most participants considered Reality Television portrayals of women's relationships as a negative role model. Thus, these portrayals could provide the viewer with negative role models of female behaviour and character. For example, Participant 8 expressed concern that:

"...it would be detrimental to someone who only watches reality TV...I think, it can be harmful, especially ... at a young age, especially at the age, like when you have gossiping, and like, cliques, and like, feuds, and like frenemies, and stuff like that. I think it can be harmful, on the ways to perceive other women, other than yourself."

Participants also alluded to the design of many Reality Television programs that are based on some level of competition either with other participants and/or against a time limit. Further, many Reality Television programs allow for specific time for a one-to-one between the participants and the camera. In the program, *America's Next Top Model*, this is referred to as "the confessional." During this one-to-one time, participants are encouraged to vent feelings or are sometimes directed in what they say by an unseen director or an anonymous voice of an unseen interviewer. The camera's focus remains solely on the participant as they respond. This type of camera set-up would naturally tend to stimulate a wealth of opportunities to film females expressing aggression towards their competitors, frustration with time limits and contests, or seemingly talking behind their colleagues back. The viewing audience is often left uninformed as to whether or

not, or to what degree, an unseen television camera worker or producer elicit their responses. Participant 3 likewise responded with a reference to a younger audience:

“...it depicts female/female relationships realistically provided that the women involved are very emotionally young. Um, there is not necessarily a lot of depth to it, it’s very, it’s the superficial side of female friendships, and female conflict.... as we get older, or more mature, that we get to process our feelings better, but it certainly seems realistic, in the sense that I’ve experienced some of these situations while younger.”

Other responses described the Reality Television portrayals of female relationships as “catty” and “confrontational.” Participant 4 said: “It’s giving us, like, you’re making us look at the bad, the bad bitchy, like, cat-fight, girl on girl, like, bad side of it. But, like, realistically, like, there’s more good in girl-friendships than there is bad. But it’s just like, the media and, like television shows like even like the news, like, they depict the, like, raunchy, like, like sexy stories, so it’s like, the bad stuff, you know.”

Participant 6 described the female relationships depicted seemed “animalistic” as Reality Television often portrays a competitive element between the contestants. Participant 6 continued, saying: “...you’re either on top or you’re a nobody, um, and if you’re a nobody, you’re at the whims of the one whose on top.” Most participants expressed concern over the negative portrayals of women and their female friendships as having a negative influence on society’s perception of females in general. Particular concern was expressed for the younger generation who may be looking for female role models but finding only negative ones on Reality Television. Under the impression that

they are viewing popular and acceptable female behaviour, they may naively imitate the negative behaviour in real life, resulting in negative consequences.

These participant viewpoints led me to further question who are the female role models for girls today. Unlike eras wherein prominent social or political female leaders such as Susan B. Anthony or Gloria Steinem were easily identifiable, participants describe female role models found on Reality Television as “catty” and “manipulative.” Yet, framed on television these contestants are often physically attractive, live in custom made high scale residences, and wear expensive clothing which can create a glamorous image that may influence a younger viewer to imitate that which they find at least visually attractive.

In the following section the participant responses discussed here will be presented through the lens of theoretical analysis. The combination of findings and theory are used to address the research questions. Reported findings will then be compared to previous research using social and cultivation theories as well as feminist perspectives as described in the literature review.

The Findings Related to the Research Questions

In this section, each of the three research questions will be addressed in relation to the findings in the participant interviews and supported by theoretical frameworks.

Individual sections will be given to each of the following research questions:

RQ 1: Does viewing female aggression on reality television influence young women’s imitation of viewed behavior?

RQ 2: Does reality television drive or simply mirror culture?

RQ 3: How do these depictions influence young women and their perceptions and definitions of feminism today?

The social cognitive, cultivation and feminist theoretical frameworks will be discussed to provide insight and clarity in applying participant results to each research question separately.

R1. Does viewing female aggression on reality television influence young women's imitation of viewed behavior?

As discussed, participants expressed concern that Reality Television and the behaviour depicted, may act as role models for younger girls. However, the participants not only described younger girls as impressionable and interested in adopting new social skills, they also described their own observations of changes in younger female behaviour. Participants shared their observations and impressions of increased name-calling, vulgarities, and dressing in sexier clothes in girls at increasingly younger ages. In recalling their experience, some participants used their high school years as a timeframe to measure distinct behavioural changes in the female freshman students who seemed more aggressive and acted sexier in ways that they would ever consider behaving when they were freshman. These reported observations of increased female aggression are interesting but do not directly link it to television viewing.

However, these responses describe one of the most distinctive connections to social cognitive theory in this study. As social cognitive theory is based on imitation of viewed behaviour as a way of learning social interaction, television is a primary source

for viewing behavioural interaction. Canadians dedicate an average of four hours a day to television viewing and Reality Television is ever increasing its broadcast time slots, gaining a powerful mass presence that cannot be ignored (Quail, 2015). According to Nielson reports in the 2007-2008 seasons, Reality Television programs captured 77 percent of the total audience of the top ten broadcast programs. The influence of Reality Television and the behaviour it portrays must be considered as a distinctly plausible influence in audience behaviour. Interesting to note that the participants never mentioned any other source in popular culture that were prevalent influencers in young female behaviour other than television and specifically, Reality Television. It is also interesting to note that participant observations made in their high school years occurred during the corresponding rise of Reality Television (Nielson, 2011). This may be coincidental but this timeframe may indicate some relationship in the increased adoption of aggressive female behaviour viewed on Reality Television as it gains greater broadcast time. Based on participant responses, social cognitive theory was implicated in their concerns that female aggression depicted on Reality Television is being imitated as female aggression is portrayed as a social norm and is often performed by attractive females who compete to win. This type of winning is often incremental and achieved by contestants who dominate social scenarios such as achieving the bridal “Madame Bee” status or being awarded as *America’s Next Top Model*, or finding the perfect bachelor. These increments in gaining social attention and dominance could be the positive reinforcement that supports the imitation of the behaviour described in social cognitive theory. Unlike, the modeled behaviour used in videos for improved health-related habits where actor outcomes are positive and productive (Smith, 2002), Reality Television creates an aura or

illusion of success. This portrayed success is progressive as each week, the remaining participants represent a winning over of the competition, surpassing them by the use of their skills and savvy, often resulting in social tactics that undermine, insult and intimidate their competition. Regardless, whether positive qualities or negative tactics are used to gain on the competition, a sense of winning is clearly portrayed.

Similarly, in terms of reinforcement or reward, Stefanone, Lackaff and Rosen (2010) suggest that Reality Television generally communicates the possibility that the average person may attain a sense of coveted celebrity entering the highly desired world of mass popularity. Using social cognitive theory, Stefanone, Lackaff and Rosen (2010) argue that Reality Television has eroded the normative and behavioural distinctions between celebrity and the everyday world so that even the possibility of a prized celebrity status through Reality Television exposure may motivate imitation and adoption of viewed behaviour. The reinforcement of this viewed behaviour may not be direct or tangible but lies in the possibility Reality Television offers in terms of the viewer's potential celebrity and popularity.

In summary, the participants expressed concern for younger female viewers and female viewers who attribute greater importance and become emotionally involved with certain Reality Television programs. The participants indicated that these audience segments might be the most impressionable and most likely to imitate the viewed behaviour as devoted fans. All of the participants shared their impressions on the younger generation and possibly adopted behaviour learned or promoted by Reality Television. Over all, the participants reported their impressions that younger females use

vulgarity to greater degrees and dress in more provocative ways than they remember they did as high school students themselves. These participant responses collectively point to the key elements of social cognitive theory: modeled behaviour, imitation, adoption of the behaviour and reinforcement. Though there were indications that support the application of social cognitive theory, the participants also described Reality Television's influence in cultural behaviour such as word-adoption, attitudes and values, which better relate to cultivation theory and feminist perspectives.

For the purposes of this study cultivation theory was part of the theoretical framework to determine how female aggression portrayed on Reality Television affects viewers' perceptions and changing norms in female behaviour. Participants discussed their perceptions of the clips and how it compared to their personal beliefs, values and everyday experience. They then described their perceptions of the portrayed aggression as acceptable as a norm, or rejected it as skewed, negatively representing female interactions. Through the cultivation process, television is considered a basic cultural influencer and the behaviour viewed is adopted, not through specific reinforcement, but by a more subtle process of cultural evolution. For example, newer media stereotypes such as the white mean girl or the loud and aggressive black female have come to the forefront as previous female stereotypes fade from the television screen. The manifestations of the cultivation process stimulated by television viewing may appear more subtle in developing changes in attitude and values, as compared to the observable manifestations of social cognitive approach resulting in fairly immediate imitation of

viewed behaviour. However, some of the participant first responses clearly identified and described these cultural manifestations such as changes in lexicons and attributing new word meaning.

Language: Adoption of Jargon

One of the strongest indications of Reality Television's cultivating effects was found in perceptions of traditionally derogatory terms such as "bitch" and "slut." Participants' responses differed greatly in their perceptions of these terms. Some described them as offensive while others claim these terms have evolved into lighthearted terms of endearment. However, almost all responses indicated that the word "hooker" used in a female interaction, friendly or not, would be unacceptable. For example, when asking if terms such as "slut" or "hooker" are commonly used amongst her friends, Participant 2 replied: "Sometimes, but not hooker, cause that is too far, but slut- yeah, it's just funny." Participant 1 described the use of the word "hooker" in the clip shown as "outrageous." She then added that the use of the word "slut" was quite common to her everyday experience and when she herself has been called a slut, she did not feel insulted or offended. She explained: "I know with some of my friends they just, like, do it to poke fun at the words. Like, it's not, like you can be a slut if you want, it's not a bad thing, it's not a degrading term, it's just, it just is." Participant 7 said that "slut" and "ho" (short for whore) is commonly used jokingly among friends in a private setting but being called a "hooker" seemed "harsh." When asked about common use among friends, Participant 8 replied:

“Yeah, like, when we were friends, we would be like, “Listen, here, you little bitch” we don’t mean it as an insult, or as a way to insult each other...So, I like, understand, but hooker in itself, I never really heard that being turned into a good phrase, it’s really strange, it’s caught me a little bit off guard.”

The majority of participants described how words like “bitch” and “slut” have recently evolved from expressing a derogatory meaning to an inoffensive or even positive expression described as “friendly” or “funny”. Yet, “hooker” was a word that remained distinctly derogatory to them. Only two participants reported their perceptions of all three terms as unacceptable and offensive, regardless of intention. Despite these different perceptions in meaning and usage, all participants agreed that “bitch” and “slut” are more commonly used in recent years, especially among females. At the core of this increased usage and trending definitions lies cultivation theory linking television and its repetitive messages as the medium which translates the adoption of viewed behaviour into cultural effects such as changes in language, lexicons, and cultural expressions. Participant responses seemed to indicate television’s greater influence in the translation of these once derogatory female terms into the inoffensive as the linguistic history of the words “slut”, “bitch”, or “hooker” did not provide any support for their increased adoption. Nor did history of use provide any motivation for a more polished and positive interpretation or definition of these terms. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary “slut” is defined as “slovenly woman”, “promiscuous girl especially: prostitute” or a “saucy girl” or a “minx” defined as “a sexually attractive and playful woman who often causes trouble.” Webster’s definition of “bitch is “the female of the dog or some other carnivorous

mammals,” “a lewd or immoral woman” and “a malicious, spiteful, or overbearing woman —sometimes used as a generalized term of abuse” (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.)

These definitions give little latitude for creative interpretations of their meanings, nor did they provide any evident positive reinforcement or reward for their increased use. However, the term “hooker” which was considered unacceptable by the majority of participants does provide more variety. Merriam-Webster’s (n.d.) defines hooker as “one that hooks” which may apply to a hooker position in soccer, or one who hooks wool to canvas to create rugs. It is also defined as “drink” giving the example of use such as “a hooker of Scotch.” Thirdly, “hooker” is defined as a “prostitute.” Yet, “hooker” in female interaction was considered taboo preferring the terms “bitch” and “slut.” In revisiting these definitions it became even more questionable if and how “taking back the term” creates positive reinforcement as it is based upon the necessary shared understanding that the intention to express some type of resistance to negative female labels. However, the meaning of their rhetorical use is often left unclear- again a byproduct of attempting to change a cultural definition. It seems nothing but cultivation theory explains why “hooker” would remain a taboo term. It is most likely, that “bitch” and “slut” have simply been so repetitively heard and exposed through mass media that some have adopted these terms as common usage.

Cultivation theory also provides a framework for understanding the participants’ seemingly contradictory responses in upholding a trend that caused them negative experiences and feelings. As discussed, it was as if the momentum of the trend was beyond their control making acceptance their only option. This acceptance or resignation

to developing cultural trends seemed to be of greater value to them rather than applying their own judgments based on their life experiences. Intuitively, many participants perceived mass media exposure as a powerful cultural informer capable of transmitting exponential amounts of influence than any resistance they or their circle of peers might form on an individual or local level. Gerbner (1998) describes the process in which the mass media's concentrated and homogenized repetitive messages infiltrate the common consciousness that transforms culture. Television's portrayed narratives, characters and their interaction provide a broad, basic and globally shared cultural reference. Within an entertainment context, attractive actors, backgrounds and film frames depicting laughter or lightheartedness, derogatory female terms may be dismissed as nebulous. Gerbner addresses this issue calling it "happy violence" on television (Gerbner & Morgan, 2010). Reality Television, aiming at retaining audience viewers, mixes portrayals of aggression with cultural standards of beauty glamour and power creating a more acceptable scenario. Female aggressive behaviour is often broadcast on Reality Television as constant and inevitable, cultivating viewer adoption and expectation of the portrayed behaviour in real life. Though the television clips used for this study did not depict any physical violence, Gerbner (1997) finds that depictions of social domination and exploitability may be related issues, as violence is based on a social relationship. Gerbner (1997) explains that symbolic violence whether depicted as humorous or not, is a demonstration of power. Like a thief attempting to steal and get away, symbolic violence can express an attempt to dominate another person without consequence. Gerbner (1997) explains that violence, whether serious or humorous, is essentially a demonstration of power of who can get away with what against whom. He further explains that "happy violence" is part of

today's television entertainment and is far from an era when social consequences of violence were addressed. Gerbner states that the evidence of his studies on the effects of viewing televised scenes of violence contributes to aggressive behaviour in its viewers. Moreover, Gerbner claimed that his research revealed that television's persistent portrayal of unbearable relationships affects our real world responses in ways that preserve and reinforce destructive social inequalities (Gerbner, 1997).

Exploring the affects of watching verbal aggression in the context of humor, Chory-Assad (2004) found that exposure to verbal aggression in sitcoms resulted in marginally more verbally aggressive cognitive responses than did exposure to crime drama. This research builds on Potter's (1997, 1999) suggestion that exposure to less serious forms of violence, such as verbal aggression may pose an even greater risk in influencing viewer imitation because the inhibitions associated with verbal aggression are much lower than inhibitions associated with perpetuating physical violence. Thus, humorous depictions of female direct and indirect aggression may desensitize and lower inhibitions in adopting the portrayed usage in real life.

Norms and Stereotypes

Besides language use and its evolution, cultivation theory provides a framework to explain how behavioural norms can change and how cultural stereotypes develop. In particular, cultivation theory references television as a principal communicator of norms, and stereotypes. Participant responses revealed descriptive categories of "bitch" types. There was the "main" bitch, or as one participant translated in French as "grosse bitch" which referred to an important personal female friend. There was a "bad" or "tough"

bitch referring to a female who apparently had a strong or dominant presence yet those terms seem to also carry a negative connotation. Unfortunately, the meaning of the category or stereotype of a “bad” bitch or “tough “ bitch was left unclear. Participant 5 explained her own impressions:

“If you’re a bitch, then it’s almost, not something to be proud of, but it’s something that shows strength. Because, I guess, when women are trying to be someone that’s strong, or someone like a man, they’re considered a bitch. Like, if they’re exerting their- like not their dominance, necessarily, but if they’re exerting their thoughts, or like this is what I like, and this is how I like things done. And, if they were in the same position as a man, they would be considered a bitch, whereas men would be just like, boss.”

In direct sequence, when asked if the term “bitch” ever carries a negative connotation today, the participant answered:

“I think it is still negative, even if you are referring to someone as a bitch, like someone who is in control like that, because it’s not what’s desired of that person, that’s why they’d be called a bitch.... It’s like, less desirable that she’s strong, does that make sense?”

In summary, Participant 5 perceived that if a female expressed a sense of control or authority or even clarity in her viewpoints, she could be labeled a “bitch.” However, a man with the same strengths would be called “boss” because it is undesirable or uncomfortable in our culture to experience a woman who is in control and authoritative. Yet, if a woman is called a “tough bitch” or “bad bitch” it may be a cultural expression of her strength but not without social repercussions such as this negative labeling.

The clips shown for this study showed only one clip in which a friend calls another friend “a freakin’ slut” wherein both friends are smiling and laughing. All other clips portrayed the use of these female derogatory terms within a negative context of direct or indirect aggression. That is, exchanges of these terms were made in an angry and accusing tone of voice, or were said in the absence of another female’s presence, i.e. “behind her back.” In viewing many Reality Television clips for the purposes of sample selection, the vast majority depicts female aggression, not friendly encounters. In terms of cultivation theory, due to Reality Television’s repetitive use, the word “bitch” is branded in today’s popular culture. Its constant exposure through mass media has led to a new norm in negatively labeling women. It also includes repetitive exposure of women acting aggressively with one another for no other purpose other than providing dynamic interaction for audience entertainment.

Besides normalizing these female derogatory terms, Reality Television often portrays women confronting each other over small everyday issues such as fighting for living space in kitchens and bathrooms. Sometimes the issues are greater, and the confrontation may concern spreading rumours, name-calling, or undermining a contestant’s success. Whatever the issue, the clips often depicted female confrontation as destructive and without resolution. When asked to describe the perceptions of how these clips portrayed female relationships, participant responses included: “animalistic”, “tearing each other down”, and “very venomous.” Participant 4 responded: “It’s giving us, like, you’re (Reality Television is) making us look at the bad, the bad bitchy, like, cat-fight, girl on girl, like, bad side of it.” It would be naïve to dismiss these mass repetitive depictions as nebulous given participant perceptions. Certainly, these repetitive

portrayals of women confronting each other out of anger, jealousy, or strife without any resolution influences our cultural acceptance of the “bad” bitch image and the “angry black woman” and the middle class white “mean girl” stereotypes.

Riddle & Simone (2013) explored the impact Reality Television may have on viewer’s perceptions of female relationships. Through a broad content analysis Riddle and Simone (2013) confirm that the surveillance genre of Reality Television is typically based on a competitive schemes designed to provoke and focus on significant amounts of relational aggression. That is, groups of strangers are housed together competing for a coveted reward with additional stresses of competing in minor contests, projects and challenges while being filmed almost 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Further, they note that females tend to be portrayed as particularly aggressive, using gossip, ignoring and isolating a group member, and spreading rumours. Using questionnaires, their sample population (145 undergraduate students, 70% female) reported a correlation between heavy viewers of surveillance types of Reality Television and their beliefs that females tend to act inappropriately and be more relationally aggressive than males. The study reported that exposure to surveillance programs (typical of Reality Television) also positively correlated with beliefs about the prevalence and overestimations of relationship discord in the real world.

Applying cultivation theory in Riddle and Simone’s study (2013) reveals a relationship between viewing Reality Television and perceptions of female aggression as a norm. Likewise, this thesis used reality video clips of female aggression with participant responses describing the depicted and derogatory name-calling in female interactions as “common” but also “animalistic.”

Cultivation theory provides some explanation of how the participants' report the exchange of female derogatory terms such as "bitch" and "slut" as a norm, yet simultaneously expressed their discomfort with their use. It would reason that the principles of cultivation theory, i.e. mass media, particularly television's constant presence with global and frequent exposure provides a steady and never-ending flow of messages that drive our culture to perceive these depictions as acceptable. More exposure and more repetition cultivate more imitation of viewed behaviour, without any reward or reinforcement, resulting in the evolution of a new norm. Cultivation theory positions television as a global cultural influencer wherein its influence manifests in the acceptance and adoption of portrayed. Applied to participant responses to the Reality Television clips sampled, the influence of repeatedly watching female aggression in its most negative form, i.e. without purpose nor resolution can be perceived as an accepted cultural norm by constant and repeated mass exposure that is not much affected by a single individual's disapproval. From the participant responses, it is clear that individuals differ in their feeling towards the use of female derogatory terms yet they are consistently broadcast in mass media providing a constant repetition of background noise that becomes an expected and normalized presence. Their constant repetitive presence may have become an accepted norm but the negative female stereotypes born out of these depictions are demeaning to females regardless of age or race.

Mcluhan (1964) famously coined the term "the medium is the message" referring to the symbiotic relationship the medium has in influencing the perception of the message it delivers. It seems that today mass media, and specifically, television, has become a powerful global cultural influencer that is symbiotic to cultural change. Though

individuals may resist television's influence as a cultivator, its steady repetitive drumbeat of messages constantly exposed all over the world, creates a commonly globally shared cultural reference.

RQ 2: Does reality television drive or simply mirror culture?

As social cognitive theory suggests that depictions the viewer perceives as more realistic typically carry greater influence, participants were asked about their perceptions of the realness of what they saw after each clip. Viewer awareness of production aspects used to manipulate and influence participant has been corroborated in previous research (e.g., Andrejevic, 2004; Hall, 2006; Hill, 2005; Lundy, Ruth, & Park, 2008). Similarly, Hill (2002; 2005) finds that viewers perceive viewed behaviours as exaggerated and not entirely genuine to the person. Questions exploring participants perceptions of real and authentic portrayals in the viewed clips took on slightly different forms from asking the participants if they experienced a similar situation in their own life, if they perceived the scene being real, or if in their opinion the depiction was more spontaneous rather than directed. Most participants agreed that something similar has happened to them in response to a variety of clips portraying female aggression such as: being called a "bitch" or "slut", scowling, being intentionally ignored by a group of females, a female talking behind your back, and being the subject of intentional rumours. On an individual basis, the participants seemed to quickly and easily recognize the behaviour and shared their personal experiences of similar interactions. Participants explained that this type of behaviour was common in their everyday experience. Some qualified that though the basic interaction may have spontaneously occurred, television production framed the

behaviour so as to appear even more dramatic. However, after viewing clips of Reality Television portraying female aggression, all participants for this study confirmed that they experienced a similar female interaction, or that they felt the portrayals were more real than manipulated through production. Despite these positive responses, when asked later in the interview as to whether Reality Television in general mirrors or affects culture, many answered that it does not mirror their sense of reality or culture. Though these answers seem to conflict, upon closer analysis, they do not. Each clip portrayed a short interaction of female aggression. However, a full Reality Television program may depict several conflicts in the space of an hour. One participant described it as a “condensed version” of reality. Thus, short scenes may appear real, but a sequence of aggressive scenes in a short time period can be perceived as hype. Participants also qualified that the producers may have a “selection bias” in searching for a specific type of personality or “polarizing personalities” in potential female casts.

These personalities would be chosen as likely to create ongoing drama, relational conflict, and action in each episode that would maintain audience interest. Likewise, they said that becoming contestants on these shows would only appeal to females who are ready to comply with television directors’ or producers’ affectations in portraying a character, rather than their true selves. These responses corroborate Hill’s finding (2007) that viewers do not experience factual genres in isolation but as part of a chaotic mix of factuality. That is, films clips of genuine, spontaneous expressions, behavior and naturally occurring social dynamics are scattered among more produced and practiced scenes. The combinations of genuine and contrived scenes are often edited to produce a storyboard worthy of audience share that supports a continued program series. This

produces a mosaic of factual representations and contrived scenes arranged to produce Reality Television success, but that do not always represent naturally occurring behaviour and expressions in their natural sequence.

As Participant 3 says: "...culturally speaking and socially speaking, it's a good mirror of what's going on, but it kind of enlarges, kind of a fun-house mirror, ...makes all of our quirks seem so huge." Presumably, the added drama of low volume music and altering clip sequence adds to the fun-house mirror effect. Another participant also mentioned the largess of Reality Television: "I think when we have reality TV like that we take something that is like, real and like genuine, and we turn it into something bigger so that it can be entertaining..."

In summary, participants felt that short clips were very real and agreed that something very similar happened to them. However, various clips pasted in sequence form a distorted collage of events no longer seem real but are perceived as forced or produced to support the program's needs for a storyline, drama, action, or shock value. Some participants mentioned that the numerous incidences of aggression shown throughout a one-hour program were a cinematic tactic used to retain audience attention and interest. Participants described how confrontation and conflict create dynamic scenes, whereas more mild everyday behaviour would be too plain to be considered entertainment. Though no participant fully agreed that Reality Television mirrors reality, all participants agreed that it does affect culture.

RQ 3: How do these depictions influence young women and their perceptions and definitions of feminism today?

As defined in the theoretical chapter, the scope of feminist perspectives for this study focuses on participants postfeminism perceptions of gender equality in social and political spheres, with respect to the Reality Television clips viewed. As feminism in its broadest form seeks to correct an imbalance of social and political power and aims to restore equal power to the oppressed, this study explores participant perceptions of the relational aggression among female contestants typical of the genre. Feminist issues such as stereotyping, objectification, and equal human rights are examples wherein an imbalance of power hinders the social growth of targeted individuals. Feminist perspectives are also concerned with forms of racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, and classism that can prevent individuals from seeking growth-fostering relationships (Hartling & Sparks, 2008). After inquiring on perceptions regarding the portrayed female relationships, the final interview questions asked participants about their beliefs on Feminism and portrayals of feminist behaviour in the study's Reality Television clips. This was a smooth progression as participants described how Reality Television often portrays female relationships as "animalistic" and depicts them "tearing each other down." These descriptions of female relational dynamics are contrary to feminist research showing egalitarian friendships as more fulfilling and mutually helpful to the individuals involved (Knickmeyer, Sexton & Nishimura, 2002). Yet, participants

expressed awareness of Reality Television's reliance on portrayals of female aggression as key to the programs' success. Participant 4 explained:

“...you wouldn't see on, like a reality show, like, two girls becoming the best of friends, and like, being, like, the best friends to have ever come out of 'The Bachelor'. No, you're gonna see, like, the enemies. And so like, other reality shows, like on MTV, called like 'The Challenge', and like, what their goal is' like, from years, they put people that hate each other, and they make them partners. So, like, you'd never see them put people that are friends as partners, because, like, who wants to see friends, you want to see the fighting, that's where all, like, the money is coming from...”

While cultivation theory provided a framework to explore the effects of watching female aggression on Reality Television, Feminist perspectives will be used to explore how these depictions influence participants' views of feminism today. As post-feminist attitudes and behaviours are primarily depicted through mainstream media (Douglas, 2010; McRobbie, 2009), Reality Television offers a contrary depiction of pre-feminist ideals. For example, the reality programs *The Bachelor*, *Say Yes to the Dress*, and *American Next Top Model*, maintain a strong if not sole focus on female beauty, charm, and popularity, not independence or competence. Nabi (2009) reports that viewers of Reality Television see women as prefeminist as television contestants are often depicted as investing their time and energy in seeking a husband, the right wedding dress or approval of their physical beauty. Other studies on content analysis shows that Reality Television programs often portray female behaviour in a prefeminist context of patriarchy, submissiveness and stereotypical gender dynamics (Douglas, 2010;

Fairclough, 2004). In terms of female aggression depicted on Reality Television, Dejmanee (2015) holds that the dichotomy of mother and daughter relationships in the Reality Television show “Toddlers and Tiaras” symbolically depicts a mother’s second wave feminism and her young daughter’s sense of post-feminism as diabolical. Like the aggressive scenes used for this study, this pitting of one generation of feminism with another’s often result in outrageous scenes including shouting, tears and tantrums as the younger try to break free from the hegemonic desires imposed by previous generations and their second wave feminism. Similarly, participants’ for this study described the depictions of female relationships and interactions as very negative based on aggression with peers, but not with parents nor authority figures. Two participants whose seeming intention was to describe positive feminist qualities in the viewed depictions ultimately described female behaviour in very questionable terms.

For example, Participant 5 responded:

“I think that they show like, a lot of confrontation, but they also show like, a lot of support sometimes for the other. My boyfriend calls it the ‘web of vaginas’, cause he says like all women, no matter how wrong that they are, like will support each other when they are friends, and I’m like, that’s not true.”

Participant 5 spoke as if she seemed pleased or proud of her boyfriend’s insight into a “web of vaginas.” Though referral to a female group of friends as a “web of vaginas” may be original, it is also demeaning to refer to people by their genitalia. Not only is the term debasing, Participant 5 goes on to describe his belief that women will support their

friends no matter their morals or actions, no matter “how wrong they are.” As she spoke, she seemed unaware of how dismissive her boyfriend’s description was to groups of female friends.

Another participant whose intent was to avoid any negative adjectives in described her perceptions of the portrayed viewed female relationships :

“that we’re (females) really versatile people, like we call our friends sluts and hookers, but we also can be super hypercritical when we put a front, like we are tough, and bad-asses and don’t mess with me, but when you get confronted, you like, cry about it. I don’t know, we’re versatile, no two girls are the same, everyone’s different, everyone has personality, everyone has different way of looking at things...”

The versatility this participant describes seems to show a flexibility of character that enables only a variety of negative female attributes.

As each interview came to a close, questions moved from participant perceptions of Reality Television portrayals of female relationships to how these depictions compared to the participant’s own impressions, meanings and interpretation of feminism.

Participants named what they considered foremost qualities of a feminist. The most repeated feminist quality participants mentioned related to autonomy and independence. For example, Participant 6 mentions most of the repeated perceptions of feminist qualities. She explains:

“...a woman who will stand up for themselves, and speak clearly about how they’re feeling and how something has affected them, and not let somebody else walk all over them.” According to their own ideas and impressions, most participants reported their

perceptions of the viewed behaviour as void of any feminist attitude or values. However, they also mentioned some latitude in terms of the depictions as manipulated for entertainment sake, as well as the pressured conditions in which the contestants were filmed. Most participants also recognized that personal perceptions and ideas about feminism would vary based on the individual. Participant 3 provides an example of this latitude and individualistic approaches to feminism:

“...as for myself, I would categorize them as feminists, in the sense that they believe in themselves, and they believe in their dreams and, and they actually want to have power themselves, and have more power in social influence. But, in terms of ah, um, feminism as I see it, or as I would pursue it in my life, I wouldn’t necessarily agree with that version of feminism, because to me it kind of perpetuates the idea of women as petty, and very emotionally driven, so I do definitely think that they’re mirroring some socially acceptable form of feminism, but it’s not one that I would want to be the only acceptable form out there.”

Participant 3 expressed a similar individual approach to feminism. She did not perceive feminist qualities in the depictions but felt these female contestants represent a small population. She explains that she feels most women do not act as these contestants do, and those who do may be imitating the female behaviour viewed on television.

Three of the eight participants responded without reservation that based on the behaviour viewed, none of these contestants would consider themselves as feminist. Participants reported that in the basic social interactions depicted the female contestants did not express free agency, push the boundaries of stereotypical gender or support each other in any way. Participants also mentioned that they saw a tendency to use aggressive

behaviour instead of a civil confrontation aimed at a resolution which would have better aligned with a feminist egalitarian approach.

Lastly, three participants spoke of the evolution of feminism and how the term “feminist” could be perceived as negative. Participant 8 responded that she didn’t like what she called a “pop culture version of feminism” portrayed by outspoken women who insist on their independence and refute any need of men. She felt that a woman does not have to be vocal about feminist issues, but could express feminist attitudes better through action rather than words. She talked about how the term “feminist” may not have been degraded but rather has gained a more homogenized definition that does not appeal to all women. Thus, she says that though she considers herself a feminist, negative stereotypes of feminists have resulted in a backlash of people disassociating with the term.

Participant 1 responded that:

“Through the years, it’s kind of gone through this, it was a bad thing to be a feminist, you’re crazy if you’re a feminist, you live in the woods, kind of thing. But I think the idea was still there, of just a strong, independent woman that doesn’t get typecast, and doesn’t, like, serve to please others, and isn’t afraid of, like, being expressive, and being themselves, and like, standing up for themselves.”

Similarly, though Participant 5 studied feminism’s concern for equality for not only women but all those oppressed, she responded: “I still think that they have an idea that feminists are women that are like, burning their bras somewhere, or like, men haters...”

Summarizing these results in light of feminist perspectives, the participants agreed in describing feminist qualities as personal feelings of self-confidence and

independence providing a base for expressing their self-worth and individual opinion. Many participants spoke of different interpretations of feminism, and how negative feminist stereotypes resulted in their avoidance of the term as a self-descriptor. Only Participant 5 articulated her view of feminism as part of an external political or social cause that upholds the rights of the oppressed whether female or not. All participants expressed that the behavior depicted in the Reality Television clips did not portray any feminist qualities. Some participants used conditional phrasing giving some latitude for the contestants' behavior such as their young age and the artificial circumstances in which they are filmed. A few participants wondered out loud as to whether the contestants even cared about feminism. These responses coupled with previous research on Reality Television's stereotypical portrayals of pre-feminist ideals (Douglas, 2010; Fairclough, 2004) and conflicting dynamics between pre- and postfeminist values, substantiate media's influence in cultivating feminist views. While mass media is one of the greatest disseminators of postfeminism (Douglas, 2010; McRobbie, 2009), Reality Television seems to rely on pre-feminist stereotypes void of any feminist ideals. The power of mass media to cultivate positive feminism qualities in action in political and social realms can be undermined by Reality Television's reliance on depictions of female aggression to create more dynamic entertainment.

The effects of the dissemination of feminism through mass media, as well as cultivation theory on television's cultural influence, consistently arose in tandem. For example, the use of the words "slut" "whore" and "bitch" were common to all participants' experience, as there seemed to be a redefining of these terms as less derogatory than their former meanings. However, these terms refer to females, and thus

there was no apparent standard of respect that the participants would uphold for themselves or women in general. Thus, the influence of these constant and repetitive broadcasting of images of female aggression and the repetitive use of the negative name-calling mentioned seems to uphold cultivation theory but simultaneously becomes a feminist issue. For example, the lightness in which Participant 5 describes her boyfriend's name-calling her friends as a "web of vaginas" expresses a casual acceptance of the term, even when applied to close personal friends. This is an enormous contrast to a previous era wherein Suffragettes fought for women to be simply recognized as legal persons. This acceptance of derogatory terms seems to have decimated the social respect previous feminists dedicated themselves and through hardship, achieved. In the last hundred years, feminism in its evolving forms provided a standard of conduct of respect and equal treatment for all. Today, that standard no longer seems as relevant to young females. In part, it can be attributed to cultivation theory, particularly to Reality Television's successful global outreach depicting negative female portrayals. The eroding standard may also be found in the competing voices broadcasting feminist perspectives through various media such as individual blogs or vlogs and ever more powerful mass exposure, specifically, Reality Television.

In summary, participant interviews along with a three-pronged approach applying social cognitive theory, cultivation theory as well as feminist perspectives converged to focus on potential influences and effects of viewing female aggression on Reality Television. Though social cognitive theory was relevant in substantiating possible imitation of viewed aggression, cultivation theory and feminist perspectives showed stronger application in reviewing participant responses. Further substantiated with

studies such as Riddle and Simone (2013) utilizing cultivation theory, as well as Douglas (2010) and McRobbie (2009) utilizing feminist perspectives, these theoretical approaches provide insights into the effects of viewing female aggression on Reality Television. As Douglas (2010) suggests that postfeminism is largely disseminated by mass media, it may also suggest that feminism in general is largely cultivated from televised depictions and images. However, if postfeminism views are largely broadcast through mass media, yet Reality Television in particular counters feminist views by repetitively portraying pre-feminist ideas and stereotypes (Douglas, 2010; Fairclough, 2004), feminist messages delivered through mass media can drown in the noise of constant broadcasts of pre-feminist portrayals. These opposing media messages seem not to cancel each other, but rather create both a skewed and negative association with the term feminism and perhaps postfeminism, as portrayals of female aggression are consistently filmed for the sake of entertainment. Neither message of pro-feminist or pre-feminist ideals seem to dominate but together they create a muddled view of feminism that does little to inspire young female viewers.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Limitations

Though the current study's results show potential for further research, some limitations should be noted. The most evident limitation is in the number of participant interviews. These interviews provided rich feedback and the participants felt very comfortable sharing on a one-to-one basis. However, as the method of interviewing is resource intensive, the results found in the small group of participant interviews cannot be generalized. The sample population, though of different ethnicities, were all students at the same university and thus their perspectives may differ from populations of different ages, and education levels. Thirdly, the participants viewed a sample of Reality Television surveillance clips depicting only female aggression. These clips were played sequentially which may have heightened participant attention to the female aggression. Though all participants freely expressed themselves, only two seemed somewhat shy and were distracted by the presence of a small digital recorder. Though all participants were scheduled for an hour-long interview, two participants were late, thus one or two of the interview questions were omitted for lack of time.

With the substantial age difference between the participants and me, the interviewer, I was concerned that participants would be slightly retentive. However, as I described myself as a student, not unlike them, they were all ready to share their insights and experiences. To some degree, it was if they were educating me on how their inside everyday reality functions. The participants seemed to appreciate my interest in their perceptions and experiences. They shared jargon and guidelines with me so that I may

better understand but also assimilate into the general student body. Indeed, the participants were the experts in describing their responses and I was privileged to learn from them.

Significance of the Study

The first unique finding in the participant responses is that some reported positive feelings yet negative personal experiences involving similar behaviour portrayed in the Reality Television clips presented. It appears that through cultivation process, these participants were willing to accept a repetitive behaviour as a norm regardless of how that behaviour negatively impacted them in real life. This acceptance could indicate that television remains the great cultivator of our time. Mass media, particularly television, creates a constant presence and constant exposure that has become an integral part of our global culture. It seems that the participants felt that their individual resistance countering such a global powerful source would be futile, and thus they accepted television's constant cultivating influence instead of learning from their direct experiences. It may also indicate that they do not recognize aggression in themselves and others which is a primary step in changing behaviour to prevent victimization (Goldberg, Smith-Adcock, & Dixon, 2011).

Secondly, a three-pronged theoretical framework was used to isolate and delineate the effects of watching female aggression on Reality Television on its viewers. Combining theoretical lenses helped reveal some of the more nuanced effects on viewers' perceptions. The methodology was designed to test how strongly the interview results related to longstanding theories on television's influence on the adoption of the viewed

behavior (social cognitive theory) and the cultivating of attitudes and beliefs (cultivation theory). Feminist perspectives were added as a third theoretical framework as Reality Television often portrays and relies on female aggression to create a more captivating viewing experience (Riddle & Simone, 2013). However, as the effects of media are multi-dimensional, it would be presumptuous to attribute viewing effects to one particular theoretical approach. The resulting prevalence of each theory as it applies to this study will be summarized in the following section on theoretical implications.

Thirdly, the methodology combining individual interviews with video elicitation provided an experiential component to understanding the effects of viewing female aggression on Reality Television as compared to critical or analytical essays. It also allowed a pairing of current samples of reality television as an immediate cultural reference with open-ended questions that produced insightful responses.

Practical Implications

There were indications of social cognitive theory as participants expressed a concern that these negative female portrayals could influence younger viewers looking for role models. However, findings suggest a stronger relationship in applying cultivation theory and feminist perspectives. Cultivation effects were more prominent in adopting norms of using once derogatory female terms and attempting to redefine these terms or change their affect and meaning. The application of feminist perspectives elicited participant responses that the Reality Television clips and Reality Television in general portray women and female relationships negatively. Participants also discussed a gender issue in the use of these terms if used by men or used to address men. Some

participants responded that Reality Television portrayals of female aggression influences cultural change. Others felt that there was a causal relationship between television and cultural change as television is a direct and primary source of cultivation.

However, as various television programs broadcast opposing feminist values (pre-feminist or anti-feminist values), it seems that their combined cultivation effect has eroded audience perception of clear feminist qualities. Adding to the mix of mass media dissemination of current feminist ideologies are individual blogs and vlogs professing personal interpretations of feminism. Individual and independent messages can range from messages encouraging feminism in action to messages of hatred and a belittling of any association with feminism. This practice corroborates the theories on post-structuralism wherein unified meanings are subject to individual dissemination. Yet, as opposite messages are simultaneously broadcast, they compete for attention preventing a unified message to prevail. However, participant responses were clear that mass media, particularly Reality Television, seems to be lacking in positive female portrayals. Many participants expressed awareness that depictions of females fighting and acting “animalistic” were produced for the sake of profitable entertainment. Their awareness that the mass culture prefers a type of entertainment where their gender is, described by participants as “bitchy,” “catty,” and “animalistic” highlights the probability that this type of viewing has a negative influence on perceptions of females. These responses may indicate that the participants lack accessible cultural standards, other than television portrayals, that provide guidelines as to how females should be referred to as persons.

Instead, through constant repetitive exposure, the participants seemed to accept derogatory female terms as a popular norm, and use these derogatory terms themselves to refer to other women.

As these messages are broadcast through various mass media, their combined effect seems to point to the cultivation of attitudes, perceptions, values and norms within feminist ideology. Perhaps, in the 1970's the women's rights movement was more physically present through its female leaders, rallies and events. In decades since, technology has inspired the evolution from physical communities into virtual ones. Consequently, the feminist movement has also moved from a strong physical presence to one that is dependent on mass media to communicate and influence effective social and political change.

The study's results highlight the need for media literacy providing objective perspectives identifying mass media's gender bias and stereotypes. As feminism is dependent on mass media for communication, cultivation theory becomes more critical in exploring younger females' view of feminism and how Reality Television depictions of females affect their personal development in terms of self and social relations. Instead of accepting and adopting female aggressive behaviour as a norm, women can be proactive in countering negative images of female aggression on Reality Television by sharing values and attitudes supporting equality and respect for all people at local and personal levels. As past feminism movements stimulated a social awareness for female equality, social sharing and media education may communicate a minimum standard of respect for all women countering the depictions and effects of watching female aggression on Reality Television.

Future Research

The emerging themes found in the participant interviews provide interesting research topics to explore such as the contradictions in participant responses reporting an acceptance of a cultural trend yet experiencing negative personal consequences of the same trend. Another intriguing theme to explore would be women's self-awareness of aggression that may be lightly veiled or described as "joking" when using terms like "bitch", and "slut." Also, further research could increase our understanding of how feminist messages are disseminated through social media, and how they influence the cultivation of feminist views as well as other sources of feminist dissemination. Complementary to that topic, future research may investigate the relationship between feminist and cultivation theories and what seems to be their intertwining as feminism as a social movement is largely disseminated by mass media (Douglas, 2010).

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APPENDIX A. Interview Questions

Clip 1. Reality Television Program: "Say Yes to the Dress" Season 8, Episode 11
"Rocker Brides", 7:50-8:45.

In this clip bridal consultant and client retreat into the large dressing room to try bridal gowns.

Client says she has her "hookers" with her today.

Consultant looks confused.

Client explains that "hookers" is her name for her friends. However, they are fully aware that "I am the Madame."

Consultant and client laugh.

Clip 2. Reality Television Program: "Say Yes to the Dress" Season 8, Episode 17
"Staying True Before Saying I do", 19:41-20:05.

In this clip: bride at final fitting shows gown to friend who responds with: 'Who's that freakin' slut over there?'

Questions:

1. What do you think of this clip?
2. What do you think of what happened here?
3. Why do you think the client had to explain that she was the "Madame"?
4. Would you have responded differently if you were the other person?
5. What do you think they are laughing about?
6. How do you feel when you hear other women refer to their female friends as "hookers" or "slut"?
7. Have you heard similar conversations in your own life?

Clip 3. Reality Television Program: "American Next Top Model" Season 14, Episode 1
"Be My Friend Tyra", 57:46-59:09.

In this clip: one model contestant attempts to intimidate another contestant through stares and grimaces. She later explains it was intentional.

Questions:

1. What are your general impression and comments regarding this clip?
2. What do you think of Angelea's description of her intended expression she calls the "Bitch, please." look.
3. Have you heard similar situations in your own life?
4. What do you think of women referring to other women as "bitch" ?
5. Do you think referring to women as "bitch" is becoming more commonplace in your own experience as well as in the media or social media?
6. In your opinion, what was Angelea trying to communicate?

Clip 4. Reality Television Program: “America’s Next Top Model” Season 16, Episode 2 “Alek Wek”, 7:30-9:09.

In this clip, contestant Alexandra talks to the camera in designated area: "Dahlia, I feel kind of bad for you because it's not going to be too pleasant for you anymore - on my side at least. I kind of pity you."

Questions:

1. What do you think about this clip?
2. What do you think about what Alexandra said?
3. What do you think motivated Alexandra to tape this for the camera?
3. If you think back, has something similar happened to you?
4. How do you think Dahlia feels watching this, or hearing about this video?
5. If you were Dahlia, how would you respond?
6. If you were Alexandra, would you do anything differently?
7. Do you think this could happen in real life, without cameras rolling?

Clip 5: Reality Television Program: “America’s Next Top Model” (ANTM), Season 16, Episode 7 “Eric Daman”, 14:30-15:22

In this clip: Alexandria wins a challenge test much to the negative response of other contestants who in a group decide to either “give it to her straight and tell her everything or we give her the silent treatment.”

1. Why do you think they chose to give her the silent treatment?
2. Do you think that Alexandria’s expression of confidence as “Alpha” was genuine?
3. What did you think of the other girls forming a group in order to make a group decision?
4. What do you think may have motivated their group decision?
5. If you were Alexandria, how do you think you would respond to the girls’ silent treatment?

Clip 6. Reality Television Program: “The Bachelor Pad” Season 1, Episode 1: 38:44-45:27.

In this clip: One contestant, Tenley, starts a rumor that another contestant, Michelle, has strategically “hooked up” with Craig. Michelle is then voted off as a contestant.

Questions:

1. What do you think of the rumor-spreading?
2. What do you think of Tenley and Michele, and their outcomes?
3. In your opinion, who likely to start and/or spread rumors, males or females?

Final Questions:

1. Do you think this media mirrors reality?
2. How do these scenes depict women, and their relationship with other females?
3. In your opinion, and according to your own definition, would you consider the women in these reality television programs as feminist?

Appendix B. Ethics Approval Notice

File Number: 06-14-08

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 09/22/2014



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice
Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Peruvemba	Jaya	Arts / Communication	Supervisor
Kathleen	Donovan	Arts / Communication	Student Researcher

File Number: 06-14-08**Type of Project:** Master's Thesis**Title:** Perceptions of Female Aggression on Reality Television

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
09/22/2014	09/21/2015	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A