Interrogating the Politics of LGBT Celebrity in British Reality Television

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, reality television has been one of the most prolific spaces of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) visibility in British popular culture. Yet, in almost two decades of scholarship on reality TV, very little academic work has addressed the representation of LGBT identities within this medium, outside of a small set of makeover programmes. Where LGBT visibility in non-makeover reality shows has been analyzed, these representations have been approached as largely indistinguishable from fiction texts, their status *as reality TV* passing largely unaddressed.

This thesis critically interrogates the relationship between reality television as a form, and the representations of LGBT identity found within reality programmes. Focusing on British reality shows broadcast between 2000 and 2014, this study explores how the generic specificities of reality television have shaped the ways in which LGBT identities have become visible within reality formats. This thesis argues that, in the figures of LGBT reality TV participants, tropes of authenticity, self-realization, celebrity and democracy bound to reality television itself have functioned as the discursive frameworks through which a series of normative scripts of LGBT subjectivity and LGBT life have been produced and circulated through British popular culture.

This thesis examines the representations of LGBT identity in a range of different reality formats, including *Big Brother*, *The X Factor* and *The Only Way is Essex*, amongst others, alongside the discussions and depictions of LGBT participants in extra-textual media like magazines, newspapers and blogs. Through these materials, this study interrogates how different reality formats enable LGBT subjectivities to become visible in different ways, the divergent ways in which British reality television has represented different kinds of queer identities, and how British reality shows have mobilized the conventions of reality TV to construct and delineate cultural hierarchies of "acceptable" and "unacceptable" formations of queer subjectivity.

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INTRODUCTION

> I've learned a lot about myself and I've learned to accept myself, and I really hope the British public have learned a lot about the transgender issue, and they will accept me and respect me as I go out into the public. And not only me, but respect other transsexual people (*Celebrity Big Brother*, Five, 5 September 2014).

This statement by Kellie Maloney, a recently transitioned transgender participant of *Celebrity Big Brother* UK (Channel 4, 2001-2010; Five, 2011-) in 2014, condenses a number of the discursive tropes which have structured the representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in British reality television between the years 2000 and 2014. In this quotation, Kellie positions her appearance on the show as a crucial stage in her broader narrative of gender transition, situating participation in *Celebrity Big Brother* as part of an existential journey to discover and affirm her 'authentic' self. Prior to 2014, Kellie had been known to the British public as Frank Maloney, a male boxing promoter, and appearing on *Celebrity Big Brother* as Kellie functioned as her public coming out as a transgender woman. Embedded in Kellie's claimed revelation of her intuited female identity via participation in the show, was the broader cultural conception of reality television as a space of *authenticity*; an environment in which, under the gaze of twenty-four hour camera surveillance, the 'true', essential and innate selves of those who are mediated will inevitably emerge for public consumption (Corner, 2002). It is in this discursive context that Kellie's intuited, female identity was constructed as the essence of who she 'really' was.

'Learning' in the quote above thus takes on dual meanings. First, the therapeutic and revelatory qualities of the *Big Brother* format are conceived as having enabled Kellie to connect with and articulate publicly her true and authentic female identity. Second, the mass mediation of her gender transition narrative is endowed with a pedagogical function. Kellie voices her hopes that (heterosexual and non-transgendered) viewers will 'learn' about the emotional and physical challenges of transgender life through having witnessed her own struggle represented on the show. Here, cultural scripts of participation in reality TV as an emotional 'journey' of self-revelation are implicated in the shifting contours of 'acceptance' and 'integration' for sex and gender non-conforming people in contemporary British society.

Discourses such as these, which assert the apparently transformative potential of reality TV visibility, have surrounded transgender, gay, lesbian, and otherwise gender/sexuality non-conforming participants of numerous British reality TV shows since the turn of the millennium. Indeed, by the second decade of the twenty-first century, reality television in the UK has attained a popular legacy as a space of unprecedented visibility for LGBT identities. Whilst often vilified in almost every other way, the form has been, and continues to be, celebrated by broadcasters and critics for helping to foster a climate of 'acceptance,' 'tolerance,' and 'inclusion' for sexual minorities in contemporary Britain.[1]

Operating on this dual axis, discourses of acceptance – both self and societal – have recurred with striking regularity in the context of LGBT participants in British reality TV. Brian Dowling, the openly gay winner of *Big Brother* in 2001, stated in his eviction interview that the 'high point' of his reality television experience was 'people accepting me for who I was,' whilst in 2004, the victory of transgender Nadia Almada as the winner of *Big Brother 5* was summarised in *The Times* with:

> [Nadia] had said that her reason for entering the show was to seek "acceptance as a woman". She won 3.9 million votes – 74 per cent of the vote – and one could only presume that the viewing public had, after watching her for ten weeks, really understood just what being a transsexual means, and had accepted her (Moran, 2004).

Crucially, this passage coalesces the authenticity and interactivity inherent to the reality form as not only reflecting, but as having *actively enabled* a greater awareness of transgender issues amongst the British public. By the 2010s, these discourses had become woven into the texts of *Big Brother* itself. In 2011, when the broadcast rights to the show were relinquished by the show's long-time broadcaster, Channel 4, and purchased by rival network Five, Brian Dowling was instated as the presenter of the show, a circuitous turn in his celebrity narrative, which hinted at the changing possibilities for LGBT visibility since Brain's initial mediation, and in which *Big Brother* had itself played a hand. Indeed, in 2013, *Celebrity Big Brother* UK was won by gay TV personality Rylan Clark (known to audiences at that time for having competed in reality-pop

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[1] See, for example, the documentary *Big Brother: A Decade in the Headlines* (Channel 4, 30 May 2009).

show *The X Factor*) who, upon winning, expressed his own fandom for Brian, and reminisced about watching Brian triumph in *Big Brother* 2001:

> **Brian:** How does it feel for me to actually tell you that you are the winner of *Celebrity Big Brother*?
>
> **Rylan:** Coming from you [Brian], this is a dream come true […] I have been the biggest fan of *Big Brother* […] I remember when Brian was in the house, and it [the *Big Brother* compound] was five minutes from my house, and I got on the train, I went down there […] and I screamed at the top of my voice, 'Brian!' (25 January 2013).

In this exchange, Rylan becomes metonymic for a new generation of LGBT people, who have come of age at a cultural moment in which LGBT images have become relatively normalised features of the British media landscape. By implication, Brian is positioned as the product, and perhaps even pioneer, of a previous age, in which non-normative sexual identities were only just *beginning* to become visible on prime-time television. As such, this sequence emphasizes the crucial role that reality programming has played in making non-heterosexual and non-normatively gendered people visible on British television, and in British popular culture more broadly. Furthermore, the story told by Rylan, who is only one year older than myself, resonates with my own experiences of growing up as a teenager in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As a young queer person, as well as an avid viewer of reality TV, it was in my encounters with LGBT celebrities emerging from reality television shows that I began to perceive life outside of the heterosexual norm as viable, livable, something that *real people* do (this was, after all, *reality* television). Reality TV was, however, also the place where I learned how *not* to be queer: from the militant lesbianism of Kitten in *Big Brother* 2004, to gay 'bunny boiler' Craig the following year, reality TV has made clear that acceptance is not equally attainable for all permutations of queer subjectivity, operating as a disciplinary regime in the context of sexual normativity and difference.

My own interactions with reality televisual representations of LGBT identities have therefore been contradictory and complex, at once enabling *and* restricting. Reality TV is an intricate and productive cultural form, one which offers a diverse range of potential subject positions from which to live one's sexual and somatic difference to the heterosexual norm. At the same time, the iterations of queer identity made legible in reality programming are shot through which

discourses of social, moral, and ethical value. A desire to work through these tensions, to interrogate in detail the cultural work of reality television's representations of queer subjectivities, and explore what is potentially enabled socially, culturally and politically by reality TV's treatments of LGBT people, has led me to undertake this thesis.

Situated at the intersection of media studies and queer studies, this thesis also seeks to address the striking *absence* of any sustained engagement with LGBT representations within existing academic literature on reality television. Despite over fifteen years of scholarship on the reality programming, and reality TV's status as one of the most prolific discursive spaces for LGBT representation, interrogations of queer identity within the genre (outside of the makeover subtype, as I explore in Chapter One) have remained small in number, and limited in their conceptual approach. This scholarship has largely approached reality programming as simply another set of texts within an existing trajectory of queer cultural representation in cinema, soap opera, documentary, and so on. Consequently, much existing work has failed to take seriously the ways in which the specific tropes of reality TV – what sets it apart from other forms of media – have been inextricably implicated in the shows' constructions of LGBT identity.

My primary research question, therefore, is:

What are the discourses through which LGBT identities are constructed in British reality television programmes broadcast between the years 2000 and 2014, and what are the social and cultural implications of these representations?

To answer this question, I will ask:

What is the significance of the generic specificities of the reality television form to these representations, particularly the thematics of authenticity, emotion and celebrity?

How do these discourses operate in the context of LGBT identities in different sub-categories of reality television: the game-doc (e.g. *Big Brother*), reality talent shows (e.g. *The X Factor*) and structured reality (e.g. *The Only Way is Essex*)?

How far has reality programming demarcated particular forms of LGBT identity as more 'acceptable' or 'appropriate' than other kinds of LGBT life?

Mapping national focus and time period

In this thesis, I focus specifically upon British reality television shows. These include both original British formats, as well as British incarnations of reality formats which originated in other national territories and which circulate across the globe. That said, I acknowledge that a large portion of the reality programming broadcast in the UK are not British productions in either of these senses. In the British media landscape, British shows sit side-by-side with reality programming from other English-speaking nations, predominantly the USA, and, to a lesser extent, Australia, Canada and South Africa. Shows such as *America's Next Top Model* (UPN, 2003-2006; The CW, 2006-2015; VH1, 2016-), *RuPaul's Drag Race* (Logo, 2009-) and *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* (Bravo, 2008-) (to name but three) are fascinating and plentiful sites of queer representation,[2] and in many ways appear to converge with the findings of my research here. However, to analyze these alongside British programming within this thesis would elide the crucial differences between these distinct national contexts. Although many reality formats are global in their reach, the individual permutations of these formats are very much embedded within nationally-specific social, cultural and political settings, offering images of nationhood which speak to these shows' geographical locations of production (Darling-Wolf, 2011). Diane Negra, Kirsten Pike and Emma Radley (2012: 187) have stressed the need for scholarship which engages with questions such as, 'How is the context of the national articulated in the global language of reality formats? How are ideologies of gender, sexuality, race, and class identity – conventionally the representational ground of the genre – transformed, subverted, or reified by such articulations?' My thesis responds to this call.

Attention to national specificity is particularly crucial in relation to non-normative sex and gender identities. In many ways, the cultural and political context for LGBT rights and visibility as it has developed throughout the twenty-first century thus far, is markedly different in the UK and other nations such as the USA. Whilst in America, anti-LGBT right-wing and religious factions still occupy a vociferous and influential position in social and political life, in the UK, homophobia and other forms of anti-queer animus (at least in their most obvious and explicit manifestations) are largely considered marginal viewpoints: backwards, anachronistic, and outdated. Rather than LGBT lives, it is anti-LGBT sentiment which has come to be stigmatized,

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[2] See Strings and Bui (2014) and Goldmark (2015) on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and Dominquez (2015) on the queer resonances of *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*.

and LGBT rights have been firmly positioned under the rubric of human rights (McCormack, 2012). In the 2000s, all of the mainstream British political parties have articulated an apparent commitment to LGBT rights, and in 2014, under a Conservative-led government, same-sex couples were permitted the right to marry under British law.

This particular British national context has also informed my choice of time period for this thesis. The years 2000 to 2014 marked a period of seismic transformation for LGBT people in Britain, both in terms of legislative rights and popular cultural visibility. As I explore throughout this thesis, it is therefore not entirely coincidental that this trajectory of reform was co-temporal with the proliferation and consolidation of the phenomenon of reality TV as a constant of British cultural life. The year 2000 saw the first broadcasts of some of the most popular, iconic and long-lasting reality formats on British screens, particularly *Big Brother* and *Popstars* (which would later mutate into *Pop Idol* and *The X Factor*), and the emergence of the term 'reality TV' in popular discourses (Holmes, 2004). My choice of 2014 an end point for my analysis is somewhat more arbitrary. Throughout the researching and writing of this thesis (2013-2016), the repeated emergence and circulation of new potential case studies necessitated the selection of a point of analytic closure in order for the thesis to be completed in the requisite time period. I therefore acknowledge the *ongoing* relevance of many of the representational tropes I identify and interrogate as part of this study beyond 2014, and I turn to some of these briefly in my conclusion.

Moreover, 2014 marks a crucial, albeit largely symbolic, turning point in British LGBT history. Within popular discourses this moment has, somewhat optimistically, been positioned as the end point of a process of social and political transformation which had been active since the turn of the millennium. For many commentators, 2014 appeared to mark the conclusion of LGBT rights' inhabitation the mainstream political discourse in the UK, the realization of legislative equality for LGBT people, and the final integration of sexual minorities into the fabric of British social and political life, emblematized by the passing of same-sex marriage legislation. To this end, 2014 saw the publication of various popular books seeking to take stock of this purportedly new era, some celebratory, such as the *The End of Gays* by Mark Simpson (2014a), and others more critical, such as Julie Bindel's *Straight Expectations*, in which she stated:

With all these legal and social changes, there is definitely a mood in the UK of exhilaration and victory. Legislatively, nothing now separates lesbians and gay men from heterosexuals. In the space of a few decades it appears we have gone from shame to same. The bigotry of yesteryear, when we were viewed as freaks and corrupting influences, has seemingly been replaced by a seat at the table of normality [it seems] the battle for full acceptance has been won (2014: kindle location 23-31).

As Bindel notes, such a progress narrative is incredibly problematic. Equality (if indeed it can be conceived as such) has not been equally accessible for all of those outside of the heterosexual norm. The cultural acceptance of transgender identities, for example, lags far behind the advances made by (some) gay and lesbian people. Such a celebratory rhetoric submerges the extent to which the rights of sexual minorities remain tenuous and vulnerable, particularly those further marginalized by race, class or disability.

Mapping case studies

Throughout the period I analyze, a vast number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and otherwise sex/gender non-conforming people have appeared in British reality TV shows. Clearly it is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to interrogate the ways in which every single one of these LGBT participants were represented. Rather, I focus specifically upon LGBT participants who have undergone processes of *celebrification* through their textual mediations. That is, those whose images became displaced from their originating televisual text, and circulated through other media sites in a dialogue with their originary representations. I thus focus specifically on LGBT reality TV *celebrities*, however ephemeral this celebrity may have been.[3] This focus provides a richer and more diverse range of materials for analysis, enabling interrogations of how discourses of sexual normativity and difference have moved between reality television shows and their wider discursive contexts.

Writing in the context of television drama, Jonathan Bignell (2005: 16) has argued that in choosing example texts, researchers must reconcile a complex 'duality between representativeness and exceptionalness' in their choice of case studies. Such choices are always

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[3]Embedded within my augments in this thesis, therefore, is the assertion that reality television does produce celebrities. I critique the highly problematic trend in much scholarship to denigrate reality TV participants as 'celetoids' rather than fully-fledged celebrities in Chapter One.

subjective, there is no 'perfect' example, and a text is implicitly, yet inevitably, positioned as a more valuable object of study, more representative of its wider context, than other potential choices as soon as it is chosen (ibid). In this thesis, I focus in detail upon particular case studies which I believe exhibit an appropriate mixture of typicality and exceptionalness. I address both participants whose time in the media spotlight was relatively long-lasting, provoking large amounts of discussion and debate, as well as more quotidian examples of comparatively ephemeral LGBT reality TV celebrities, whose media circulation lasted barely beyond the broadcast of the show or series in which they featured, yet which exemplify the pervasiveness of the representational tropes I interrogate. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that a large number of my case studies relate in particular to *Big Brother*. This is congruent with the prolific representational space this programme has provided to LGBT identities in comparison with other reality TV formats within the UK context. That said, whilst *Big Brother* has evidenced the *most* LGBT visibility of all British reality TV, non-heterosexual subjectivities have traversed British reality shows far beyond the *Big Brother* franchise. Indeed, as stated above, one of my key research questions is to interrogate how different reality sub-genres shape queer visibility through their particular generic, aesthetic and discursive tropes and conventions. As such, I also analyse textual case studies from reality pop programming: *Pop Idol* (ITV, 2001-2003), *Fame Academy* (BBC, 2002-2003) and *The X Factor* (ITV, 2004-), so-called 'structured' reality TV (Woods, 2012), such as *The Only Way is Essex* (ITV, 2010-), as well as other *Big Brother*-style 'game-docs' (Couldry, 2004), like *I'm a Celebrity...Get Me out of Here!* (ITV, 2002-). I discuss the different epistemological claims to reality made by each of these formats in Chapter One.

I have also selected examples which emphasize both the converging and contrasting ways in which LGBT reality TV participants have been depicted and discussed, in order to convey the spectrum of different, and often contradicting, ways in which LGBT people have been represented in British reality television. As my analysis will show, what initially appears as overarching, coherent and unified discourses of LGBT identity within British reality TV as a whole – acceptance, integration, celebration - are in fact comprised of a polyvalence of competing and contrasting representations, collating different subgenres of reality programming and divergent iterations of non-heterosexual and non-normatively gendered subjectivity. For example, in the figures of Nadia Almada of *Big Brother* 5 fame, and the maligned Sam Brodie of *Big Brother* 7, broadcast only two years apart, transgender femininity became publicly visible

through very different discursive registers. Yet, the representations of each of these celebrities formed vital, interlinking facets of an inherently mutable and contradictory discursive cluster which enabled transgender, as a recognizable form of identity, to become publicly legible within a particular cultural and temporal moment. As Rebecca Beirne (2008: 2) has argued in her study of lesbian representations in television fiction, lesbianism, as an overarching descriptor, is 'pixelated as complex patterns of lesbian subjectivities, cultural productions and representations are broken down into individual pixels, with these tiny elements of the picture then being used to explain lesbianism.' In a similar way, my project within this thesis is to pull apart the textual and representational 'pixels' which compose LGBT identity in British reality TV, and by doing so interrogate the complex cultural work these do in shaping and circulating perpetually unstable discourses and epistemologies of sexual and somatic normativity and difference in the context of twenty-first century Britain.

It is important to emphasize that I do not mean to conflate gay, lesbian and transgender identities under the homogenous labels of 'queer' or 'LGBT'. Nor do I wish to disavow the highly divergent experiences of oppression and marginalisation for different queer people, particularly as sexuality and gender intersect with other vectors such as race and class. That said, all of the identities condensed under the LGBT acronym occupy an ultimately shared position in relation to the ideologies of *heteronormativity*. Heteronormativity refers to the cultural expectation that everyone, or most people, are straight (that is, attracted to members of the opposite sex from their own). As a critical concept, heteronormativity encompasses the myriad ways in which this assumption of heterosexuality is embedded within the fabric of day-to-day life, on a range of social, cultural and political levels (Chambers, 2009: 35). The bifurcation of public toilets into 'male' and 'female', the ubiquitous imagery of heterosexual romance in advertising, and the traditional legal definition of marriage as the union of man and woman, provide just three quotidian examples of heteronormativity at work in everyday life. The logic of heteronormativity is reliant upon a binary conception of gender, in which everyone is gendered unproblematically as male or female, and where sexual desire flows from men to women, and women to men. Thus, both gay and transgender lives are characterised by experiences of what Alan Sinfeld (2000: 162) has called 'gender disaffection' - the feeling that the behavioural and sexual expectations attached to one's assigned gender do not correspond to one's intuited desires and sense of self, albeit in different ways. I therefore employ the term 'queer' interchangeably with LGBT and 'sexual

minorities' for semantic variation, to describe 'whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant,' namely, the heteronormative (Halperin, 1995: 62).[4] 'Queer' in this sense captures paradoxical construction of contemporary LGBT identities: at once relatively normalised features of the British social terrain, yet distinctly beyond the parameters of the heterosexual norm. Moreover, I believe that despite their inevitable differences, the discursive *similarities* between the representations of the gay and transgender reality TV participants I analyse here would render the exclusion of either an omission, and indeed these figures are often grouped conterminously in the popular discourses I interrogate as part of this thesis. I must also acknowledge that the celebrity case studies I analyse here concern mostly gay men and transgender women. Whilst the partial exclusion of other forms of queerness was certainly not my intention, the lesser presence of lesbians, bisexual people and transgender males within the thesis is reflective of the comparative marginality of these identities in the reality genre itself. That said, when these subject positions have appeared in representational form they have been engaged with, at the same time that I also take their relative absence as a point of analytic scrutiny in itself.

Approaching celebrity

Whilst the figures I address within this thesis are ultimately material, human entities outside of their representations in the media, in this study I am interested in them as discursively-constituted celebrities. In this thesis, I therefore approach celebrity as a discursive phenomenon, in keeping with a longstanding tradition in star and celebrity studies. Methodologically, I build upon Richard Dyer's concept of the 'star image' as articulated in his seminal study of Hollywood film stars - an approach that remains influential to this day - in which 'various media texts come together to form a particular star image' (1998). In the context of contemporary reality TV stars (or indeed any contemporary celebrity), numerous sites of visibility in a variety of different media (TV, newspapers magazines, websites, social networking platforms) interweave to form a complex tapestry of texts, which make manifest the 'celebrity' at a discursive level; a

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[4] I must also acknowledge, however, that some queer studies scholars have used the term 'queer' to refer to forms of life which escape categorisation within legible taxonomies of sexuality and gender altogether. As such, for some, the LGBT spectrum, as a culturally-constructed system of identity classification, and the concept of queerness exist in *opposition* to one another. Paradigmatic of this critical position is Lee Edelman's (2004: 17) contention that 'Queerness can never define an identity, it can only disturb one.'

multifaceted yet relatively coherent visual and audio-visual *product* which is consumed by audiences through their interactions with these representational spaces.

Whilst I acknowledge the arguments of scholars such as John Ellis (1982), who has asserted that the 'television personality' is qualitatively different from the cinematic 'star', Dyer's framework is particularly applicable to my case studies as it foregrounds the intertextuality inherent to the construction of celebrities. People do not become celebrities simply by virtue of appearing on television, but only when their televisual presence is remarked upon, gossiped about, judged and dissected in other media texts. As P. David Marshall (1997: 58) has described, celebrity is constructed through a 'layering of connotative meanings,' so that:

> Although a celebrity may be positioned predominantly in one mediated form, that image is informed by the circulation of significant information about the celebrity in newspapers, magazines, interview programs, fanzines, rumours, and so on. The celebrity, in fact, is by definition an intertextual sign. Without the domain of interpretative writing on cultural artefacts, the development of the celebrity personality would be stunted. The descriptions of the connections between celebrities' "real" lives and their working lives as actors, singers, or television news readers are what configure the celebrity status.

Marshall's conception of celebrity as a product of intertextuality is particularly salient in relation to reality television celebrities, for whom the represented bifurcation he describes between the celebrities' 'real' and 'working' lives is often ambivalent and unclear. Participation in reality television (the sub-genre of reality pop perhaps excepted) is rarely framed in both popular and academic discourse as a form of labour. Rather, reality television is frequently discussed as the mediation of participants "being themselves" in formats 'organised around […] an excess of leisured time' (Holmes, 2004a: 120). Furthermore, when the reality television series which launched a celebrity into the public eye reaches the end of its broadcast run, the visibility of the celebrity becomes entirely contingent upon representations in what would initially be perceived as intertextual media. Therefore, in this thesis, texts such as newspapers, websites and celebrity gossip magazines are not utilised simply as sites at which the visibility of LGBT reality television celebrities is critically reflected upon, but as crucial, inextricable elements of the textual matrix which comprises these figures' celebrity itself.

Moreover, the textual clusters which constitute celebrity are far from static, augmenting and diminishing in size throughout the mediated life span of a particular star, as the popularity, public interest in, and cultural relevance of the celebrity peaks and troughs over time. As Tom Mole (2004) has argued, 'Although it appears to be centered upon an individual, celebrity culture is in fact radically rhizomatic. It operates as an intertextual network in which texts from several media collectively create a public profile that is not, finally, under anyone's control.' Mole's description of celebrity as 'rhizomatic' refers to a philosophical concept from the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2004). A rhizomatic entity is mobile, flexible, nomadic and mutating, formed of a network of smaller, separate entities which interlink to collectively form something larger. These linkages are perpetually unstable, 'detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of' formation (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 13). The concept of the rhizome is useful for conceptualising how celebrities, as discursive entities, are formed both collectively and temporally. Particularly as many of the texts comprising reality television celebrity are low-cost, ephemeral and disposable media such as daily tabloid newspapers and weekly gossip magazines, the LGBT celebrities I analyze are highly unstable, and in constant processes of metamorphosis, processes which for some continue to this day. Furthermore, the cluster of texts comprising any celebrity is, by nature, fraught with ambivalence, conflict and contradiction. Texts in which a celebrity is represented emanate from a myriad of organizational and technological contexts, and so are often characterized by a collision of disparate industrial, economic and ideological investments and interests. I therefore approach the celebrity of any reality TV participant as comprised of an inherently unstable, contradictory and mutating matrix of inter-textual nodes.

Accessing the celebrity image

To access representations of LGBT reality participants beyond their televisual visibility, I used the LexisNexis online archive of newspaper articles. As search terms, I used combinations of participants' whole names (e.g. "Nadia Almada" or "Will Young"), first names combined with the titles of their shows ("Nadia Big Brother" or "Will Pop Idol") and, where applicable, first names combined with common abbreviations of programme titles found in tabloid media (e.g. "Nadia BB"). I also supplemented my use of digital archives with representations on LGBT reality stars found in my own personal collections of *heat*, *OK!* and *Attitude* magazines, those

unearthed in the extensive archive of *heat* back issues held in the British Library, and, for more recent case studies, all manner of online media. I acknowledge that, unfortunately, I have been unable to access what is no doubt a large body of representational material, particularly magazines dating from the first half of the 2000s, because they no longer exist. This is largely due to the ephemeral nature of much of this media, and hierarchies of cultural value which have demarcated which texts do, and do not, become archived for future research. As Su Holmes (2004a) has explored, for much of the twenty-first century it was weekly gossip magazines which most prolifically circulated the celebrity of reality participants. Yet, whilst the British Library does hold *heat* (probably due to its status as the most iconic 'noughties' celebrity magazine), the issues of *Now* magazine from 2004 listed on its online catalogue were declared 'missing' when I applied to access them. Whilst the fact that most celebrity-media consumption is now practiced online may go some way to resolving these kinds of access issues for future researchers, during the research stages of this thesis I couldn't help but feel that many (if not most) of the artifacts of the early/mid-2000s heyday of celebrity gossip magazines (*Now*, *new!*, *Closer*, *Star*, *Reveal* to name but a handful), are probably lost forever. However, I do believe that the continuities of discourses and representational tropes which I have identified across TV texts, newspapers and magazines in relation to LGBT reality TV celebrities offers a strong case that if I had been able access this additional material, the discourses found therein would further support, rather than challenge, the arguments and conclusions I draw within this thesis.

Methodology

In this thesis, I employ textual analysis as a means of interrogating the ways in which British reality television has been implicated in the circulation of discursive frames through which non-heterosexual and otherwise non-normative forms of sexuality and gender identity have come to be understood, in the specific context of twenty-first century Britain. More specifically, I utilize a form of discourse analysis which apprehends the ways in which discourses are produced and circulated not only through written and/or spoken words (the focus of traditional, socio-linguistic iterations of discourse analysis), but also in the layers and textures of audio-visual and visual media products. As Myra MacDonald (2003: 4) has argued, 'Visual signification […] forms part of the system of communicative practices intrinsic to discursive formation.' In reality TV, these signifiers include the performances and physical appearances of participants, in combination

with editing (the ways in which particular shots are juxtaposed to create meanings and narrative), camera angles, positioning and movement, visual texture (the grainy, CCTV-style aesthetic of *Big Brother*, or the glossy, softly-lit style of structured reality shows, for example) lighting and the use of musical soundtracks.

Broadly, I am defining discourse as the circulation of *ideas*, following MacDonald's Foucauldian-informed approach to discourse as 'a system of communicative practices that are integrally related to wider social and cultural practices and that help to construct specific frameworks of thinking' (2003: 1). Conceptualizing discourse as a *system* of communication has enabled me to analyze the ways in which discourses traverse and move between numerous different media texts and forms. This approach is in part informed by my focus upon reality television *celebrities* whose images, by definition, circulate throughout different representational spaces.

Crucial also to my methodological framework, is the argument that media texts do not represent queer identities (or indeed anything) in terms of re-presenting a pre-existent reality which exists independently, outside the parameters of the media text. As Michel Foucault influentially argued in his theories of discourse, forms of communication and cultural representation can never capture the 'real world' in any essential, pure or innate way (MacDonald, 2003: 11). This is not to argue that there is not material reality outside of discourse, but that we only come to understand our identities, those of others and the world in which we live, through the frames of meaning-making provided by discursive formations. It is through discourse that 'raw' matter becomes endowed with cultural meanings and significance. It is perhaps tautological to state that media texts have come to stand as the primary fabrics upon which we encounter discourse in modern society. As Lynne Joyrich (2015: 3) has stated, 'Television constructs our very notion of reality and how we thus come to think about, feel towards, and live with the real in ways that are, in fact, televisual.' Whilst reality television has been located within this conceptual frame (e.g. Kavka, Joyrich and Weber, 2015), scholarship has yet to explore in any extended and detailed capacity, the central role that reality television has played in the making legible of LGBT subjectivities in twenty-first century Britain.

The purpose of this thesis is therefore certainly not to assess how far reality TV and its network of surrounding texts have 'accurately' or 'inaccurately' represented a British LGBT community

whom queer reality TV participants stand in for metonymically. Neither do I seek to qualify how 'positive' or 'negative' these representations might be (a framework which still, perhaps inadvertently, creeps into academic and certainly popular analyses of queer representation to this day). Any such judgements of 'positivity' or 'negativity' are inevitably partial and subjective, and can further marginalize forms of queer life which do not fit with the idealized frames of reference posited by such evaluative analyses. Moreover, sexuality is not a static, ontological or biological fact, but, in Jeffrey Weeks' terms, 'a historically shaped series of possibilities, actions, behaviors, desires, risks, identities, norms and values that can be reconfigured and reconstituted' (2007: 4). Sexualities are culturally contingent *ideas*, which find articulation and solidification in representational and embodied form, and which are intrinsically situated within particular historical, social and political moments. Reality TV, I argue, has therefore played a crucial role in constructing and *making real* the sexual and gendered identities it has purported only to represent.

In this way, my methodology of Foucauldian-influenced media discourse analysis is intertwined with the theoretical conception of sexuality, gender and identity I am adopting in this thesis: Judith Butler's enormously influential theory of 'performativity', which is itself informed by Foucault's work on sexuality, discourse and power. At its most basic level, performativity posits identity categories 'as a matter of social and political construction, rather than the expression of some kind of essential nature' (Jaggar, 2008: 17). In this theoretical framework, gender is produced through the 'performative effects of language and signification'; it is a concept made real when we identify with it, and conduct ourselves accordingly: moving, speaking, dressing and so on, in particular, gender-coded ways. It is this process which is encapsulated in the term performativity, a process which is compelled, enabled, regulated and constrained by discourses *about* gender, sexuality and identity which circulate throughout the social realm, and which we, often unconsciously, 'cite' in our day-to-day behavior and interactions (Butler, 1999 [1990]: 185). This is not to imply that gender and sexuality are *performed* in the theatrical sense (as some early critics of Butler's work maintained). We do not choose to be male or female, gay or straight, as if donning a costume or a mask. Our positioning under these cultural signs is social and discursive, yet often far beyond our individual control (the cry of 'it's a boy/girl' at the birth of child, and the instantiated process of gendered and heteronormative socialisation, for example). These practices are so culturally ingrained that they construct the 'illusion' that gender

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and sexuality are essential and innate, and are often experienced as the emanations of a seemingly intrinsic nature. The apparent fixity and ontology of gender and sexuality are, Butler claims, '*fabrications*' mediated by 'a decidedly public discourse' (1990 [1999]:185).

In its configuration of sexuality and identity as shaped in and through discourse, however, this kind of poststructuralist theory, typified by Butler and Foucault, encounters something of a sticking point in relation to the 'real', a problematic which becomes particularly acute in the context of reality television. Whilst reality programmes are, of course, constructed and mediated cultural texts and sites of discourse, reality show participants are also living, breathing human entities, capable of agency, autonomy and resistance. As such, the ways in which reality TV cast-members perform or articulate their sexualities and gender identities cannot be approached as *wholly* shaped or determined by prevailing frameworks of knowledge, nor by the work of producers, editors and other cultural and institutional intermediaries in their construction of the texts in which the reality stars become publicly visible. As Chris Weedon (1987: 125) has argued in relation to poststructuralist theory more broadly:

> Although the subject of poststructuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is a subject able to reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives, and able to choose from the options available.

In this way, throughout the texts which I analyse within this thesis, there are moments which could be interpreted as points of resistance, made by individual reality participants, to the dominant discursive resisters and regimes of sexuality, gender, identity and celebrity at work within these cultural products. Where I have found these moments I have sought to bring them to the fore.

Moreover, my use of Butler's theory of performativity is not a direct and straightforward application of this paradigm onto reality texts. This is largely due to the fact that Butler's theory primarily concerns *gender*, whereas my focus in this thesis is largely upon representations of non-normative *sexuality* (although this does clearly intersect with gender, particularly in relation to transgender subjectivities). Butler's framework *has* been used to study media representations

of sexuality (for example, Thornham and Purvis, 2005), and in her later work, Butler has adopted a more universal rhetoric around performativity, engaging with issues of 'identity' more broadly (2004a). Furthermore, sexuality and gender are inextricably linked. Exiting cultural categories of sexuality: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, each refer to the flow of erotic and affective attachments and desires based upon the genders of both those positioned under the categorical sign, and others to whom they are, or are not, sexually attracted.

Where slight problems arise in the context of my research, are in Butler's statements around the relationship between heterosexuality, homosexuality and performativity. Butler argues that the fiction of two genders (man and woman) sustained through performativity, solidifies and reproduces the primacy of heterosexuality as the defining mode of sexual and social organization. An integral part of performatively citing a female identity is maintaining a sexual attraction to men, and vice versa. Butler states:

> The disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within in the reproductive domain. The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender - indeed, where none of these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another (1999 [1990]: 173).

Here Butler builds upon the assertions of feminist philosophers such as Monique Wittig (1992), who argued that 'compulsory heterosexuality' was one the central means by which patriarchal power was secured, through the discursive binding of female sexuality and identity to the impetus to reproduce. Clearly, heterosexuality remains the normative mode of sexual subjectivity, yet what troubles me is Butler's apparent placement of gay, lesbian and bisexual sexualities in an oppositional and antagonistic relationship to the discursive and performative processes through which heteronormatvity is consecrated. As Butler claims, the legibility of LGB identities *does* demonstrate that sexual desire does not *have* to flow from men to women and women to men. Yet, the vast majority of discourses on homosexuality circulating within the popular cultural domain can hardly be read as 'running rampant' with 'discontinuities' to the heterosexual norm, and thus exposing heterosexuality as a discursive ideal, secured through

regimes of social, political and cultural power. As emphasized by concepts such as 'homonormativity' and 'homonationalism' (both of which I engage with later in the thesis), LGBT identities have become legible within contemporary popular culture largely in ways which do not challenge the fundamental principle that heterosexuality is the 'normal', and certainly most common form of sexual subjectivity. As I explore throughout this thesis, the shifting position of (some) queer people within discourses of normalisation, social inclusion and national belonging, as well as the relatively emergent notion that gay, lesbian and transgender identities are natural, essential and innate in much the same way as heterosexuality has historically been perceived to be, emphasizes the mobile, elastic, unstable and ever-changing nature of the processual construction of sexual identities through discourse. The reliance of heterosexual primacy upon a dimorphic model of gender and the oppositional flow of sexual desire has evolved to incorporate some of the kinds of sexualities and identities which traditional iterations of performativity theory appear to hold as transgressive.

Using textual analysis

A core task within this thesis is therefore to map the changing discourses of LGBT identity as they have structured and been structured by reality TV and celebrity culture over a temporal period characterized by dramatic shifts in both the civic status and popular visibility of non-heterosexual and non-normatively gendered people, and interrogate the social and political implications of this process. This is enabled by my text-centered methodology. Textual analysis, as Elfriede Fursich (2009: 249) has argued, seeks to apprehend media products in conceptual 'moment' (my term) between production and consumption, unearthing the text's roots in historical tropes and embeddedness with broader cultural contexts. Textual analysis establishes the 'ideological potential of [a] text' in terms of what 'versions of reality' it makes legible, and consequently, how far it solidifies, or challenges, existing structures of social and political power.

I must also, however, acknowledge the limitations of such a text-centric methodology. As has long been argued, particularly in audience studies, textual analysis alone cannot tell us how audiences and consumers respond to a make use of the representations I analyze within this thesis; how far these depictions have (or have not) functioned as points of identification for LGBT people, and whether the inclusion of queer people within reality TV has actually have, as

popular discourses claim, enabled a greater tolerance and understanding of LGBT issues amongst the British populace. Neither can the analysis I provide here shed definitive light on the motives of producers, editors and other production staff in the creation of these texts, nor explore how complicit LGBT participants themselves have been in the constructions of the their celebrity images.

Since the 'ethnographic turn' of the 1990s, in which sociological methodologies, such as ethnography and interviews with audiences and industry practitioners, began to proliferate in media and cultural studies, textual methodologies have been subject to increasing critique. Textual analyses have been dismissed as 'decorative sociology', perceived as privileging abstract textualism over the "real" experiences of media users and creators, and theoretical insights over empirical data (Philipov, 2013: 201). For example, Kim Allen, Heather Mendick and Laura Harvey (2015: 374) have lamented the dominance of textual analysis in the field of celebrity studies, arguing that only by speaking to audiences can scholars attain an undistorted understanding of how 'celebrity is implicated in everyday life.' Yet, in making a case for the continued importance of textual studies within celebrity studies, and media and cultural studies more broadly, following Fursich (2009) and Michelle Philipov (2013) (both of whom have published papers entitled 'In Defense of Textual Analysis'), I would argue that there are avenues of crucial research that simply cannot be undertaken with ethnographic, people-focused methodologies, and this is particularly the case in relation to the study of sexuality and identity.

In the context of this thesis, text-based discourse analysis enables an interrogation of the ways in which the aesthetic, technological and thematic properties of reality television programming have worked to make culturally legible certain formations of LGBT identity. These forms of identity are discursive, and their very existence is *dependent upon* their textual representation. Yet, as I outlined in relation to Butler's theory of performativity, gay, lesbian and transgender identities are often experienced by individuals as if they are not discursive at all, but innate, natural and essential. The discursive processes that my textual analyses capture and probe, therefore frequently escape the conscious decision-making strategies and describable reactions of audiences and producers. Combined with the theoretical toolkits provided by writers such as Butler and Foucault, my analysis brings to the fore processes which are highly active in cultural life, yet which often pass under the radar of public legibility.

Moreover, interrogating the ways in which marginalized identities become visible in the mainstream media is a crucial and urgent task. These representations have ramifications far beyond the parameters of individual texts, becoming implicated in human life and its most fundamental level. It is through identification with these discursive norms that we become recognized as human lives at all. 'Who counts and the human? [...] Whose lives count as lives?' Butler (2004b: 17) has asked, postulating that the concept of the 'human' is unequally and differentially allocated. Not all forms of life *count as lives* within the cultural imaginary. This is particularly the case for sexuality and gender non-conforming people, whose departures from the norm can often render them vulnerable to both physical violence, as well as the symbolic violence of cultural invisibility, violence legitimized through these people's apparent lack of recognizable 'humanness' (Butler, 2009). The emergence of sexual minorities into visibility, not least in the sphere of reality TV, is therefore both enabling, in allowing certain, select forms of queer life to be recognized legitimately *as lives*, but also constraining, in its moulding of the inevitably narrow, partial and exclusionary parameters through which we are able to understand the human and make sense of human life. Visibility does not necessarily equal validation. This thesis is therefore highly attuned to the *power* of reality television as a social and cultural force. This is not to suggest that reality TV, and those who create it, are invested in any sort of formal ideological project in relation to sexual minority visibility (Turner, 2010). Rather, I interrogate the power that the representational spaces of reality television celebrity possess in their capacity to *produce* frameworks for understanding and articulating self, subjectivity and sexuality in the contemporary moment, identities which they purport merely to 'reflect' through the rubric of the 'real'.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. In Chapter One, I offer survey of the existing academic literature which has informed this thesis and contextualize the position of my project here in relation to this existing scholarly work. In Chapter Two I begin my analysis proper, interrogating how LGBT reality TV stars have been frequently represented through discursive frameworks which have positioned their visibility as signifiers of the 'acceptance' of sexual diversity in twenty-first century British society. Intervening into this popular rhetoric, I explore how these 'acceptance' claims sit in relation to the commercial tropes of reality TV, and its ability to both

humanize LGBT people and commodify their marginalization in line with the generic tropes of the reality form. In Chapter Three I focus specifically upon the role of reality TV in producing and circulating normative epistemologies of gay and lesbian subjectivity. In particular, I interrogate how reality TV's investment in authenticity has provided a discursive framework through which gay and lesbian sexualities have become commonly understood as an ontological core of self-identity for gay and lesbian subjects. Chapter Four then specifically looks at representations of transgender identity within the inter-textual spaces of British reality television celebrity, interrogating how far the 'acceptance' of transgender people in the popular media extends to the ability of their identities to cohere with normative ideals of female identity and bodily work. Finally, Chapter Five analyses how the media narratives of LGBT reality TV celebrities have discursively drawn together discourses of social and self-acceptance, positioning societal integration for the contemporary queer subject as contingent upon a particular 'proud' and accepting relationship with one's non-normative sexuality, which reproduces the socio-cultural defaultness of heteronormativity.

Chapter One:

Surveying the literature

In this chapter, I offer a survey of the existing academic literature which informs this thesis. I begin by discussing how sexual minority representations in media have been studied, analysed and researched academically, situating my own approach within this. I then move on to explore in detail the intervention of this thesis in relation to existing work on LGBT identities in reality television. Following this, I position the visibility of queer subjectivities in British reality TV within the history of LGBT visibility on British television, and the broader social and political context of LGBT rights in twenty-first century Britain. I then turn to scholarship on reality TV, situating my approach to reality programming within this thesis in relation to it. Of course, there is not space in this chapter to outline all of the many ways in which reality TV has been analysed and conceptualised academically. Rather, I engage with the areas I believe most pertinent to the focus of this thesis: defining reality television; industry, technology and interactivity; reality TV and celebrity; ordinariness; reality TV, emotion and the public sphere; and the concept of the authentic self as it is produced through reality TV.

LGBT identities and media representation

Issues of representation within the mainstream media have always been central to modern LGBT politics. Much popular, activist and scholarly critique has been galvanized by what Richard Dyer (1993: 1) has described as, 'the feeling that how social groups are treated in cultural representations is part and parcel of how they are treated in life, that poverty, harassment, self-hate and discrimination are shored up and instituted by representation.' Yet, despite the central positions of television as medium for the construction and circulation of cultural representations, as Alexander Doty and Ben Gove (1997) have argued, studies of queer identities on TV have historically lagged behind the more developed field of queer film studies, both quantitatively, and in the sophistication of the analytical and conceptual approaches employed. Analyses during the early years of the Anglo-American gay rights movement in the 1970s were characterized by what Glyn Davis and Gary Needham have termed the 'evaluative paradigm' (2009: 2). In this evaluative approach, representations of lesbians, gay men and, less frequently, transgender people, were assessed in terms of how 'positive' or 'negative', 'good' or 'bad' they were perceived

to be (Doty and Gove, 1997). This framework hinged upon highly subjective notions of what a 'good' or 'bad' representation does, should, or could look like. Generally speaking, this subjective criteria often translated into an evaluation of how far these depictions of gay life were seen to advance (or hinder) a liberal gay rights agenda centered upon legislative equality and social toleration.

Whilst it was initially the product of a specific historical moment, resulting from the expansion of a gay rights consciousness across certain sections of the British and American social and political spectra, the evaluative paradigm continues to thrive in the present moment. In the UK, LGBT campaign groups and charities such as Stonewall and Trans Media Watch continue to lobby and campaign for what they envision as 'better' and more 'progressive' representations. Academic approaches have, however, mostly moved on from this subjective, and often simplistic, evaluative approach. Since the 1990s, when the visibility of LGBT people began to expand exponentially across Anglo-American television (Walters, 2001), scholarship has come to acknowledge that a 'good' representation is always partial and selective, and that assertions of the value of certain representational tropes over others can work to further marginalise queer forms of life which do not fit within this idealised mould of 'progressive' visibility. In this way, queer television studies of the last two decades has shifted towards a more nuanced approach, based less on evaluations of supposed 'quality' of televisual representations of LGBT life, and has become more concerned with interrogating what these representations *do* (Heller, 2010).

This has involved critically interrogating how LGBT visibility on television has shaped the ways in which ideals of normalcy and difference come to be understood in relation to sexuality, gender, and the self in cultural life more generally. Much of this later scholarship has been influenced, either explicitly or implicitly, by the rise of queer theory within the Anglo-American academy, and its displacement of the older field of lesbian and gay studies (a label which is rarely used to situate scholarship today). As Kristen Moana Thompson (in Bronski et. Al, 2006: 119) has noted, this epistemological shift engendered 'broader explorations of sexual practices, identifications, and representations that were not restricted to questions of identity, communitarian politics, and/or affiliations.' Work on queer representation on television since the 1990s has largely moved away from a conception of these depictions as 'accurate' or 'inaccurate' reflections of a 'gay community' which (pre-)exists independently, outside the parameters of the

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televisual text. Rather, mobilizing queer theory's concern with the ways in which subjectivity is forged in and though discourse, queer television studies has sought to understand and critique the role of television in making legible certain discursive formations of sex and gender; interrogating the role of television in 'defining who and how we can *be'* (Poole, 2013: 279). Lynne Joyrich (2009), for example, has asserted that our knowledge of sexuality is increasingly the product of what she terms 'the epistemology of the console,' pointing towards some of the ways in which television 'constructs [...] knowledge' about sexuality. TV, she contends, plays a significant role in 'the ways in which we, as subjects, come to know sexuality through television's scanning look' (2009: 20-21). In this way, as both some of the most prolific spaces of LGBT visibility in the British mainstream media, and as a media form heavily invested in notions of authenticity, emotion and subjective truth, *reality television* can, and should, be approached as a core televisual space at which cultural meanings of sexuality and the self are constructed.

Joyrich's description of 'television's scanning look', however, suggests a conceptualization of television similar to scholars such as John Ellis (1982), who have approached TV as a series or procession of transient, ever-changing images; repetitive and sequential, commanding on a casual 'glance', as distinct from the apparently more intense and absorbing 'gaze' of the traditional cinema viewing experience. In the context this thesis, such gaze/glance distinctions are difficult to reconcile with reality TV, a form characterized by intimacy and confession, where viewers are invited to be drawn into the emotional and affective worlds of participants over an extended temporal period. The intimate and affective peculiarity of reality TV means that its role in the production of what Foucault called 'truth claims' (Butler, 2004) - discourses and epistemologies which work to enable and delimit how we are able to cognize and articulate our own identities, and understand and make sense of those of others - is ever more pronounced. An exploration of how far reality TV elicits a gaze or a glance, or whether these are useful categories for thinking about television consumption at all, are not central concerns of this thesis. However, it is important to emphasise how far many of the discourses I interrogate here are invested in a perception of the power of reality TV to make a sustained intervention into people's daily lives, on a highly emotional level.

Furthermore, reality TV's resistance to positionality within Ellis' dichotomy of glance and gaze, emphasizes the importance of attention to generic differentiation *within* the realm of television

programming. Different kinds of television, and indeed different kinds of reality television, are subject to highly divergent aesthetic, technological and thematic tropes and conventions. As scholars such as Joshua Gamson (2005; 2014) and Katherine Sender (2014) have argued, these points of differentiation mean that images and discourses of LGBT identity are constructed in distinct ways, tied to the conventions of the specific media forms in which they are represented. A core concern of this thesis is with the question of generic specificity in reality TV's depictions of LGBT people. I interrogate how the specific tropes of reality television - particularly the themes of emotionality, intimacy, confession and excess - have worked to shape certain normative conceptions of LGBT subjectivity, and how these conventions have worked to demarcate cultural scripts around what constitutes 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' formations and articulations of queer identity within contemporary British society.

LGBT identities in reality television

Cognisant of the role (sub)-generic specificity can and does play in enabling and delimiting how different forms of identity are able to become visible within popular culture, one of the primary interventions of this thesis is to take reality television seriously *as a form*; one which has played a crucial role in the construction and circulation of images of queer life throughout the twenty-first century. Despite over fifteen years of scholarship on reality television, academic interrogations of queer identity within the genre have largely followed two limited trajectories. On the one hand, scholarship has focused intensely upon the makeover subgenre of reality programming, with the North American incarnation of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Bravo, 2003-2007) occupying a particularly canonical position within this literature. Early collections of essays exploring issues of sexuality and gender in reality programming, published in the journals *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*[5] and *Feminist Media Studies*,[6] for example, both featured *Queer Eye* as a prominent textual case study. Many of these studies, and those published since, have explored how the insertions of gay male identities within the makeover paradigm have worked to shape certain normative conceptions of modern homosexuality, particularly the notion of gay man as exemplary consumers of fashion and lifestyle products (for example Papacharissi and Ferback, 2008; Gamson, 2013; 2014). This privileging of makeover shows in

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[5] Volume 11, Number 1: 2005.
[6] Volume 4, Number 2: 2004.

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analyses of queer visibility in reality TV continues in current scholarship. Gamson's (2014) essay on queer visibility in the recent collection *A Companion to Reality TV* (edited by Laurie Ouellette), whilst perceptively asserting the importance of sub-generic specificity to these representations, focuses in detail largely upon depictions of gay men as 'style mavens and GBFs [gay best friends of heterosexual women]' in reality programming centered upon fashion, beauty and lifestyle consumption. In addition, small bodies of research have addressed gay dating shows in both a British and American context, such as *Boy Meets Boy* (Bravo, 2003) and *Playing It Straight* (Fox, 2004 (US); Channel 4, 2005, E4, 2012 (UK)) (Kolemaninen and Makinen, 2007; Richardson, 2009; Tropiano, 2009; Alderson, 2014). At the time of writing, there is also a burgeoning scholarship around the *RuPaul's Drag Race* franchise (Daems, 2014; Strings and Bui, 2014; Goldmark, 2015; LeMaster, 2015).

I would argue that all of these texts are, however, exceptional rather than typical examples of LGBT representation within the landscape of reality television. Each of these shows take gay sexuality as a central concern, featuring casts of mostly gay participants. These formats' constructions of 'queer worlds' (Gamson, 2014) – televisual spaces where *not* being heterosexual is the norm – is perhaps why scholars have been so drawn to them as objects of analysis and critique. However, and certainly in the UK context, the most prolific, repeated and sustained representations of LGBT identity on reality television have been in formats in which queer people occupy a minority position within a largely heterosexual cast. It is therefore programmes of this nature, such as *Big Brother*, *The X Factor* and *The Only Way is Essex*, which I address within this thesis.

The small body of existing work which *has* interrogated this kind of reality programming has, however, largely approached reality television as simply another set of texts within an existing history of queer representations in film, soap opera and documentary (for example, Pullen 2004). Perhaps the only notable exceptions here is Misha Kavka's consideration of the queer dimensions of the affectivity of reality TV in her monograph *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy* (2008), which I engage with in more detail later in this chapter, and in Chapter Two. In the majority of existing work, however, the significance of the specific tropes and qualities of reality TV - what sets it apart from other forms of media - have passed largely unaddressed. For example, in her study of the online reception of gay participants of *Survivor* (CBS, 2000-), Kathleen LeBesco

(2004: 271) noted, 'Because these characters are framed as honest-to-goodness people and not merely figments of wild Hollywood imagination, their representations and reception carry significant weight in reaffirming or altering ideas about sexual difference.' LeBesco points towards a relationship between the claims to 'reality' specific to reality TV, and the socio-political ramifications of the form's depictions of gay-identified people, yet she does not carry this observation further in her analysis.

LeBesco's piece is one of the earliest analyses of gay identity in reality TV, having been published in one of the first edited collections which sought to situate reality TV as an important object of academic inquiry (*Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, edited by Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (2004)). Yet, even more recent interrogations of the ways in which non-heterosexual identities become visible in (non-makeover) reality programming have continued to exhibit this lack of sensitivity to generic specificity. Balazs Boross and Stijn Reijnders (2014) have studied the Dutch reality show *Uit de Kast* (KRO, 2010-2013), in which a film crew document young people as they come out as lesbian or gay to their families and friends. Boross and Reijnders argue how, in the programme, the process of coming out is constructed as a profound ritual transition for the young, gay participants through the fact that it is mediated for public consumption, which works to cement the media's broader symbolic power. In this analysis, however, the significance is located simply in the fact that the coming out ritual is mediated, rather than how it is mediated specifically through the thematic and aesthetic tropes of reality TV. From my own viewing of the show, I would argue that central to the text's construction of the coming out ritual, are the claims to facilitating the revelation of authenticity and subjective truth embedded specifically in the reality televisual apparatus: the raw intimacy of the shaking, handheld camera work, and the group therapy-esque sequences where families sit together and discuss the young queer person's revelation, for example (I discuss these reality TV tropes more detail later in this chapter). Notions of authentic self-representation possess a high level of currency in reality TV, and I would argue that the show's mobilisation of these authenticity discourses is one of the core mechanisms through which the apparent existential profundity of the participant's articulations of their gay and lesbian identities is ratified.

The most sustained interrogation of the presence of gay participants in reality TV has been made in the work of Christopher Pullen, particularly his monograph *Documenting Gay Men: Identity*

and Performance in Reality Television and Documentary Film (2007), and a preceding selection of articles. Pullen has conceptualised reality television as the contemporary extension of a tradition of politicised queer documentary making: focusing specifically upon gay male reality show participants, he approaches these figures as 'political agents' who, in 'alliances' with programme producers, deliberately and tactically utilise their media visibility to alter public perceptions of gay masculinity. Harking back problematically to the evaluative paradigm of the 1970s, Pullen's work has sought to assess the political efficacy of reality TV through an implicit criteria of how far it is able to *transcend* its status *as reality television*, how far it can abandon the established generic conventions of the reality form, and replicate the explicitly political documentaries with which he seeks to align it. In one particularly polemical passage, he states:

> The ideal performative context for gay identity in reality television should include the provision of discursive arenas less concerned with format obstacles and twists (designed to entertain the heterosexual majority) and more concerned with issues that directly affect the gay community, such as marriage rights and adoption rights, as well as legal protections (2006: 173).

Notwithstanding his highly problematic bifurcation of reality television audiences into queer spectators who are by definition invested in and supportive of LGBT civil rights movements, and the 'heterosexual majority' who, ostensibly, do not particularly care about such issues, Pullen rejects any in-depth engagement with the ways in which the generic and narrative norms of reality television programming (dismissed as superficial 'format obstacles and twists') are inextricably embedded within these texts' representations of gay identity. Rather, he attempts to describe his vision of an 'ideal' televisual context for representing gay identities, an imaginary form of programming more akin to a current affairs talk-show than any recognisable incarnation of reality TV.

My departure from this form of analysis is crucial to the intervention I seek to make in this thesis. I am interested not so much is what reality television *should or could do*, but the significance of existing generic specificities of the reality television form to its representations of LGBT identity. Rather than dismissing these conventions, I will critically interrogate what they have enabled, in terms of the ways in which LGBT people have become visible, and the discursive configurations of LGBT subjectivity these representations have produced.

Indeed, I would argue that Pullen's conception of reality participants as 'political agents' galvanised to serve a liberal gay rights agenda of marriage, adoption and other legal rights, is extremely difficult to reconcile with the majority of reality programmes. As I explore in Chapter Two, the apparent political potentiality of reality televisual representations of LGBT identities has been repeatedly located, by broadcasters and popular commentators, in the format's investment in the *personal* and the *emotional*, and apparent refusal to engage directly in political debate as this has been traditionally understood. In particular, and somewhat ironically considering Pullen's approach, those who have made this argument (such as Peter Bazalgette (2001), the former head of Endemol UK, the British arm of the Dutch production company which created *Big Brother*), have emphasised the socially transformative potential of reality TV's *departure* from the didactic mode of address of traditional, 'issue' driven documentaries. Further, in opposition to Pullen's work, Kavka (2008: 63) has argued that one of the distinguishing features of reality television is the ways in which these shows do '*not* pretend to representativity' in their inclusion of participants from subaltern groups [emphasis added]. She states:

> Ultimately, [participants] do not represent anyone but themselves, which is to say that the representative category, such as 'gay guy', informs their individual characterization, rather than vice versa [offering] a vividness of individuating detail for each participant that far exceeds his/her representative value (ibid: 65).

Whilst I agree that many of the discourses around sexual diversity in British reality TV are invested in the idea that sexual minority participants have not been included to 'stand in' as metonymic for a larger social group, I would argue that Kavka in some ways over-emphasises the extent to which LGBT figures in reality TV are divorced from a representative status. As I explore in Chapter Two, these discourses are ambivalent and complex. In many ways, it is the apparent ability for sexual minority reality TV participants to transcend their alignment with a larger identity category - how far we become acquainted with them as individual *people* rather than as a tokenistic incarnation of queer identity - that is perceived to possess a progressive and transformative power for public acceptance of that minority group, *because* this groups can now purportedly be perceived as a collection of 'real' individuals.

The complex entanglements between discourses of the personal and the political which the visibility of queerness within the representational spaces of reality TV entails, come to the fore in

Anita Brady's (2011) analysis of the gay *American Idol* contestant Adam Lambert. Brady explores Lambert's (apparently self-motivated) decision not to come out publicly as gay during his time on the show, his post-coming out refusal to align himself with mainstream gay civil rights movements for legislative equality, his (homo)sexually provocative performances, and flamboyant glam-rock inspired, gender-ambiguous appearance. In turning away from what is seen as formal gay politics, Brady contends that Lambert enacted a different kind of politics, a queer politics, opening up a discursive space which complicated the hegemonic positioning of the normatively gendered, desexualised, politically aware and socially responsible gay person as the 'acceptable' and 'desirable' model for openly gay celebrities in contemporary America.

Brady's analysis highlights how the circulation of Lambert's queerness jarred with existing discursive registers, which had worked to regulate the kinds of queer identity which were 'appropriate' for visibility within mainstream popular culture. Whilst the increasing pop-cultural visibility of LGBT people has done cultural work in expanding the range of sexual and gendered subject positions legible within the popular imaginary, numerous scholars have argued that this augmented visibility has also led to an intensified *regulation* of queerness within the public sphere (Walters, 2001; Reed, 2005; Kolemainen and Makinen, 2007; Gamson, 2014). This regulatory process is particularly pronounced in the context of reality television, which has been discussed as form of media which is often self-consciously framed as offering an intervention into the ways in which participants are conducting themselves as citizens of contemporary society, 'offering techniques for the management of self-identity in late capitalism' (Ouellette and Hay, 2008). A core research question of this thesis concerns how the insertion of queer identities within the regulatory tropes of reality TV has worked to demarcate certain normative ideals around the 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' ways in which to conduct oneself as an LGBT subject in twenty-first century Britain.

The history of LGBT representation on British television

The history of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender representation on British television across the twentieth century is, at the time of writing, yet to be subject to a detailed and extended scholarly interrogation.[7] As Keith Howes (2005: 52) has argued, 'Television has been

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[7] This is in contrast to LGBT (or L and G at least) representation in US television, which has been documented in several monographs (e.g. Tropiano, 2002; Becker, 2006).

inadequately rendered as part of [British] gay and lesbian artistic and cultural history.' Howes suggests that the marginality of television in both academic and popular histories of British queer cultural production and representation, stems from a combination of access issues – a large portion of early British television no longer exists – alongside a lingering devaluation of television as a cultural form. Whilst an attempt to address this striking gap in both queer cultural history and television historiography in a UK context is clearly beyond the parameters of this thesis, it is pertinent to offer a brief history of LGBT representation on British television, and the ways in which this history has been conceptualized in existing scholarship, in order to establish the representational and scholarly history from which queer visibility on reality TV, and the academic writing about it, has emerged.

In the majority of existing scholarship, the history of queer people on British TV has been condensed into a discourse of invisibility and caricature. To quote from Gwenillan Jones' contribution to the text book *Television Studies* (edited by Toby Miller) as exemplification:

> Until the late 1980s, explicit representations of lesbians and gay men were rare in television programmes. Where they did occur, they usually repeated the same old stereotypes: limp-wristed sissies […] confused and unhappy young men […] or aggressive butch lesbians […] Lesbians and gay men were represented as deviant, tragic, predatory and/or comic figures. Their presence on the small screen was intended to elicit horror, laughter, pity or disgust from a mainstream heterosexual audience (2002: 109).

Whilst examples of the kinds of stereotypes listed by Jones were a feature of British television history, Howes has pointed out some the varied shades and textures of queer visibility on British television since the 1950s, arguing that images of 'comic queens with flapping wrists and piping voices' were broadcast in tandem with 'generally liberal viewpoints and relatively diverse characterizations' (2005: 52). Howes' assertion of the historical heterogeneity of queer representation in British television is particularly important for studies of contemporary representations, such as this thesis. This is because inter-textual commentary surrounding sexual minorities in the contemporary media often works to fix particular frames of meaning to these representations through the evocation the kinds of oversimplified renderings of queer British TV history encapsulated in the quote from Jones cited above. In extra-textual discourses, contemporary LGBT visibility has been frequently endowed with political and transformative

potentiality (or lack thereof), because they are perceived to mark a *break* from, or continuation of, in more pessimistic commentary, a partly-imaginary history of queer representation in which every LGBT person made visible on television before the 1990s was a wretched or ridiculous stereotype.

According to Howes (2005) and journalist Terry Sanderson (1995), the first known programmes to explicitly address the subject of homosexuality were broadcast on British television in the 1950s. In 1954, the current affairs show *In The News* featured a segment on homosexuality, and in 1957 Granada television broadcast a documentary entitled *Homosexuality and the Law, a Prologue*. The 1950s have been characterized by historians as a decade of increasing public interest in homosexuality in mainstream British culture (David, 1997; Jivani, 1997). This climate of augmenting public awareness of homosexuality was galvanised in large part, as the title of Granada's documentary suggests, by the publication of the Wolfenden Report in 1957, a parliamentary initiative which explored the possibility of legalizing sex between men. This period also saw a spate of widely-reported homosexual scandals involving public figures, such as the aristocrat Montagu Wildeblood, the actor John Gielgud, and the Labour MP William Field, further increasing public interest in the figure of the homosexual (Sanderson, 1995; David, 1997).

Whilst the dominant discourses on homosexuality circulating within British popular culture during the mid-twentieth century positioned homosexuality as form of medical and social deviance, a 'problem' which heterosexual society must take it upon itself to address (Pearce, 1973; Thornham and Purvis, 2006), individual representations – where they still exist to be viewed – are fraught with complexity and contradiction. The earliest surviving representation of homosexual identity on British television (in the archives of the British Film Institute), an episode of the current affairs show *This Week*, broadcast in 1964 and simply entitled 'Homosexuals', asked, 'What is it like to be a homosexual male in Britain today, whose only choice is between a lifetime of complete sexual abstinence, or being a criminal?' These opening lines, delivered by the (heterosexual) reporter Bryan Magee, work to frame the programme's treatment of 'homosexual' identities in a public service-oriented rhetoric of didacticism and understanding, complicating any attempt to read the broadcast as inherently homophobic. Further, from my own viewing I would argue that the broadcast, which is composed largely of

interviews between Magee and various anonymous homosexuals, exhibits a complex tension in its representations of these men, constructing them both as *objects* of heteronormative scrutiny, judgement and perverse fascination ('Most normal people find what you do disgusting' Magee informs one of the participants, who are all shot either from behind or in silhouette in order to conceal their identities), and as *subjects*, endowed with the capacity to articulate and make legible, often in quite emotional registers, their stigmatized identities in their own voices. Although there is not space here for a more thorough analysis of this text, the programme illuminates how far the discourses of emotional connectivity, object and subject, and agency and constraint, which, as I explore throughout this thesis, have been central to the construction of LGBT subjectivities in twenty-first century reality programming, have a long and complicated history.[8]

Whilst the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s are largely uncharted territory in terms of scholarly analyses of queer representation on British TV, the 1980s and 1990s *have* been subject to more concentrated interrogation. This is in large part due to the creation of Channel 4 in 1982, which, in both popular and scholarly discourses, has been attributed with transforming the ways in which sexual minorities were made visible on UK television. Channel 4 was established with a statutory remit to offer programming for 'minority' audiences not served by the three existing channels (BBC1, BBC2 and ITV). According to Nial Richardson (1995), Channel 4 was heavily influenced by the identity politics which had emerged in the 1970s and become consolidated in the 1980s: second wave feminism, the black civil rights movement, and gay liberation. Furthermore, Channel 4 was initially funded through a levy financed by ITV, which, as Jane Arthurs (2004) has argued, enabled a relative freedom for Channel 4 to be experimental and provocative in the representations of sexuality offered in its output, without fear of commercial reprisals. To quote Richardson (1995: 220), Channel 4 thus established itself as a 'minority channel: political, liberal, vaguely left-of-centre, community oriented, experimental, even arty, and willing to tackle 'difficult' 'adult' themes, notably sex and sexuality.' Queer-themed broadcasting on Channel 4 in the 1980s and early 1990s included *In the Pink*, a series of gay and

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[8] Similar tensions are to be found in editions of the BBC current affairs series *Man Alive* addressing the subject of homosexual men ('Consenting Adults: The Men') and lesbians (Consenting Adults: The Women) broadcast in 1967.

lesbian themed films, *Six of Hearts*, *Framed Youth*,[9] and *Out* (originally *Out On Tuesday*), a magazine show addressing gay and lesbian issues. [10]

In the late 1990s, however, Channel 4 became responsible for selling its own advertising space, at the same time that the channel was still mandated to remain faithful to its public service remit. In this context, the channel used programmes featuring, and about, LGBT people to perpetuate its 'alternative', 'edgy' and controversial, diverse and inclusive brand identity, whilst appealing to lucrative, advertiser-friendly youth demographic, and at the same time demonstrating its commitment to representational diversity in its output (Edwards, 2009). It was at this cultural moment that reality television was born, and I discuss how the sexually diverse casts of *Big Brother* have been articulated as part of this strategy in Chapter Two. Moreover, By the late 1990s, the liberalization of attitudes towards sexual minorities seemingly encapsulated in Channel 4's output had spread across the spectrum of British television (McNair, 2002). Popular drama series such as *This Life* (BBC, 1996-1997) and *Queer as Folk* (Channel 4, 1999-2000) centralized gay issues, BBC2 broadcast the comedic gay-themed magazine programme *Gaytime TV* between 1995 and 1999, and openly gay and lesbian comedians and presenters such as Rhona Cameron and Graham Norton, and drag queens such as Lilly Savage and Dame Edna Everage circulated widely on British TV (Howes, 2005). It had also, by this time, become almost commonplace for British soap operas to include gay characters (Bradley, 2013). *Coronation Street* (ITV, 1960-) introduced British soap's first transgender character, Hayley Cropper, in 1998, the same year that the Eurovision Song Contest was broadcast from London, and won by the Israeli transgender singer Dana International, whose song 'Diva' reached number 11 in the UK popular music charts.

Contextualising the social, cultural and political status of LGBT people in British society

This proliferation of LGBT visibility on British television in the late 1990s continued to expand throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, and into second. During this time, reality television has come to stand as one of the most prolific spaces of LGBT representation within the popular media. Due to the amount of queer visibility it has provided, the ascent of reality television can be positioned as an integral facet of a broader cultural process, spanning media,

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[9] For an analysis of this programme see Franklin (2014).
[10] See Richardson (1995) for an analysis of this programme.

politics and activism, which has been conceptualized by scholars in a variety of disciplines, including cultural studies, politics, sociology, and law. In this process, sexual minorities have been discursively reconstituted from 'deviants', 'perverts' and criminals occupying necessarily peripheral positions in British social life, to purportedly accepted and legitimated members of the British social body. Between the years 2000 and 2014 - the time period that I focus on within this thesis - the civic status and cultural visibility of LGBT people in Britain changed exponentially, perhaps more so than in the entire century before. According to Jeffrey Weeks (2007: 3), this temporal moment has played host to a 'profound revolution that has transformed the possibilities of living our sexual diversity and creating our intimate lives', and in Mark McCormack's terms, was characterised by a 'zeitgeist of decreasing homophobia' (2012: 60).

Numerous academic works have identified the coming to power of the New Labour government in 1997 as central to this apparent zeitgeist of augmenting acceptance of sexual diversity in British social and political life. As many researchers have explored, the rhetoric of the UK Conservative governments of the 1980s and early 1990s was deeply homophobic, and sought to bind notions of social, political and national inclusion firmly, and exclusively, to heterosexuality (David, 1997; Arthurs, 2004; McCormack, 2012). In contrast, as David Bell and Jon Binnie (2000: 112) have argued, New Labour offered a vision of a 'new 'progressive' British nationalism that embrace[d] cultural diversity and pluralism.' In his victory speech on 2 May 1997, Blair promised 'a Britain renewed... where we build a nation united, with a common purpose, shared values, with no-one shut out or excluded' (cited in Levitas, 2005:1). It was under the aegis of this inclusionary rhetoric that, throughout their time in office (1997-2010), New Labour passed a trajectory of legal reform (Figure 1), which worked to discursively re-position LGBT people within the national fold, marking, to quote Carl Stychin (2003: 33), 'an hegemonic shift in the extent and degree to which homosexuals [were] viewed as 'outsiders' to this imagined [national] community.' Britain was no longer to be conceived within the political imaginary as comprised of a white, Christian, heterosexual majority, alongside various minority racial, ethnic, religious and sexual others, but as 'New Britannia,' defined by a kind of homogenous heterogeneity: diverse, multicultural, pluralistic, and proud to be so (Springer, 2014).

New Labour's apparent commitment to LGBT rights was one of a broader political project to foster a 'meritocratic' British nation. Meritocracy, broadly defined, refers to 'the idea that

whatever our social position at birth, society ought to offer enough opportunities and mobility for 'talent' to combine with 'effort' in order to 'rise to the top'' (Littler, 2013: 52). Through this optic, the role of the state was to mitigate structural homo- and transphobia, and to facilitate a social and political landscape in which non-normative sexualities and gender identities did not inhibit an individual's ability to achieve success, howsoever defined. As I explore throughout this thesis, the imbrication of ideals of sexual liberalism with discourses of meritocracy has been played out frequently in the texts of British reality TV, where numerous LGBT participants have attained public popularity, celebrity status, and lucrative media careers in spite of, or, as I explore in this thesis, *because of*, their non-normative sex and gender identities, due to their perceived innate suitability for mediation. Writing in the early years of the twenty-first century, Jo Littler (2004: 10) argued that the expansion of reality formats concerned with the construction and circulation of celebrities was inextricably bound to 'the political conjecture we inhabit in terms of the Blairite *vision* of Britain as a 'meritocracy.' These shows, Littler claimed, offered narratives which paid testament to the seemingly new-found capacity for 'ordinary' people from humble backgrounds to be catapulted into celebrity though the requisite application of talent, tenacity and hard work. As Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (2005: 144) have noted, in the early years of the New Labour administration, 'arts and entertainment celebrities [particularly reality TV stars] gained prominence as exemplars of a new meritocratic and essentially *modern* democratic social realm.' Writing in the context of race, Paul Gilroy (2013: 23) has explored how Tim Cambell, a young black man and the winner of the reality show *The Apprentice* (BBC, 2005-) in 2005, was constructed in the British press as 'the poster-boy for what was then spoken of as a rising tide of interest in entrepreneurship among Britain's ethnic communities,' delineating 'the idea that racism is no longer and significant obstacle to individual success' (ibid: 25).

Whilst it is, of course, problematic to align sexuality and race, it is certainly the case that such millennial visions of a democratic and equal social realm in which (formerly) marginalized people were able to attain capitalistic success and media visibility by working hard or applying their 'natural' talents (howsoever defined – see below for a discussion of this in relation to reality TV) have also been central to the construction of LGBT identities in British reality TV. I take this up further in Chapter Two. Scholars such as Jasbir Puar (2007) and Jin Haritaworn (2008) have interrogated how, throughout the twenty-first century, liberal tolerance towards sexual

diversity has become discursively consolidated as a core 'national value' of contemporary Britain. Puar (2007) has influentially critiqued this discursive linkage of Britishness with sexual liberalism as a form of 'sexual exceptionalism'. Here, LGBT rights are claimed as signifiers of Western enlightenment, the hallmark of a progressive society. This enables the relative legal freedoms of LGBT people in the UK to be contrasted to the apparent plight of sexual minorities in non-Western nations, which has been mobilised within both media and political rhetoric as justifications for British foreign policy, and even military intervention in non-Western nations such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Whilst it is beyond the parameters of this thesis to explore this complex process further, it is important to note that it forms a crucial component of the cultural climate in which the reality TV representations which I address here are produced, and to which they speak.

Figure 1: Timeline of LGBT rights reform in Britain.

1957: The Wolfenden Report recommends the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

1967: The Sexual Offences Act 1967 partially decriminalises sex between men in England and Wales.

1988: Section 28 of the Local Government Act criminalises the 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities.

1994: The age of consent for sex between men is reduced to 18.

2000: The ban on gay people serving in the Armed Forces is removed.

2002: Adoption and Children's Act 2002 permits adoption by same-sex couples (entered into force in 2005).

2003: Section 28 is repealed in England and Wales.

2003: Discrimination at work on the grounds of sexual orientation becomes illegal.

2004: The Civil Partnership Act 2004 enables same-sex couples to attain equal rights to heterosexual married couples.

2004: The Gender Recognition Act 2004 allows people to legally change gender.

2011: Civil partnership ceremonies permitted on religious premises.

2012: Transphobia is officially recognised as a hate crime.

2013: The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act allows same-sex couples to legally marry (entered into force in 2014).

2014: The first same-sex marriages are held in Britain.

Reality TV: Questions of definition

Early scholarship on reality television was centrally concerned with questions of generic definition, with scholars encountering no small amount of difficulty in positioning reality TV shows within existing taxonomies of television genre. Reality TV has thus been conceptualized as a fundamentally hybrid form, a self-conscious amalgamation of (at least) documentary, game show, soap opera, melodrama, talk show, talent show and sporting broadcast (Kavka, 2012; Hill, 2015). Reality TV's slippery and porous relationship to discreet categories of television genre led several early writers, including Jon Dovey (2000) and Richard Kilborn (2003), to classify reality TV as the ultimate example of postmodern culture. Yet, whilst the label of postmodernism has

been repeatedly stuck to reality programming, conceptions of reality TV as the televisual incarnation of the postmodern jar against reality TV's continued investment in a number of highly traditional ideals, which traverse the modernist and postmodern epochs. As Justin Lewis (2004: 288) has argued, whilst reality TV may be postmodern in form, it has been, and remains, 'steadfastly modernist in its assumptions,' particularly, as I argue in this thesis, in relation to sexuality, gender and the self, where distinctly un-postmodern notions of authenticity, essentialism and innateness continue to hold sway.

The difficulty which scholars have faced in defining reality television stems largely from the fact that many of the programmes clustered under the heading of 'reality TV' in both popular and academic discourses, have little in common in terms of production values, narrative structure, aesthetic style, and so on: the usual markers of generic coherence. For John Corner (cited in Hill, 2015), reality television is less a genre than an 'inter-generic space,' and for Annette Hill (2015: 9), a 'container' in which a variety of stylistically and thematically divergent programmes uneasily co-exist. Responding to this dilemma, June Deery (2015: 6) has suggested that reality television:

> Is best understood not so much as content with certain textual or aesthetic characteristics, but as a relationship between texts, agents, and technical devices. It is, in other words *a way of making television*. While particular topics or formats may trend only for a time, the basic production relations remain much the same - ordinary people, actual events, participation and interactivity [emphasis in original].

The main criticism I would level at Deery's argument lies in her assertion that reality television is fundamentally defined by the use 'ordinary people.' A large portion of reality programming, including those I interrogate within this thesis, utilize not ordinary people, but *celebrity* participants, that is, individuals who are constructed, explicitly and/or implicitly, as *extra*ordinary, more special and worthy of attention and mediation that the average, anonymous members of the public. The construction of celebrity in reality TV ranges from participants who are coded as already celebrities, prior to their appearances on their respective shows (e.g. *Strictly Come Dancing* (BBC, 2004-)), celebrities in the making (*Big Brother*, *The X Factor*, *The Only Way is Essex*), and former celebrities, now occupying a liminal position in the celebrity/ordinary hierarchy (many cast-members of *Celebrity Big Brother* and *I'm a Celebrity… Get Me Out of*

Here!). With this caveat firmly in place, in this thesis I follow Deery in adopting a loose definition of reality television as, 'pre-planned but mostly unscripted programming with non-professional actors in non-fictional scenarios' (ibid: 3). The specific levels of pre-planning, (un)scriptedness and non-professionalism of participants of course varies considerably between different reality formats. As such, this thesis requires an expansive definition of reality television which can capture the variety of formats and subgenres which I analyse. Formats based upon intensive surveillance of participants within sealed locations, *Big Brother* being the prime example, are perhaps the most 'raw' in this regard, whilst structured reality shows, such as *The Only Way is Essex* are often perceived to be the most contrived, due the partial acknowledgement of the manufactured nature of many of the broadcast scenarios in the texts and inter-texts of these shows (Wood, 2012; Biressi and Nunn, 2013). In this thesis I interrogate the representations of LGBT identity in three different typologies of reality programming which each bare distinct similarities and differences: the 'game doc', the reality pop show, and structured reality TV.

The term 'game doc', a portmanteau of game show and documentary (Couldry, 2004), refers to programmes such as *Big Brother*, which combine the intensive, round-the-clock surveillance of participants with some form of competition structure. Whilst game doc participants are often set various challenges and tasks to complete, the main content of this type of reality show are the surveilled interactions between participants in a sealed and constructed televisual environment, cut off from the 'outside' world. Reality pop shows narrativise a competition between members of the public to win a recording contract and, in theory, become a pop star. The competitions usually (purport to) take the form of open auditions before a panel of judges and, in later formats, a studio audience, before segmenting into various further audition or 'boot camp' style rounds and sequences, culminating in a series of final performances, broadcast live in prime-time scheduling slots. Structured reality is perhaps the newest sub-form of reality TV. Structured formats move further away from the documentary aesthetic of the game doc and ally increasingly with reality TV's generic heritage in soap opera. Focusing upon the everyday life of a group of supposedly 'real-life' friends and acquaintances, structured reality shows openly acknowledge that many of the scenes contained within them are at least partly orchestrated, set up, or scripted by production staff for the express purpose of creating the show. Structured reality does maintain, however, a claim to the real in the selves, relationships and emotions of those it represents, at the same time that it self-consciously blurs the line between fact and fiction.

Reality TV: Industry, technology, interactivity

> Reality TV has rapidly come to occupy a place at the forefront of contemporary television culture - a position from which it seems to 'speak' particularly clearly to the ways in which broadcasters are seeking to attract audiences in the multichannel landscape, the ways in which television is harnessing its aesthetic and cultural power in an increasingly multimedia experience (Holmes and Jermyn, 2004: 1).

As the above quote from Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn suggests, reality TV is perhaps the quintessential televisual form of the twenty-first century, a direct product of the changing modes of television production, distribution and consumption at the turn of the millennium. Various scholars have identified the years 2000 to 2001 as marking the 'birth' of reality television, as the term is most commonly used today (Holmes, 2004a; Deery, 2015), and it was in these years that some of the most iconic and long-running, prime-time reality formats: *Pop Idol*, *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, were first broadcast on British television.

Since its earliest incarnations, reality programming has been tightly bound to an ever-diversifying and converging television landscape. In many ways, the history of reality television between 2000 and 2014 *is* the history of the dramatic shifts in television production, broadcasting and consumption throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century. At the millennial turn, the proliferation of satellite and cable television channels had created a need for broadcasters to produce low-cost, yet wide-reaching, programming, which could effectively capture as large an audience share as possible within a multichannel environment characterized by increasingly fragmented viewing practices. In comparison with scripted drama, reality television carried a low financial risk, making use of the unpaid, un-unionised labour of non-professional participants, and light-weight, mobile technical equipment. At the same time, reality TV was able to reach out to lucrative youth demographics, highly valued by advertisers, and the rights to the formats of successful shows could be sold for profit to production companies in national territories across the globe (Kilborn, 2003; Holmes and Jermyn, 2004).

Furthermore, perhaps more than any other form of television, reality TV has been highly receptive to the increasingly convergent nature of media usage in the twenty-first century. Henry Jenkins (2006: 2) has coined the influential term 'convergence culture' to describe 'the flow on content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and

the migratory behaviour of audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment experiences they want.' The attunement of much reality television to its position within a matrix of texts and technologies which comprise contemporary media usage, has been a constant feature of reality TV scholarship from the early 2000s to the time of writing (for example Tincknell and Raghuram, 2002; Holmes, 2004b). Much of this scholarship has engaged with the ways in which reality television has self-consciously moved beyond a conception of television shows as a series of interlinked, yet atomised, episodes broadcast at a specific date and time, and towards a configuration of the programme texts themselves as central nodal points within a larger economy of audio-visual and print, analogue and digital (though increasingly digital) sites of media consumption and communication. From the first series in 2000, for example, *Big Brother* addressed a technologically capable, media literate consumer, who would actively seek to expand and extend their interactions with the show through a variety of digital platforms (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2002, Mole, 2004). *Big Brother* offered an explicitly interactive viewing experience, as audiences were called upon the vote (via telephone and SMS) for the participant they wished to be evicted from the show each week, as well as offering a 24-hour live feed of the action inside the house which consumers could view online. Alongside this, ancillary programming, such as *Big Brother's Little Brother* (E4, 2000-2010) and *Big Brother's Big Mouth* (E4, 2004-2010) (later combined when the show moved to Five as *Big Brother's Bit on the Side* (Five, 2011-)), worked to draw a trail between the main highlights and eviction shows on the Channel 4 network's flagship channel, and its digital channel E4, where these 'sister shows' were broadcast.

In recent years, reality television programming has also sought to integrate social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram into the matrix of convergence platforms structured around individual broadcast texts. Paradigmatic in this regard are structured reality shows such as *The Only Way is Essex*, in which cast members' actions and interactions on social media are frequently discussed, and mobilised as sources of drama and conflict, within the show itself. Not only is this a strategy for encouraging viewers to follow the cast members' representations throughout a diverse range of digital sites, but, building upon the heritage of interactive reality TV emblematized by *Big Brother*, the show positions viewers themselves as embedded within a digital dialogue orbiting around the televisual text. For several series', during the initial broadcasts of new episodes on ITV2, *The Only Way is Essex* official Facebook page published a

series of memes featuring screenshots from the episode superimposed with written text of humorous lines of dialogue, immediately after these lines were spoken in the show, and which could then be circulated throughout Facebook and other social media platforms. Reality programming in the 2010s is thus addressed explicitly to a consumer engaged with multiple media texts, platforms and technologies at any one time. During the 2013 series of *The Only Way is Essex*, before each episode began, and at the start and end of each advertisement break, a voice-over stated, 'You can let us know exactly what you think about tonight's how by tweeting us @ITV2,' and before the show resumed a series of comments published by social media users about the show were quoted by the narrator. This voice-over was accompanied by shots of cast members looking directly into the camera, holding placards bearing the Facebook and Twitter logos, and text reading 'TWEET US' and 'CHAT TO US'. These shots were clearly evocative of police 'mug shots', signifying the participants' subjection to a scrutinizing and judgmental gaze, again constructing the reality television viewer as savvy, active and engaged, with the literacy and judgment to assess, comment upon and critique the cast's onscreen actions. This construction also speaks to the diversification of media consumption away from the traditional television viewing experience, and onto increasingly personalised technologies, such as computers, smartphones and tablets.

Reality TV and Celebrity

A central thread of inquiry which has run through reality television scholarship is the vast amount of representational space reality programming has appeared to offer ostensibly 'ordinary' people - members of the public with seemingly no formal training or experience of working in the media industries. Graeme Turner (2004) has used the term 'demotic turn' to describe the proliferation of media platforms upon which ordinary people could attain mediation - of which reality TV shows were central - in the early 2000s, and the connected *appearance* that media visibility is more democratically allocated and more easily obtainable than ever before, whilst the material and symbolic power of the media remain in the hands of the privileged few.

Indeed, many reality shows concern themselves, either explicitly or implicitly, with process of *celebrification*: the transformation of previously anonymous members of the public into national (and sometimes international) celebrities. Nick Couldry (2004: 60) has argued that through these narratives, reality television does cultural work in postulating a hierarchical distinction between

'media people,' those visible through the media, and 'ordinary people', those denigrated to the 'symbolic disempowerment' of anonymity (Littler, 2004: 10). Immersion within the mediated worlds of reality television therefore comes to stand as means through which participants can transition from 'ordinary' to 'media' people. This process of celebrification becomes manifest within reality television texts on a number of different levels. These range from the 'search for a star' rhetoric which is integral to the workings of reality talent competitions, such as *The X-Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent*, to shows like *Big Brother* and *The Only Way is Essex*, in which participants are often represented as self-consciously aware of their roles as participants within a reality TV show, and in which participants are often shown reflecting upon their statuses as celebrities in the making (Deery, 2015). Reality TV is therefore deeply invested in discourses of contemporary celebrity as an apparently democratic phenomenon, seemingly accessible to anyone who possesses the requisite combinations of talent (however defined), perseverance, and a sprinkling of good luck. Reality TV has played a key role in the construction and circulation of a cultural myth that, in the twenty-first century Britain, celebrity is more easily attainable, and more accessible to a wider range of people, than at any other time in the nation's history.

In relation to this trend, a core intervention I seek to make in this thesis is that the transition from 'ordinary' to 'media' person central to reality TV has been represented to possess different implications for different participants, based upon specific facets of their identities. What becoming a celebrity may *mean*, socially culturally, politically and ideologically for LGBT people has not yet been explored in celebrity studies. Existing scholarship has conceptualized the significance of becoming a celebrity in two ways. Firstly, through an abstract lexis of 'symbolic validation' (Andrejevic, 2004; Couldry, 2004; Littler, 2004) or as a means of class-based, social ascension (Littler, 2004; Biressi and Nunn, 2005), as captured in Littler's (2004: 10) description of becoming a celebrity as:

> A means of symbolic validation, a way to 'really' exist, to mean something in public and private, to be rich with symbolic as well as material capital. To seek the full glare of celebrity media validation is to strive against the hidden injuries of disempowerment; to strive against the symbolic disempowerment of the ordinary.

Throughout this thesis, I interrogate what these 'symbolic' aspects of celebrification have been represented to mean in the specific context of LGBT reality TV celebrities: social validation,

self-acceptance, and confirmation of the authenticity of one's non-normative sexuality or gender identity. Moreover, I assess how the aesthetic and semiotic production of queer subjectivities through the discursive lens of celebrity's apparently symbolic and validating qualities has worked to demarcate certain normative envisionings of 'good' and 'bad' queerness in relation to this paradigm.

To do this, however, it is necessary to engage with the arguments made by numerous scholars that the celebrities produced and circulated through reality television shows and their networks of extra-textual and ancillary nodes (magazines, newspapers, blogs, social media, merchandise, and so on) are not actually celebrities. This conceptual standpoint is particularly bound to the often ephemeral nature of reality television fame. Sue Collins (2008), for example, has argued that reality TV produces a specific model of 'dispensable celebrity.' Turner (2010) has similarly asserted that, as many reality TV formats regenerate annually with a new batch of participants, ripe for transformation into celebrities, the eventual obsolesce of these same figures is written into their production, in order to make way for a new group of celebrities the following year. The often transient nature of reality television celebrity has led many scholars to conclude that reality television participants should not be considered celebrities at all, but should rather be conceived as *celetoids.* The term 'celetoid' is attributable to Chris Rojek in his foundational work of celebrity studies scholarship, *Celebrity*, first published in 2001. Introducing the term, Rojek states:

> I propose *celetoid* as the term for any form of compressed, concentrated, attributed celebrity. I distinguish celetoids from celebrities because, generally speaking, the latter enjoy a more durable career with the public. However, I take it for granted that many of the representational techniques that present celetoids and celebrities for public consumption are identical. Celetoids are the accessories of cultures organized around mass communication and staged authenticity. Examples include lottery winners, one-hit wonders, stalkers, whistle-blowers, sports' arena stalkers, have-a-go heroes, mistresses of public figures and the various other social types who command media attention one day, and are forgotten the next (2001: 20-21).

As can be seen from the passage above, Rojek did not identify reality television stars as potential celetoids, not least because reality TV did not exist in its current guise at the time that Rojek was

writing. Other scholars have, however, mobilized Rojek's concept of the celetoid to define the particular kinds of celebrities produced by reality TV. Turner (2010: 15), for example, has described the reality TV celetoid as 'the individual with no particular talents that might encourage expectations of work in the entertainment industry, no specific career objectives beyond the achievement of media visibility, and an especially short lifecycle as a public figure.' Rojek does not explain precisely why he has chosen the term *celetoid* as a label for this particular kind of flash-in-the-pan celebrity. It could be argued, however, that the 'oid' syllable evokes the words 'android' or 'droid', thus signifying an absence of individual agency on the part of the celetoid, who performs a specific, prescribed function with a media text, and then is rendered obsolete.

This conceptual framework is highly problematic, as it ultimately colludes with, and perpetuates, reductive, popular, neo-Frankfurt School judgements of reality television participants as powerless dupes of the commercial industries (more on this below). Yet, if the central characteristic of the reality TV celetoid is its ephemeral nature, I would argue that, in the 2010s, it has become increasingly difficult to apply the concept of the celetoid to the celebrities produced and circulated by reality television. Structured reality shows, such as *The Only Way is Essex, Made in Chelsea* (E4, 2011-) and *Geordie Shore* (MTV, 2011-), which have become increasingly visible in the UK reality TV marketplace, maintain the same cast members each series (with minor additions and subtractions), with participants' involvement in the show often spanning several series over several years. In contrast to the arguments of Collins (2008), Turner (2010), and others, the imperative for producers of these shows (which remain comparatively underexplored in academic literature generally) lies in securing the *longevity* of its cast members' lifecycles in the public eye. It is in these specific figures, rather than simply the format itself, where audience loyalty is located. Furthermore, the lack of agency attributed to the celetoid has been frequently located in reality participants' apparent reliance upon the formats which enabled their transformations into celebrities in order for them to remain visible, often through contractual bindings and obligations (Curnutt, 2009). Whilst studies of the industrial conditions of structured reality participation remain to be undertaken, it is certainly the case that participants of shows such as *The Only Way is Essex*, *Made in Chelsea* and *Geordie Shore*, have a relative autonomy to pursue a variety of commercial ventures (product endorsement, magazine features, and fashion lines) independent of, yet co-temporal with, their appearances on these shows.

For many, the designation (or denigration) of the reality television participant as a celetoid (rather than a fully-fledged celebrity) is based upon these figures' apparent lack of any recognizable talent or skill – ideological constructs which have historically been central to the myth-making apparatus of celebrity – at least as these concepts have been traditionally understood. Whilst this clearly does not apply to talent shows, such as singing and dancing competitions, for the majority of reality participants, their inclusion within their respective series' is contingent simply upon the mandate that they 'be themselves' (Holmes, 2004a). Here, notions of achievement are perceived to have been drained of all profundity or social value, subsumed into the mere circulation of one's image throughout the mainstream media. As Ellis Cashmore (2006: 196-203) has asserted:

> The celebrities who emerged from reality TV shows knew they had no talent. Like artless children who stumble on a stash of new Xboxes, they made the most of their good fortune. They usually busied themselves endorsing products, attending openings, making ads, appearing on talk shows; cashing in on their instant, and for the most, transitory fame […] It could be argued that reality TV has introduced a new generation of celebrities whose fame owes nothing to achievement and everything to appearance. Yet even this distinction is artificial by today's criteria. Appearing on a reality television show *is* an achievement. The genre has been successful because of the changes in conceptions of achievement.

In his description of reality TV celebrities as 'artless children' stumbling upon 'a stash of new Xboxes,' Cashmore's statement contributes to a rhetorical infantilisation of reality participants which has spanned both scholarly and popular debate since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The rise of reality TV in the early 2000s was greeted with a raft of popular commentary which sought to argue that this emergent medium had engendered a degradation of 'traditional' ideals of celebrity and fame. Articulated frequently by both broadsheet commentators and politicians, celebrity status acquired through participation in reality television was conceived as superficial, meaningless and undeserved. As Holmes (2006a: 7) has explored, such theses mobilised a rhetoric of cultural decline, lamenting the apparent debasement of traditional notions of labour and skill, whereby 'an ethos of "famous for being famous" has regrettably triumphed

over the concepts of talent and hard work.'[11] Summarising this representational trend, Turner (2004: 60) has stated of the thousands of applicants who audition to appear of *Big Brother*, 'these people want to be famous but most of them haven't worked out what for. *Big Brother* helps them defer answering that question while making major steps towards achieving their objective.' In this representational frame, reality television participants (and indeed anyone to desires to become one) have been positioned as seemingly brainwashed dupes of a contemporary media culture in which becoming a celebrity is inexplicably valorised as the ultimate achievement for the individual subject, yet a goal to which many aspire without any cogent knowledge or rationalisation as to *why* they desire fame, besides the fact that the media tells them that they should.

This conception of reality TV fame as superficial, synthetic and manufactured has a distinctly feminine-gendered inflection, as several scholars have pointed out (Williamson, 2010; Edwards, 2013; Holmes and Jermyn, 2014; Weber, 2014). As such, reality television, in its cultural denigration as 'lowest-common-denominator' entertainment, has always been associated with non-dominant social groups; a typology of fame which, in this cultural construction as shallow and vapid, aligns with damaging cultural perceptions of many marginalized populations. Yet, Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood (2012) and Sender (2014) have noted that is precisely through this denigrated form of fame that women and LGBT people – groups traditionally barred from formal sites of public culture - have been able to access points of public visibility as a means of producing and articulating their subjectivities. In alignment with this argument, in this thesis, I argue strongly against any popular and academic standpoints which would designate reality TV celebrity as meaningless, and the concomitant characterisation of reality TV participants as devoid of any rational or profound reasoning as to why they seek celebrity status (as in Turner (2004) cited above). As I explore in the thesis, for LGBT participants, becoming a celebrity has been repeatedly represented to be of prime importance in personal and existential quests for both self and societal acceptance. Throughout this thesis, I return to the notion that, for LGBT people, fame attained through reality TV is endowed with a significance which defies dominant envisionings of reality television fame as vapid, vacuous and meaningless, at the same time as I interrogate critically the cultural and political implications of these narratives.

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[11] Holmes (2004a) has also stressed the continuities of reality TV fame with more historical discourses of stardom and celebrity.

On a more general level, I would also argue that conceptualisations of reality TV participants as talentless 'celetoids' (rather than celebrities, whose fame is the result of talent and achievement), is problematic in that implicitly posits concepts such as celebrity, talent and skill as static frames of reference, with fixed *a priori*, historically transcendent meanings. Rather, as Holmes (2006a) has argued, celebrity is a porous and mutable discursive concept. Drawing upon historical understandings of the competing relationship between stardom, talent and manufacture, reality television has worked to transform the cultural meanings attached to terms such as celebrity, talent, achievement, skill, and so on, within twenty-first century popular culture (Holmes, 2004a). As I discuss in more detail below, in reality television, the ability to offer a mediation-worthy performance of selfhood, one which is entertaining yet faithful to one's apparently essential 'ordinariness', *is a talent*, at least in the sense of a skill which can be converted into both economic capital and celebrity status. Alison Hearn (2010: 60) has argued that reality shows provide frameworks for participants to engage in 'self-commodification' where they are able to 'generate and brand their own personae' through forms of 'immaterial labour.' The consolidation of performing one's selfhood as a marketable skill with the capacity to produce value (albeit value which cannot be readily quantified in any straightforward way) is emblematized by the many figures who have made simply appearing on reality television shows into a viable and lucrative career (Kavka, 2012; Ross, 2014). As Biressi and Nunn (2013: 274) have stated of the cast-members of *The Only Way is Essex* (many of whom have remained visible as celebrities long after their tenures on the show), 'Self-presentation, self-branding, and self-promotion are fundamental to the success of participants […] whose own future social advancement might depend upon their marketable appeal as celebrity subjects.' This commercial branding of the self which occurs in and through reality TV, speaks to broader trends in the contemporary labour market where, in opposition to classic Marxist paradigms of the labour process as systematically stripping the body of all humanity, performances of seemingly authentic and empathetic emotion form the basis of many forms of employment, particularly in the service industries. As Andrew Ross (2014: 35) has noted, 'A high degree of performative labour is more and more expected in a whole range of service occupations and is routinely organized to provide customer gratification.' Like that of the reality television celebrity, in many workplaces, this performance-as-labour is continually judged, scrutinised and appraised. Reality TV, Ross (2014: 35) has claimed, is 'a formalized showcase for this norm.'

Reality TV and ordinariness

The notion that, in the twenty-first century, celebrity is no longer accessible only to the chosen, gifted few, but can be attained by simply 'being yourself' is also inextricably embedded within reality TV's constructions of *queer* identities. Whilst the mythology that an ordinary person can 'make it big' and become a star stretches back to the earliest days of the Hollywood studio system (Dyer, 1998; Sternheimer, 2011), according to reality television, becoming a celebrity is no longer contingent upon the possession of a particular talent, at least, as I argued above, according to traditional definitions of the term. As I explore throughout this thesis, the purportedly open and democratic nature of reality television fame is embedded within discourses which assert the apparent potential of reality TV to affect both social and personal transformation in the context of LGBT subjectivities. On one level, the ability of queer people to become celebrities through reality TV is positioned to have contributed to a burgeoning climate of acceptance and understanding of LGBT people and LGBT issues within British society. Furthermore, on a more individual basis, the apparently new-found ability for maginalised people to attain visibility within the spaces of celebrity construction and mediation has been endowed with value in its ability for LGBT people to access the therapeutic powers of reality TV, and thus overcome feelings of marginalization, oppression and shame (explored in Chapter Five).

This is not to suggest, however, that reality television has sought to represent celebrity as equally accessible to all. It is certainly the case that many reality formats are structured upon the principle that anybody can apply or audition to appear on the programme, alongside the notion that participation is often not contingent upon the possession of any specific talent in the traditional sense. At the same time, however, these shows clearly delineate that not everybody who auditions, or even all who make it onto the shows, can, will, or indeed should, become a celebrity. Such contradictory discourses of the simultaneous openness and exclusivity construct reality television celebrity as inherently meritocractic. Whilst the meritocratic principle - the notion that achievement is correlative with ability rather than class background or financial privilege - is clearly evident in reality pop formats, where the performers with the most marketable singing talent will generally triumph, I would argue that discourses of fame and celebrity are produced through a meritocratic optic in almost all reality TV shows. Central to the meritocratic ideologies of reality programming is the conception that the ability to perform one's

'authentic' self in entertaining and mediation-worthy ways *is* a kind of innate skill or ability, one which bears currency in the commercial marketplaces of reality television and celebrity culture.

The myth of meritocracy is inextricably bound to the logic of capitalism, which necessitates the prosperity of some in the face of the austerity of the many. So too, celebrity culture entails the visibility of the few for the consumption of the anonymous majority. After all, we cannot all be celebrities as this would render the very concepts of celebrity and fame obsolete (Holmes, 2004a; Littler, 2004). Reality television participants are therefore subject to a dual imperative. If any longevity within the celebrity-media marketplace is to be achieved, one must be ordinary but not boring, 'authentic' (more on this term later) but not banal (Couldry, 2004). Participants, as Richard Kilborn has noted, must have 'an ability to project an aura of real-life ordinariness coupled with an ability to accomplish a series of tasks with some aplomb' (2003: 13). The reconciliation of this paradoxical demand often entails the provision of certain kinds of emotional performances, which, as Ellis (2009: 104) has argued, must be 'adequately performed' yet also appear to be 'sincerely felt.' The willingness of reality participants to emote is a key audience pleasure of the form (Aslama and Pantti, 2006; Skeggs and Wood, 2012), and it is the emotionality of reality televisual performance which has come to signify its apparent ordinariness and authenticity.

A number of scholars have argued that ordinariness is a discursive concept with no essential material reality. In this way, reality television (and television more broadly) has been identified as a key contemporary space at which discourses of the 'ordinary' are constructed. As such, notions of what constitutes ordinariness in the context of TV can differ, both temporally, and in relation different kinds of television. As Nico Carpentier (2014: 346) has claimed, 'The meanings of concepts such as ordinary people are not (necessarily) fixed and sedimented but rather contingent and objects of discursive struggles.' Throughout the history of television, different kinds of programming have called upon members of the public to perform their ordinariness onscreen by offering particular kinds of performances which signify the ordinary within these different televisual contexts. This has been most visible in game and quiz shows (Holmes, 2008), talk shows (Grindstaff, 2002) and news broadcasts (Root, 1986). Writing in the 1980s, Jane Root (1986: 95-96) argued that 'No-one in television wants real people to behave like the amateurs they are. When selecting them, directors pray for 'naturals': individuals who,

without any rehearsal, can magically conjure up skills that professionals spend years perfecting.' Root explored how the 'realness' of 'real people' on television was coded through emotionality, which formed a counterpoint to the polished, affectively-neutral professionalism of media professionals, such as news reporters. According to Root, ordinary people on television, in order to appear as such, 'have to be skilled at communicating feelings - not holding them back like the professionals. Real people get excited and act spontaneously [...] They are allowed, and often encouraged, to lose control of themselves' (1986: 99).

In the twenty-first century, reality television has both continued and diverged from this dialectic. Whilst reality TV has perpetuated the notion of emotionality and losing control as core signifiers of the ordinary and, by implication, the 'real' (more on this below), it would appear that the personal, economic and institutional staked embedded in these performances of ordinariness, both for broadcasters and participants themselves, have intensified. As Holmes (2008: 121) has argued, in comparison with traditional quiz and game shows, reality TV offers its participants a greater 'scope of action' to perform before the cameras. Whereas previously the appearances of 'ordinary' people on television were necessarily fleeting textual moments (ibid), performing one's ordinariness in the right way now operates as a form of lucrative emotional or immaterial labour, which, for successful reality show participants, can translate into careers in the media spotlight (Hearn, 2006; Biressi and Nunn, 2010). As Holmes (2006: 18) has stated of *Big Brother,* 'Simply because the show is not explicitly organized around the search for a particular talent, this does not mean that certain types of performance are not expected [...] Reality TV often focuses on the extraordinary personality - the outrageous, the eccentric and the explicitly telegenic.'

This demand for 'extraordinary' yet authentic personalities has been a key discursive framework which has structured and enabled the prolific visibility of LGBT people within reality programming, and the inter-textual worlds of reality TV celebrity. As I explore throughout this thesis, this representational frame has worked to sculpt normative epistemologies of queer subjectivity, which posit LGBT identities as innate, natural and essential, yet simultaneously and inherently *different* to the subject positions occupied by the majority of viewers. Made visible through this lens of normalized non-normativity, sexual minority participants have embodied almost completely the ambivalent amalgamation of authentic-yet-extraordinary, real-yet-unusual

which forms the 'ideal' mould for the reality TV celebrity. The social and political implications of this model of LGBT identity are manifold, and I explore these throughout the thesis.

Reality TV and emotion

Much academic work on reality television has identified the representation of raw, and purportedly 'real', human emotion as one of the defining features of the genre (Aslama and Pantti, 2006; Dubrofsky, 2009; Biressi and Nunn, 2010). As I outlined above, the willingness of reality participants to behave in an emotionally excessive manner is one of the primary means through which their apparent 'ordinariness' - that they are 'real people' whose performances are not trained or molded by the media industries - is corroborated. Key to reality television's mobilisation of emotionality as a signifier of ordinariness is the related assertion that these emotions are *authentic*, that is, the expression of a participant's 'true' feelings, rather than a performance for the sake of the cameras. In this way, it is in its representations of emotionality that many reality TV shows stake their claims to offering mediations of the 'real'. This discursive location of realness in emotional authenticity traverses many different reality TV subgenres. Even structured reality shows, which exhibit an ironic self-referentiality towards the fact that many (perhaps even most or all) of the sequences featured within the shows are pre-planned and facilitated by production staff, positions itself as *reality* television by asserting the inherent authenticity of the cast's personal relationships with one another, and the emotional outpourings and confrontations resulting from these interactions (Kavka, 2012).

Central to the reality TV's claims to emotional 'realness' is the extent to which participants often appear to lose control of themselves, and become subsumed with emotional expression. Rachel Dubrovsky (2009: 355) has argued that reality television shows often build up to a 'money shot': a moment, captured on camera, where a participant's emotional outpourings are rendered 'spectacular', 'excessive' and out of control. Dubrovsky use of the term' money shot' to describe this moment is influenced by Laura Grindstaff's (2002) use of the term in her work on TV talk shows. In turn, Grindstaff has taken the phrase from film pornography, where the ejaculation of male performers is colloquially referred to as the 'money shot'. For Dubrovsky and Grindstaff, moments of emotional excess can be considered the 'money shots' of reality TV and talk shows respectively as, like the pornographic money shot, these moments purport to represent something raw, base, uncontainable and uncontrollable emerging from within the subject and spilling out

into public view. In pornogrpahy this is a tangible, bodily substance, the ejaculate of the male performer. On television, however, the matter of the money shot is not a material substance, but affective energies and intensities. As Grindstaff (2002: 20) states:

> Like the orgasmic cum shot of pornographic films, the money shot of talk shows makes visible the precise moment of letting go, of losing control, of surrendering to the body and its "animal" emotions. It is the loss of the "civilized" self that occurs when the body transcends social and cultural control, revealing human behavior in its "raw" rather than its "cooked" form.

In her application of Grindstaff's talk show paradigm to reality TV, Dubrovsky argues that, in reality programming, money shots are highly gendered, emanating primarily from female participants. Reality TV is thus tied to a long history of popular representations in which emotionality has been constructed as an inherently feminine quality. Although she does not state this explicitly, in Dubrovsky's framework, reality TV stands as a contemporary iteration of age-old Cartesian dualisms, in which the human body is separated from the mind, and where reason and is elevated above the 'messiness and irrationality of emotion' (Alsop, 2005: 6). Throughout history, the Cartesian hierarchy of reason over emotion has been articulated though an inherently gendered optic, whereby masculinity has signified reason, whilst femininity has been associated with emotion and the body. Fused to the gendered denigration of reality television celebrity (discussed above), much of the cultural devaluation of reality TV, as Brenda Weber (2014) has argued, bears remnants of this age-old gendered divide, bound to an implicit perception of the form as inherently 'feminine', and thus less valuable, due to its emphasis upon emotional and bodily exposure. Much like romantic novels, film melodrama, and earlier forms of television such as soap opera and talk shows, reality TV has been repeatedly constructed as less culturally 'valuable' than more 'serious', 'rational', masculine-coded forms of broadcasting, such news, documentary or drama, through a deeply gendered lens.

Significantly for my focus within this thesis, it is not only women who have been politically and socially marginalised through cultural association with emotionality, and thus femininity, but also other subaltern groups such as people of colour and, crucial considering the topic of this thesis, non-heterosexual and non-normatively gendered people (Sender, 2014). Within popular culture, queer people have been traditionally represented through tropes of (mostly negative)

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emotionality: sadness, madness, pathology and rage (Dyer, 2001; Phillips, 2007; Ahmed, 2010). At the same time, there is a long history of queer people using the raw materials of emotional and bodily display as a means of generating capital in a homophobic and transphobic world, on a spectrum from drag performance and theatre, to sex work and pornography (see, for example, Newton, 1972; Schanke and Mara, 1998; Laing, Pilcher and Smith, 2015) Given this history, it is perhaps unsurprising that it is the emotionally expressive and excessive domain of reality TV that LGBT identities have become most visible in contemporary popular culture. Reality TV has come to circulate as a space in which subjects whose identities have traditionally marked them as excluded from public culture have been able to generate various forms of capital, such as celebrity status and monetary gain, through engaging in particular kinds of emotional labour, that is, by offering suitably emotional performances of selfhood which are mediated for public consumption (Skeggs and Wood, 2012; Sender, 2014). I take this up further in Chapter Two.

Approaching the entanglements of emotionality and sexuality in reality TV from a slightly different angle, Misha Kavka (2008) has argued that the prevalence of emotional expression and excess over measured, coherent, 'rational' discussion within reality programming, positions the form as inherently queer, even if much of the programmes' narrative contents are resolutely heteronormative. Kavka asserts that the articulation of excessive emotion by reality participants can work as forms of 'affective communication,' enabling the articulation of forms of subjectivity which exceed, and cannot find formal, verbal expression within heteronormative scripts of personhood and identity. Whilst Kavka's argument is compelling, as I interrogate further in Chapter Two, such a conception of emotion as queer communication is difficult to reconcile with the second emotional register circulating within reality TV: intimate and confessional emotional revelation.

Much of the drama of reality TV does center upon uncontrolled explosions of emotional intensity in altercations, arguments, conflicts and fights. As Minna Aslama and Mervi Pantti (2006: 196) have noted, many reality formats are geared towards the production of conflict between participants, which in turn allows 'the display of anger, rage, accusations and all kinds of negative emotions.' Yet, emotional expression within reality TV is also intimate, cerebral, cathartic and therapeutic. Many of the sequences of *Big Brother*, for example, take place in the iconic 'diary room', a small, sealed room containing only a large, cushioned chair. Clearly

evocative of a psychotherapist's 'couch', participants, either at their own motivation, or upon being summoned by producers, discuss their thoughts and feelings with the measured and soothing, disembodied voice of the omniscient 'Big Brother', who encourages them to reflect cathartically upon their emotions and behaviour, as participants often break down into quiet sobbing or floods of tears. The technical framing of these sequences, generally a static mid-shot, as participants look straight into the camera's lens, evokes a seeming absence of technological intervention or manipulation, which works to construct the articulations made within the diary room space as 'revelaion[s] of 'true' emotions' (Aslama and Pantti, 2006: 196). Aslama and Pantti argue that the prevalence of such individual, straight-to-camera sequences in reality TV marks the migration of the literary device of monologue into television. They state:

> Traditionally, in drama as well as prose, single-person speech situations have served to reveal the inner life, secret thoughts and feelings of the characters. Interestingly, reality shows have reintroduced this out-of-date staged talk situation into the context of television. Indeed, it can be argued that it is precisely the monologue that is at the core of reality television, as it provides those moments when emotions run free and a person's true self appears. We argue that the specific moments of talking alone are used on the whole as a truth-sign of direct access to the 'real' (ibid: 175).

Emotion, then, is constructed as a core signifier of the real, 'authentic' selves of particpants (more on this in the next section). If, for Aslama and Pantti, the heritage of reality television's investment in emotional authenticity lies in literature and theatre, it has also be attributed to the permutation of the discourses of psychology, psychotherapy and other 'psy disciplines' into the spaces of everyday life and popular culture. Nikolas Rose (1998) has argued that the popularisation of psycho-medical epistemologies since the late twentieth century, has been instrumental in the formations and dissemination of the notion of an authentic selfhood or essential character, residing within each individual, and which must be discovered or unearthed through a variety of practices (again, more on this later). Reality television clearly bears the marks of this dispersal of psychotherapeutic discourses throughout the popular domain. Alongside straight-to-camera sequences, such as those of the *Big Brother* diary room, much of the action of reality TV involves kinds of 'group therapy', that is, cast members assembled in small groups discussing, sharing and attempting to resolve how they feel about situations,

problems, conflicts and personalities which they have encountered on the show. For Kavka (2008: 20), the emotional intimacy of these kinds of sequences make reality TV the quintessential televisual mode, the form of television most attuned to the status of television itself as a technology of intimacy. Kavka describes television as a 'medium of closeness': situated within a domestic setting, embedded firmly within the rhythms and routines of quotidian, everyday life.[12] This closeness is becoming ever-more pronounced in the era of convergence technologies, where television programming is encountered and consumed in increasingly individualized and personalized methods, on a range of smaller screens - phones, tablets, laptops which are experienced with an embodied immediacy which exceeds that of than traditional living room viewing experiences (ibid: 5).

Reality TV, emotion and the public sphere

Yet, for all its intimacy and closeness, television remains a *public* medium. The ideals of public service broadcasting upon which television in Britain was founded, asserted that TV must not only entertain, but inform and educate the public on matters of social and political importance, playing a role in sculpting a populace with the epistemological tools to become informed political subjects. Such a conception of television as bearing a social and ethical responsibility to 'enlighten' viewers, guide their tastes and endow them with political awareness has informed much of the critical denigration of reality TV. Reality programming has occupied a fault line in debates over how far the increasing presence of 'ordinary' people engaging in emotionally excessive performances on British television has affected a degradation or expansion of both public service broadcasting, and the public sphere more broadly. In this way, reality television marked a continuation of many of the discourses which had surrounded TV talk shows in the 1980s and 1990s, programmes which had similarly foregrounded the emotionally articulated, individual experience of personal problems and dilemmas (Dovey, 2000). Scholars such as Dominique Mehl (2005: 50) have argued that the predominance of feelings and emotionality over 'rational' discussion and intellectual debate in popular television, has led to a 'subjectification of the public sphere.' In this process, she claims, the public sphere as it has been traditionally understood, characterised by the Habermasian ideals of 'rational discussion [...]

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[12] Kavka is thus aware of this emotional register, but does not address its significance in her discussion of queer affect in reality TV.

knowledge, learning, options and ideologies' has been displaced by a 'private/public sphere,' which is incapable of inciting socially and politically productive discussion and debate (ibid: 92).

For others, however, reality TV has emblematised a reinvigoration and redefinition of the public sphere, in which issues, identities, and forms of interpersonal expression previously abjected to the 'private' domain, have become consolidated as legitimate subjects of public visibility, discussion and concern. John Dovey (2000: 23) has used the term 'trauma TV' to describe programming predicated upon the representation of 'individual tragedies which would once have remained private but which are now restaged for public consumption.' Dovey argues that the cultural impact of such forms of broadcasting was in part galvanised by a cultural shift in the late 1990s in relation to normative expectations around the kinds of emotions legitimated for public display. Dovey highlights the vast outpouring of publicly-articulated grief which accompanied the death of Princess Diana in 1997, where, in the British press, the Queen of England came under rare criticism in the British tabloid press for not displaying the requisite amount of public emotion. It is therefore not insignificant that reality television emerged in Britain only a few years after the death of Diana. The proliferation of reality programming since the early years of the twenty-first century has been both enabled by, and itself instrumental in, the consolidation of public emotionality as a new cultural norm.

However, as Frank Furedi (2007: 37) has claimed, the proliferation of public emoting within the mainstream media should not be interpreted as 'representing the celebration of the display of intense raw emotion.' Close attention the ways in which emotional expression is framed within media texts illuminates how the mediation of emotion in fact operates as the *management* of emotion, working to delineate the kinds of emotion which should, and should not, be articulated in the public sphere. In a similar way, Gareth Palmer (2003) has approached reality television through the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. In this context, governmentality refers to the ways in which cultural forms intervene into the shaping of human conduct, how the circulation of discursive ideals of normativity and difference work to sculpt the behaviour of individuals, whilst at the same time appearing to address an autonomous subject with the agency to make free choices about how to live their life. That the emotionality of reality TV operates as a form of governmentality is particularly significant in the context of LGBT subjectivities, which have been traditionally barred from inclusion within national public culture. As I explore

throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter Five, the insertion of LGBT identities within the emotional domain of reality TV has worked to circulate certain cultural scripts around the kinds of emotional relationships, both to the self and to society at large, which are conductive to societal integration and individual, affective wellbeing for the contemporary queer subject. As such, the discursive management of emotionality evidenced in reality programming has deeply political consequences, which are often masked by the apparent apoliticality of emotion itself. Throughout the reality genre, political and systemic problems: homophobia, transphobia, heteronotmativity, are explored through the lens of the personal, the emotional and the subjective. As I explore at numerous points in this thesis, whilst this can enable a public recognition of these issues, it can also work to transpose political inequalities into personal pathologies, to be overcome in through individualised processes of emotional labour and therapeutic and affective work, which render the cultural foundations of these problems unscathed by social critique.

Reality TV and the authentic self

Tightly bound to reality television's investment in the ordinary articulated through emotion, is the concept of authenticity. Reality TV has been, and remains, fixated with the concept of the authentic self, most frequently articulated in discourses which assert the primacy of 'being yourself' (Holmes, 2010). In the context of reality programming, being authentic translates as behaving in a manner which is congruent with, and expressive of, an apparently innate and essential core set of personality traits, ethical values and emotional and intellectual dispositions, which form the basis of 'who you are.' As such, to be seen to be transgressing the mandate to authenticity by performing a version of selfhood which is perceived as 'fake' or calculated for the mediated space of reality TV has become consolidated as the cardinal sin of reality participation. As Dubrofsky (2011: 117) has noted, the 'good' reality TV participant behaves:

> As he or she is imagined to behave in an unsurveilled space,' offering a vision of selfhood which appears 'consistent across disparate social spaces and at different times […] To be seen as adopting a behaviour specifically designed for the space of [reality TV] immediately designates a participant as inauthentic, unreal and suspect.

Indeed, the most popular celebrities produced by reality television have all been celebrated for the apparent authenticity of the self which he or she presented whilst appearing on their

respective shows (Jones, 2003). Furthermore, as I explore in relation to transgender *Big Brother* participant Nadia Almada later in the thesis, a perceived diminution of this authentic persona in their post-show celebrity careers can end a reality star's visibility in spectacular fashion.

Whilst the purported representation of such 'authentic' selves and emotions of participants has been identified as one of the defining claims to the 'real' of all reality television, current scholarship has also shown that precisely where the expression of this personal 'authenticity' is textually located differs between types of reality programming. In the subgenre of reality pop, for example, discourses of subjective authenticity are reconciled with these shows' explicit emphasis upon the process of manufacturing a commercially viable pop star. As Holmes (2004c) has explored, authenticity is here located in the mediation of the contestants' pre-manufactured selves. Replicating a broader commercial strategy within the pop industry (Leach, 2001), the authenticity of participants is corroborated in the audience witnessing these 'ordinary' people *become* pop stars. When they first appear on the show, contestants are anonymous, would-be pop acts, and the constant referral throughout the series to their pre-mediation lives, works to anchor participants in frameworks of ordinariness, 'realness' and truth, which are then assumed to be carried though into their popstar careers (ibid).

Reality television's emphasis upon the authentic self is one facet of a pervasive cultural landscape in which ideals of authenticity have come to circulate as a form of meta-capital, which traverses numerous domains of contemporary Western culture. To quote journalist Peter York (2015), authenticity is, 'a word and concept fashionable in everything from emotions to materials. Think of politicians who "tell it like it is", celebrity confessionals, bare-brick lofts and bushy beards in Shoreditch, or "artisan" foods.' A discursive tool of both political rhetoric of and commercial marketing, 'authenticity' has become a semantic signifier encompassing a range of interrelated, culturally-celebrated vales: truth, honesty, transparency, trustworthiness, integrity, and the like. As York's statement suggests, authenticity is slippery and polysemic concept, difficult to pin down to a discreet and coherent definition. In this thesis, I approach authenticity – a key term which will emerge time and again - as a particular way of thinking about the self; the perception of a 'separable, coherent quality, located 'inside' consciousness',' a kind of unique essence of selfhood, intrinsic to each individual. This framing of the authentic self posits an irreducible core of character, which motivates and sculpts everything a person thinks, says and

does (Dyer, 1987: 7-8). I am thus conceptualizing the authentic self as a *discursive construct*, a culturally-contingent epistemological frame for making sense of self and subjectivity which becomes vividly and prolifically legible in the texts of reality television and reality TV celebrity.

The relationship between celebrity and the concept of authenticity is by no means new to reality television (see Dyer, 1987). Yet, in the context of much reality TV, visibility is almost entirely predicated upon participants' abilities to make legible their authentic selves successfully, that is, to 'be themselves.' What is also perhaps unique to reality television are the ways in which the form must continually negotiate its valorisation of authentic self-representation with the simultaneous demand that participants provide particular kinds of mediation-worthy performances (Holmes, 2006b). In order to reconcile this tension, reality TV addresses a cynical, aware and media-literate consumer, highly attuned to the potential of the reality televisual space to be used by participants as a platform for projecting a vision of selfhood they feel audiences will want to see (and thus potentially secure a celebrity career). Audience research has suggested that scrutinizing participants' behaviour in order to seek out the moments at which contestants are behaving authentically and when, in contrast, they are being 'fake' or over-performative – 'fake spotting' as Janet Jones (2002: 411) has put it – is one of the key pleasures of reality television viewing (see also Hill, 2004; Rose and Wood, 2005; Skeggs and Wood, 2012).

Moreover, reality TV's valorization of the authentic self corresponds to an intensified investment in the search for the 'real' in relation to selfhood across twenty-first social life. Writing on the early series' of *Big Brother*, Estella Tincknell and Parvati Raghuram were quick to interpret the celebration of the 'authentic' self in reality television as 'a desire to hold onto something 'real' in the context of increasing social fragmentation' (2002: 203, see also Dovey, 2000). Reality television discourses on the 'real' can be situated within a broader cultural climate in which the ascent of neoliberal capitalism is perceived to have dis-embedded social life from traditional structures of 'collective and group identity' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2004: 24), such as local community, religion, social class and familial lineage (Andrejevic, 2004). In such a context, sociologists have claimed, self-identity is 'in danger of breaking into pieces,' as sustaining a coherent sense of *who one is* becomes fraught with difficulty (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2004: 24). Looking within the fabric of the self for a core, intrinsic, authentic identity to be unearthed and realized, has thus become consolidated as a central imperative for the contemporary subject,

as a means of making sense of one's identity in an increasingly atomized and individualized world (Giddens, 1991). From the standpoint of such sociological insights, it is not difficult to perceive why media discourses which assert the ultimate, transcendental fixity of the self have such cultural purchase in our contemporary zeitgeist. Reality television's emphasis upon subjective 'authenticity' can be read as a response to an ontological insecurity which the modern age has appeared to induce, suggesting that beneath the chaos of modern life, each individual possesses an authentic, essential self-hood which forms the core of his or her very being.

One of the foundational tenets of star and celebrity studies was the notion that stars embody normative conceptions of self and subjectivity within particular historical moments (Dyer, 1987). Reality television celebrities have circulated as some of the most visible textual fabrics upon which the concept of the authentic self has attained cultural legibility as the dominant framework for understanding selfhood in the contemporary moment. As part of this discursive process, as I explore in Chapters Three and Four, reality television celebrity has also been instrumental in the production and consolidation of particular, normative scripts of lesbian, gay and transgender identity, in which gender and sexual orientation is located as the very 'stuff' of the authentic self. Beyond simply the representations of LGBT people reality TV has offered, the broader zeitgeist of subjective authenticity which reality programming encapsulates has, in part, enabled the very notion of authentic queer subjectivities to make sense, and to take hold as the normative understanding of LGBT identity in contemporary Britain.

The role of reality TV within this process comes to the fore most clearly in relation to reality television's investment not only in the notion that each individual possesses an authentic self, of which sex and gender are core constituents, but that these selves *emerge* gradually, via often affectively turbulent processes of self-discovery and self-actualisation. Much reality programming works to reconcile a complex duality at the heart of neoliberal models of selfhood, whereby the self is conceived as simultaneously static and reflexive (Holmes and Jermyn, 2014). Discussing *Big Brother*, John Corner (2002) has employed the term 'selving' to 'describe the central process whereby "true selves" are seen to emerge (and develop) from underneath and, indeed, through the "performed selves" projected for us,' so that reality television appears to enact a gradual revelation of a participant's 'authentic' selfhood throughout the duration of his or her mediation. Further, Holmes (2006b: 61) has observed that whilst reality television discourses

maintain that participants are expected to 'be themselves' from the outset of their mediations, at the same time, many reality TV narratives are framed in rhetorics which position contestants' 'true' or 'authentic' selves as being somehow discovered or unearthed by their reality television 'experiences'. She claims:

> Being yourself' is valued, but there is paradoxically also the suggestion that this self was, in part 'found' or released by the reality experience, and its vaguely therapeutic and transforming qualities […] At the same time, this is imagined as having brought forth the real self which was there ('inside') all along.

As I explore in Chapter Three, this model of a latent and submerged truth of the self, made legible through public articulation, converges strikingly with the coming out paradigm which structures normative understandings of gay and lesbian subjectivity within popular culture. Bringing Judith Butler's theory of performativity (1999 [1990]) to bear onto reality TV's narratives which purport to reveal the discovery or emergence of LGBT participants' authentic selves, it can argued that such representations, whilst purporting to bring forth an essential self, in fact construct through discourse the *idea* of an authentic and immutable queer self, which has no essential or ontological reality.

Chapter Two:

Acceptance, humanity and emotional excess: Validation, nationhood and queer suffering in British reality TV

I opened this thesis with a quote from Kellie Maloney, a transgender female participant in *Celebrity Big Brother* 2014, in which she stated her hopes that the playing out of her gender transition onscreen had affected a greater 'acceptance' of transgender people amongst the British populace. In so doing, Kellie mobilised what, by the second decade of the twenty-first century, had become a recognisable cultural script in relation to the inclusion of LGBT identities in British reality television. Since Anna Nolan the 'lesbian nun' won second place in the first series of UK *Big Brother* in 2000, the role of the show in purportedly fostering a climate of ever-augmenting tolerance, inclusion and acceptance for LGBT people within British society had been repeatedly asserted by broadcasters, journalists and reality show participants themselves.

Acceptance is, of course, a slippery and polysemic term, capable of taking on a myriad of contingent meanings. Acceptance can refer to the act of consenting to receive or undertake something offered, yet it can also denote the process of being received as adequate or suitable, particularly in relation to admittance to a group or collective. Finally, acceptance can refer to an agreement with, or belief in, an idea, value or explanation. Coalescing these different definitional strands, the concept of acceptance envisions an entity - be this an idea, duty, object or a group of people - affirmatively taken up by another group, individual or institution, and the two become somehow connected. Crucially, in this process the former entity can become *part of* the second group. As such, questions of acceptance are inextricably bound up with hierarchies of power, whereby the group accepted must adhere to specific kinds of norms in order to be considered 'adequate' or 'suitable' for acceptance to take place.

In this chapter I explore how the visibility of LGBT people in British reality television has been constructed within popular discourses as both evidencing, and itself producing, a social climate of acceptance for sexual minority identities in twenty-first century Britain. Bringing the above-discussed definitions to bear upon these arguments, I critically interrogate what the conditions of this acceptance might be. I argue that the acceptance-through-media-visibility narratives of queer people in British reality TV centralise particular aspects of queer existence which are particularly

reconcilable with the thematic tropes of authenticity, emotionality, suffering and excess which are so central to both reality television, and to celebrity culture more broadly. Finally I ask, if, within these representations, the accepted entity are LGBT identities and the *accepting* entity is not only the worlds of media and celebrity, but the British nation itself, how far does the circulation of this 'acceptance' paradigm challenge or critique heterosexuality as a fundamental, organising principle of social, political and cultural life?

I argue that the emotional intimacy and affective excess of reality television have enabled a limited, discursive re-positioning of some queer identities under the banner of normative human ontology and legibility. However, in the case of LGBT participants, these tropes have also, problematically, entailed the commodification of a kind of queer emotional suffering, mobilised by the mainstream media as a form of emotional and commercial capital. This commodification, I argue, works to perpetuate the 'otherness' of queer forms of life and consecrate the unmarked ubiquity of heteronormativity, via a seemingly progressive rhetoric of liberal inclusion. I focus primarily upon examples of gay and transgender participants from *Big Brother* and *Celebrity Big Brother*, in order to situate these shows' representations of LGBT people with the specific institutional contexts of UK broadcasters Channel 4 and Five, moving on to a final example from *The Only Way is Essex*, to demonstrate how these discursive processes have also permeated newer, structured reality television shows.

'Was this whole experience about acceptance?': Outlining the acceptance paradigm

Brian Dowling, the openly gay winner of *Big Brother* UK in 2001, stated in his live winner's interview that the 'high point' of his reality television experience was 'people accepting me for who I was.' In the days that followed Brian's win, this statement was reproduced across the 'quality' and political spectra of the British press, from *The Independent* (Beard and Milmo, 2001) to the *Daily Mail* (2001), *The Sun* (Darvill, 2001), *The People* (2001) and the *Daily Record* (2001). Discourses of acceptance thus became a central, structural frame for the inter-textual circulation of Brian's newly-consecrated celebrity image, an acceptance which was linked explicitly to his non-heterosexual identity.

This inter-textual acceptance paradigm of LGBT reality TV most visibility surfaced again two years later, when Nadia Almada became the first transgender women to appear on *Big Brother*, winning the series in 2004. As journalist Cole Moreton, writing in *The Independent*, proclaimed:

Nadia knew what she wanted – validation, by as many people as possible, and not just because she wanted to be famous like so many of the preening, posturing prats who auditioned and shared the house with her. That was her secret weapon: there was a purpose to her craving (2004).

This passage emphasises the centrality of discourses of *celebrity* to the acceptance trope. Moreton positions Nadia's desire to become a celebrity via participation in *Big Brother* in explicit contradistinction to apparent fame-seeking of her non-transgender housemates. While their desires for fame are denigrated as superficial, vacuous and narcissistic, celebrification is perceived to attain a more profound significance in the context of Nadia's own narrative. In this dialectic, for many cultural commentators the ability of sexual minorities to attain the visibility of celebrity status goes some way to rehabilitating *Big Brother* from its more usual cultural positioning as an example of valueless, lowest-common-denominator broadcasting.

Mover, throughout its lifespan, these popular arguments have become integrated into the broadcast texts of *Big Brother* itself as a means of attaching a kind of public-service ethos to this commonly-derided show. The programme has exhibited a self-awareness of its own reputation as a space of unprecedented visibility and social transformation for LGBT identities in British popular culture. In 2011, when the broadcast rights to *Big Brother* and *Celebrity Big Brother* were relinquished by their initial broadcaster, Channel 4, and sold by production company Endemol to rival channel Five, Brian Dowling was instated as the presenter of the show's live launch night, eviction and final broadcasts. As noted in the Introduction, such a circuitous turn in Brian's celebrity narrative appeared to point towards the vastly changing possibilities for LGBT visibility in the decade since his initial mediation in 2001, whilst simultaneously hinting at the role *Big Brother* had itself played in the discursive reconstitution of LGBT people as 'accepted' members of the British social body. Indeed, *Big Brother* 2012 was won by transgender male Luke Anderson, who was positioned by bookmakers as the series' most likely winner from his very first appearance on-screen (Dyke, 2012). Such a positioning was likely informed by the thematic similarity of Luke's narrative with those of popular LGBT *Big Brother* winners, such as Brian and Nadia, who had preceded him, as the following exchange from Luke's interview with Brian in the live final suggests:

Brian: How are you feeling? You are the winner. The public chose you.

Luke: I know! It's great to feel acceptance, you know. I just can't… I don't think it's sunk in yet.

Brian: Was this whole experience about acceptance?

Luke: Yes, a big part of it was about acceptance. All my life I've pretty much been an outsider, and to win this…

Brian: I think you can stop fighting. I think people have accepted you.

[To crowd] What do you think?

[Crowd cheers]

Here, the profundity of Luke's mobilisation of the acceptance paradigm is corroborated through the presence of Brian, who had found 'acceptance' for his gay identity through winning Big Brother a decade prior. Luke's narrative is tacitly positioned at the latest incarnation of a trajectory of such narratives, of which Brian's own was one of the very first. The circular movement of energy within the sequence - the cheering and applause represented on-screen between Brian, Luke and the crowd - renders these queer celebrities affectively immersed within an 'accepting' public collective.

In Chapter One I outlined how becoming a celebrity has been conceptualised by scholars as a form of 'symbolic validation,' in Jo Littler's (2004: 10) terms, 'a way to 'really' exist, to mean something in public and private, to be rich with symbolic as well as material capital.' I also noted how this abstract conceptual paradigm has been mobilised most frequently in relation to social class, where celebrity has been discussed as a form of class transcendence or social mobility. The context of LGBT reality TV celebrities therefore takes the 'symbolic validation' paradigm of celebrity studies into a hitherto unexplored direction. Returning to the passage from Moreton cited above, celebrification was perceived to mean something inherently *different* to Nadia Almada in comparison to her cisgender housemates, a difference bound explicitly to her transgender identity. As such, the cultural meanings attached to becoming a celebrity within cultural texts, especially the 'validation' which this is percieved to confer, must be interrogated critically in particular relation to the identities of those who undergoing these processes of celebrification. In the cases of Brian, Nadia and Luke, becoming a celebrity means not (only or primarily) class ascension (although they were all relatively working-class before their

appearances on *Big Brother*), but a sense of acceptance in relation to their often-stigmatised sexual minority identities.

Sexual minorities in reality TV: democracy, pedagogy or exploitation?

Before beginning to outline the contours of this acceptance paradigm as it has been articulated in critical and institutional discourses, it is important to emphasise that since the early years of UK reality TV this acceptance rhetoric has competed with a vociferous counter-discourse, which has evoked the presence of LGBT people within reality programming as evidence of reality TV's status as the cultural afterlife of the Victorian freak show. These two critical positions in relation to LGBT participants largely correspond to the broader critical reception of reality television across the twenty-first century, where reality TV has been both praised as a democratic triumph and, contrastingly, denounced as an exploitative and culturally damaging form of entertainment (Holmes, 2004a).

These debates have been particularly pronounced in the context of LGBT identities for a number of reasons. Firstly, the exploration/democracy dichotomy echoes earlier debates around the inclusion of queer participants in other forms of media, especially 'issue' based talk shows, which have been similarly discussed as treading an uneasy line between humanisation and objectification in their representations of sexual non-conformity (Gamson, 1998). Further, as Anita Brady (2011) has claimed, popular media representations of LGBT identities are often endowed with a higher political significance than non-queer representations within these same cultural forms. As noted in Chapter One, many LGBT advocacy groups in the UK and elsewhere are heavily invested in the apparent power of media visibility to effect material change in the social, cultural and civic status of sexual minority populations.

Since the early 2000s, *Big Brother* has been discussed widely in popular commentary as offering the kinds of voyeuristic and grotesque spectacles of sexual and corporeal abnormality associated with the defunct cultural form of the 'freak show' (Morton, 2004). In the show's critical reception, this 'freak show' rhetoric has occupied a continuum from sensationalist articles in the tabloid press emphasising the non-normativity of participants' identities, for instance, to quote *The Sun* on Nadia and *Big Brother* 2004, 'Big Brother Five kicked off last night with the most bizarre collection of housemates yet [...] the six girls include a **TRANSSEXUAL**' (Nathan and Smith, 2001, bold and capitalisation in original), to broadsheet think-pieces. In these latter texts,

Big Brother's producers have been accused of duplicitously promoting discourses of tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity in order to publicly mask what is in fact an ultimately damaging and asymmetric participant/producer relationship. Rachel McGrath's (2014) discussion of Kellie Maloney, published on the news website the *Huffington Post*, is particularly representative of these arguments:

> Kellie's decision to enter the 'CBB' house at, what seems to be, such an emotional and testing time is something I can't get behind [...] My issue isn't that these discussions shouldn't be taking place, it's just that the 'CBB' house isn't the place to do it [...] It's for washed-up B-listers, eccentric characters and reality TV stars with too much to say - not somewhere to contemplate your personal life in between tasks and face-to-face nominations. It's not about personal growth - despite what the producers may have told you (2014).

Here, McGrath contrasts the apparent gravity of Kellie's transgender biography – her 'emotional' and 'testing' life experiences – with the seemingly trivial thematics of the *Big Brother* format, explicitly refuting textual and institutional emphases upon the apparent existential, pedagogical and transformative potential of queer mediation within the show

These exploitation arguments have, however, vied for cultural legitimacy with a contrasting discursive register, which has endowed *Big Brother*'s representations of queer participants with no small amount of progressive political potentiality. Numerous commentators have hailed the public popularity of LGBT participants as both pointing towards, and having itself enabled, a wider climate of 'tolerance' and 'acceptance' for sexual minority identities in twenty-first century Britain. Journalist Mike Wade described in 2002 how, 'the burgeoning TV career of Brian Dowling, the publicly anointed winner of *Big Brother* 2 who was openly gay from the outset [...] highlight[s] a widespread acceptance of a person's right to their own sexuality; gay or straight is no longer an issue' (Wade, 2002). In 2004, transgender activist Christine Burns proclaimed that Nadia's victory had 'turned people's ideas about [transgender people] upside down' (Burns, 2004). Reality television celebrity is characterised as both an *emblem* and *agent* of social change. Whilst Wade suggests that Brian's *Big Brother* victory was *indicative* of an ever-augmenting climate of tolerance and acceptance for sexual minority identities in twenty-first century Britain,

Burns positions Nadia's mediation as having performed an *active role* in the very creation of such an 'accepting' milieu.

Indeed, it is in the context of sexual minority participants that reality television has appeared to function most pedagogically, 'teaching' an assumed heteronormative audience about the existence of queer forms of life. Take, for example, Sam Brodie, a transgender female participant of *Big Brother* UK in 2006. Upon her entrance to the show (two weeks into its broadcast run) many of the other housemates articulated their confusion around how to make sense of Sam's gender identity, with some expressing incredulity at the very notion of a transgender person. The series thus played host to a series of discussions amongst the other participants around how to appropriately address and refer to Sam with binary, male/female pronouns without upsetting her or causing offence. In one exchange, Richard, an older gay man, essentially taught Nikki, a much younger cisgender woman, about transgender identity (or 'transsexual' to use the terminology of the time), and about the differences between transgender femininity and gay masculinity.

> **Richard:** [Sam is] what we call a 'pre-op transsexual', have you heard of that?
> **Nikki:** No. You're winding me up.
> **Richard:** I'm not winding you up. Go ask her, she seems very comfortable with it, but you just have to be kind of respectful, you know…what she wants to be recognised as, yes? So she's not a lesbian, she was born a man but now lives her life as a woman. Can you grasp that?
> **Nikki:** So she's a man?
> **Richard:** She *was* a man, now she lives her life as a woman. You see? But she's got her bits, she's got a penis.
> **Nikki:** And does she go out with girls or guys?
> **Richard:** I would probably… I don't know, you'd have to ask her.
> **Nikki:** Would you go for her?
> **Richard:** No, because she's a woman [and] I like men.

Whilst the tone of this particular exchange is striking in its didacticism, academic work on reality television has also pointed towards the potential for the form to operate as a kind of cultural public sphere; functioning as a space in which, often contentious, issues of public interest can be

negotiated and debated (Bignell, 2005). Writing in the 1990s, Ib Bondebjerg (1996) argued that the first wave of reality television had transformed the public sphere from a space of political discussion between the middle classes and the ruling elite, as theorised influentially by Jürgen Habermas, to a more democratic realm, encompassing personal, emotional and quotidian issues and identities which were formerly consigned to the private sphere. Bondebjerg writes, 'what is taking place here is an updating of a paternalistic public service discourse to include a more democratic selection of topics and voices outside the traditionally defined area of public interest' (1996: 44). *Big Brother* and *Celebrity Big Brother* have provided representational spaces for the playing out of all manner of political issues which are often unrecognised as belonging to the realm of formal politics, such as racism, misogyny, ageism and homophobia (Holmes, 2009; Holmes and Jermyn, 2014). In the context of sexuality, for example, the 2014 series of *Big Brother* was co-temporal with the coming into force of the British government's Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act[13] which enabled same-sex couples to marry under UK law. In this series, a participant named Danielle McMahon, a devout Catholic, expressed to other housemates her disagreement with same-sex marriage, which instigated a group discussion about the issue.

Indeed, the role of reality television of bringing formerly 'private' issues into the public domain is particularly pronounced in the context of queer sexualities. As noted in Chapter One, the coming into visibility of numerous LGBT celebrities through reality television in the first, and into the second, decades of the twenty-first century was concurrent with a trajectory of legal reform which granted a series of previously withheld civil rights to sexual minorities. In a similar way to reality TV, this legislative process has been discussed by scholars as transforming the very notions of what constitutes 'public' and 'private' in contemporary social and political life. Diane Richardson (2004: 394) has argued that 'for lesbians and gay men to begin to be recognized and accepted as 'good sexual citizens' who deserve equal rights to heterosexuals' has entailed, 'a profound shift in the meanings of both homosexuality and citizenship, calling into question the historical division between the 'good heterosexual citizen' and 'the homosexual' as an *alien outsider*, who represents a potential threat to the nation state.' Central to this historical division are notions of the public and the private, an epistemological dichotomy which is seemingly complicated by the integration of LGBT people within the national polity. Of course, it could be argued that it is not just homosexuality, but sexuality per se, which has been traditionally

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[13] The act was passed by Parliament in 2013, with the first same-sex marriages in the UK taking place in mid-2014.

abjected from the public sphere. Yet, *heterosexuality* has always found abundant articulation in public culture. Weddings, for example, traditionally the preserve of a man and a woman, are both legal and highly public rituals. Historical interpretations of the public sphere as sexually neutral have therefore worked to reinscribe a conception of heterosexuality as not really a sexuality at all, but rather a default and neutral state of being, so pervasive in its construction as normative, that it escapes notice by all but those who do not enjoy its privilege.

If the LGBT rights reforms of the twenty-first century mark an opening-up of public culture to integrate forms of subjectivity previously denigrated to the realm of the private, it is here that the connections between the ascent of LGBT rights and the cultural dominance of reality television become most intensely visible. Reality TV has been interpreted as irrevocably altering the kinds of behaviour which are culturally demarcated as suitable for public articulation. Emotional outpourings, psychological breakdowns, family feuds, and all manner of sex acts (although these are almost invariably heterosexual) have all found highly public exposure in reality TV. The public visibility of queer identities within reality television therefore marks the convergence of two central points in a constellation of cultural practices which have worked in complex interrelation to enable a transformation of the very meanings of the public and the private within twenty-first century popular culture, and to affect a partial dissolution of the artificial and constructed boundary between these terms. That said, I do not wish to conflate political reform and popular cultural visibility as simply two intertwined facets of the same socio-political process. The logic of reality TV: the institutional gate-keeping around who does and does not attain representation within its textual spaces, and how this participation will be mediated through editing and other means of textual composition, and the complicated commercial and public service hybridity which characterises many broadcasters in the UK, crucially shapes the representations of LGBT identity which these programmes offer in ways which cannot be reduced simply to a political imperative to diversity and social acceptance.

Emotion, subjectification and public service broadcasting

Taking the specific case of *Big Brother*, I have so far outlined how the acceptance paradigm of LGBT representation in British reality television has been produced and circulated in journalistic commentary on the show. I now move on to interrogate how the perceived ability of reality TV to foster a climate of 'acceptance' for LGBT people in contemporary Britain has been located in

the *specific conventions* of reality TV, particularly the form's investment in authenticity, emotional revelation, intimacy and excess. I explore how the discursive construction of the generic tropes of reality TV as the locus of the acceptance paradigm has operated in an inter-textual network comprising institutional discourses, journalistic commentary, and the aesthetic and technical construction of the broadcast shows themselves.

As discussed in Chapter One, Channel 4, *Big Brother*'s original UK broadcaster, is widely considered a pioneer of sexual minority representation (Franklin, 2014). The polyvalent identities of *Big Brother* cast members have been repeatedly mobilised in institutional discourses as evidence of the channel's commitment to its statutory, public service remit to 'appeal to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society.' In 2001, for example, the year of Brian Dowling's *Big Brother* victory, the channel claimed in their annual review: 'Channel 4 reflects the social, cultural and political realities of Britain. But it does more. It also challenges and shapes those realities,' citing 'the most talked about entertainment event of the year, Big Brother' as evidence of the successful realisation of this socially and politically oriented remit (Channel 4, 2001). As Nathalie Edwards (2009) has explored in relation to representations of queer identity in the channel's fictional output, since its inception, Channel 4 has sought to reconcile its status as a *commercial* public service broadcaster though popular entertainment programming featuring sexual minority participants, which are then extra-textually positioned within institutional discourse as socially and politically progressive.

In contrast, the purchasing of the broadcasting rights to *Big Brother* and *Celebrity Big Brother* by Five - a commercial network with a popular reputation for low-quality output - in 2011, was positioned by commentators as signaling the format's relinquishing of any sense of public service responsibility (Stephens, 2011). Yet, as the quote from Kellie Maloney with which I opened this thesis makes clear, within the programme texts, the format's shift to Five has engendered little real change. The apparent power of *Big Brother* to effect socio-political transformation *remains* a pervasive discourse in the context of sexual minority participation. *Big Brother* has thus been configured in textual, critical and institutional discourses as dynamic and politically charged space of visibility for subaltern identities, enacting a process of societal integration-via-mediation, which has included not only LGBT people, but also ethnic and religious minorities, working class and disabled people.

In this discursive framework, the perceived ability of *Big Brother*'s inclusions of sexual minorities to effect social 'acceptance' of these identities has been located specifically in the generic tropes of the show. In this dialectic, *Big Brother* is able to function as a politically important space for subaltern visibility *because it is reality TV*, and so enables LGBT people to become visible in ways that other forms of broadcasting, purportedly, cannot. For example, discussing the victory of Brian Dowling in 2001, Peter Bazalgette, the head of Endemol UK, the production company behind the *Big Brother* franchise, has stated:

> The only way [he] would have got on TV in the old days would have been wedged into some convenient sociological pigeonhole by the likes of *This Week* or *World in Action.* [Big Brother] is an argument in favour of more diverse programming, and access to the airwaves for a more diverse spread of people (Bazalgette, 2001: 22).

Here, Bazalgette positions the mode of viewing elicited by *Big Brother* in opposition to the didactic, 'sociological' gaze of traditional television documentary. He places these two, apparently contrasting, televisual forms within a respective dichotomy of *subjectification* and *objectification*. Bazalgette's implicit claim that *Big Brother* approaches marginalised people as individuals who are empowered to speak on their own behalves, rather than looking *at* them as objects of anthropological scrutiny, is bound to the ways in which the show appropriates certain documentary conventions, and distances itself from others. In his references to *This Week* and *World in Action*, Bazalgette centralises *Big Brother*'s departure from the educative and informative 'expository' mode of documentary-making associated with the BBC and traditional public service broadcasting (Armstrong, 2005: 110). In so doing, he points towards *Big Brother*'s alignment with an alternative style of documentary: the 'observational' mode, where, to quote Richard Armstrong (ibid: 111), 'the style invites [viewers] to speculate and draw our own conclusions' about the action unfolding onscreen. In the observational style, the semiotics of surveillance and functionality which make up the bulk of *Big Brother*'s televisual aesthetic – continuity editing, minimal camera movement, 'naturalistic' high-key lighting and deep focus shots – construct the house as a platform or a stage upon which participants have the agency to represent their 'real' selves, with minimal intervention from production staff. Where the means of production do become visible within the programme, these connote *observation* rather than construction: CCTV-style cameras fixed into the corners of rooms, and editors sitting before a

wall of screens emitting a live feed of action within the house in *Big Brother's Little Brother*. As Misha Kavka (2012: 95) has argued, in *Big Brother* the 'media apparatus' is associated with capturing the 'real' (rather than constructing it), particularly as the 'real' is coded through the emotionally intimate and excessive mediation of participants.

In the context of LGBT representations, many commentators have pointed towards the emotionality inherent to reality TV one of the primary tools through which the subjectification of LGBT participants is enabled. The emotional contours of reality TV have been hailed as enabling the recognition of a transcendental, common 'humanity' between *Big Brother*'s LGBT participants, and the ostensibly heterosexual and normatively-gendered viewership. For example, celebrating the public popularity of Nadia Almada as evidence of a sea-change in public awareness of transgender issues, activist Christine Burns stated:

> The positive response to Nadia is a sign of growing public understanding of transsexuality – but it has only happened because viewers have had an unprecedented opportunity to get to know her as a person rather than a label […] She is treating the diary room as a place she goes to empty out her heart, which enables people to see in a way they might not have seen before, that transsexual people get hurt and cry about it (Burns quoted in Edge, 2004).

Burns refers here to the numerous moments in which Nadia recounted the day-to-day struggles of life as a transgender woman, within sealed, confessional and intimate space of the iconic *Big Brother* diary room. Nadia articulated feeling perpetually haunted by the spectre of her 'past', her sadness at her inability to find a partner accepting of her transsexuality, and the mixed feelings of physical pain and emotional euphoria following her gender reassignment surgery ('It was the happiest day of my life, but I was in so much pain'). Burns centralises *Big Brother*'s eschewing of any attempt to 'label' Nadia as a metonym for 'transsexual people' as a whole. Rather, she suggests that the emotionality of Nadia's mediation had worked to override her inherent difference to normative conceptions of personhood (her transgender identity), and expose a common, transcendental humanity between Nadia and the assumed heteronormative viewers.

Figures 2 and 3: Nadia in the diary room.

These arguments mobilise a complex dialectic in which LGBT people in reality television *not* standing as reductive tokens for their sexual minority identities, is nonetheless seen to possess political and transformative potential *for* the position of that minority group in within contemporary British society. Moreover, these arguments are tightly bound to reality television's broader investment in, and claims to represent, the 'authentic' selves of participants through the iconography and practices of therapy culture. In the diary room sequences which Burns alluded to in her discussion of Nadia, Nadia was framed in continuous, static mid-shots, sitting on the diary rooms chair, as she looked directly into the camera's lens [Figures 2 and 3]. These shots were intercut with footage of the closed diary room door, filmed from outside the room, and bridged by the continuing sound of Nadia's dialogue. The spatial division evoked in this visual juxtaposition: inside the diary room verses 'outside', in the communal spaces of the house, worked to construct the emotional experiences which Nadia articulated here as emanating from some deep and ontological core of her self-identity. The subject position offered to viewers through this textual construction was one of privileged access to an intensely personal, confessional moment (the other housemates cannot see or hear what we can), witnesses to Nadia's personal, private, affective articulations of her life experiences becoming public through mediation in *Big Brother*. As such, the ambivalent claims to public, private and the 'real' which structure reality TV – the promise access to a 'truth' of personhood through a highly constructed and mediated televisual environment/text - are central to the ways in which LGBT identities have become visible within the form.

Indeed, some popular commentators have positioned the revelation of purportedly 'authentic' selves seemingly promised by the *Big Brother* format as an 'ideal' context for the 'humanisation' of queer contestants. For example, the journalist Julie Burchill[14] (2005) argued that Nadia's emotional representations had resonated with audiences, 'because we recognise that nothing human is alien to us.' Echoing Burns' argument cited above, Burchill offers a reading of Nadia's narrative in which Nadia's capacity to experience deep, and often harrowing, emotions, had worked to discursively situate transgender Nadia under the sign of normative and universal 'humanity'. This assertion points towards the striking symbiosis which I interrogate further in Chapters 3 and 4, between the kinds of 'authentic' self-expression valorised within, and in relation to, reality TV, and mainstream epistemologies of transgender (and also gay) selfhood, in which gender identity and sexual orientation are conceived as being at the heart of one's essential self. Shaped by the format's emphasis upon authentic emotional revelation, in articulating their queer identities emotionally onscreen, LGBT *Big Brother* contestants have been constructed as simply 'being themselves': the ultimate mandate for participation within the show (Ritchie, 2001), and thus exposing the human being beneath the queer label.

'Nadia, we love you': Affective national belonging

Sara Ahmed (2004: 1) has argued that discourses and imagery of emotion within cultural texts 'work to shape the 'surfaces' of […] collective bodies.' In this way, through its intimate diary-room sequences and broader investment in emotional expression, *Big Brother* discursively constructs a variety of different social collectives: ranging from the British national body, to the contours of the 'human' itself. In the context of nation, *Big Brother* represents a world in which emotions are a connecting force and play a dynamic role in the constitution and reconstitution of national parameters. In so doing, the show does cultural work, delineating which bodies and forms of identity are, can, or should, be successfully integrated into the national fold, discursively repositioning (some) LGBT people as embedded and 'accepted' members of the British national public.

That said, as part of its cultural work in constructing reality television celebrity as a route to national acceptance for LGBT people (both for the individual celebrity and LGBT subjects more broadly), the acceptance paradigm must constantly work to resolve an inherent internal

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[14] Somewhat ironically, Burchill has been frequently accused of transphobia in her writing (e.g. Kaveny, 2013).

contradiction in the relationship between LGBT celebrities and the public who consume their images. Becoming a celebrity (via participation in reality television or otherwise) entails, by definition, a *transcendence* of the anonymous public. As Nick Couldry (2004) has argued, to be a celebrity is to be positioned in *opposition* to the 'ordinary' majority. Therefore, in being at once immersed within *and* transcendent of a collective, the phenomenon of queer celebrification appears to pose something of a paradox, which is negotiated within *Big Brother* as a complex textual process.

Firstly, popular conceptions of celebrification as an apparent 'validation' of queer subjectivities are informed by the vociferous rhetoric of *democracy* surrounding reality television fame. The textual construction of Brian and Nadia as emergent celebrities in the sequences in which they left the *Big Brother* house as winners, entailed the repeated suggestion that they had been, quite literally, *chosen by the public* to become celebrities, that their celebrification was contingent upon a collective public approval. In 2001, gesturing to the fireworks and the crowd waving placards and banners and shouting his name, host Davina McCall told Brian, 'Look at all that, it's for you […] They're all here for you […] They love you,' and to Nadia three years later, 'Enjoy it Nadia, this is for you […] Everybody loves you. How much do we love Nadia? [Crowd cheers] Nadia, we love you. We love you. We love you.' As exemplified by Davina's repeated use of 'we' in the second quotation and her call for the crowd to corroborate her statement with cheers of agreement, as a presenter, and as a fairly normative celebrity figure – white, middle-class, cisgender - Davina was positioned as the mouthpiece of the assembled crowd, who were in turn metonymic for the wider viewing public. In this context, the long, physical embraces which both housemates received from Davina immediately upon their exits become symbolic for the metaphorical 'embracing' of these queer celebrities by the British public at large.

Discourses of the apparently democratic nature of fame have a long history in Western media culture, and are by no means unique to contemporary reality television. Joshua Gamson (1994: 34-35) has explored how the notion that it is ultimately the public who make individuals into celebrities, by choosing to consume (or not to consume) their celebrity images, has a heritage dating back to the Hollywood studio system. In the age of *Big Brother*, however, where (as in many other reality television programmes) viewers are interpellated to vote via communication technologies for their favourite contestant to win the show, these discourses have become more

explicitly incorporated into the structures and formats of reality television texts themselves. The interactivity embedded into the text of the *Big Brother* final (and the show more generally), evokes the apparent agency and power of the audience to enable, or block, participants' transformations into celebrities by extending, or terminating, their media circulation within the show, through interactive voting technologies. Further, the *Big Brother* final's status as a live broadcasting event works to engender what Andrew Crisell (2012: 16) describes as a 'phatic' ambience, evoking a mass audience 'co-present' in time (and for the on-screen crowd, space), offering an image of the British nation coming together in shared celebration of these victorious queer figures.

Indeed, the conception of Brian and Nadia's celebrification narratives as signifiers of a vast public embrace was embedded into visual composition of the broadcast sequences of their emergences from the house as winners. Nadia was depicted in close-up shots, crying, screaming and waving frantically, which were juxtaposed with long-shots of the vast, cheering crowd, as fireworks dramatically exploded overhead. Again, a shot of Nadia, overcome with emotion was intercut with another long-shot of the crowd, waving home-made placards and banners bearing her name, chanting, 'NA-DI-A! NA-DI-A!' At one points she stood upon a raised platform, depicting in a grandiose low-angle shot, blowing emphatic kisses to the fans below her, like a newly crowned queen looking down adoringly upon her equally adoring subjects. The effect of this montage – shots of Nadia alone followed by footage of the assembled crowd, bridged by the sounds of euphoric celebration, was that Nadia appeared immersed within an adoring collectivity [Figures 4 to 7]. She was at once positioned above *and* as part of a public collective, or rather she was constructed as somehow 'higher' or more 'special' than the bodies which comprised the anonymous crowd *via* her affective immersion within the collective fold. At the same time, however, it is important to note that, as a broadcaster, Channel 4 does *not* claim (in the manner of BBC1 or ITV1) to speak to the *entire* British nation. The target demographics of Channel 4 are quite specifically young viewers (18-34 years old) and politically liberal, 'up-market' audiences.[15] As such, this kind of textual composition with *Big Brother* could be perceived to locate the acceptance for sexual diversity which these sequences signify as the properties of a particular segment of the British populace, defined generationally and by a liberal, cosmopolitan outlook.

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[15] https://www.4sales.com/platforms/channel4/

Figures 4 to 7: Nadia wins *Big Brother* 2004.

Nonetheless, the inter-textual commentary on Brian and Nadia's wins found in contemporaneous newspaper coverage worked to 'fix' a particular nationalised rhetoric to the victories of these two queer figures, and to the societal acceptance of sexual plurality which their wins were discussed to signify. Brian had 'endeared himself to the nation' (Todd, 2001; Todd and Hilton, 2001), been 'taken to the nation's heart' (White, 2001) in a 'wave of nationwide popularity' (Byrne, 2001), he was 'Queen Brian […] Our man […] the nation's favourite' (Methven and Cummins, 2001). Nadia, similarly, had 'won the nation's heart' (Calvert, 2004) and 'won the heart of the nation' (Compton 2005). Further, in October 2001 the cover of the gay lifestyle magazine *Attitude* magazine heralded Brian as 'Queen B', depicting him inside a car, looking into the camera simulating the Queen of England's iconic royal wave [Figure 8]. This ironic positioning of Brian as the 'Queen' – playing upon the double meaning of 'queen' as a colloquial term for a flamboyant and effeminate gay man - positioned his transformation into a celebrity as a national institutionalisation of a particular modality of queerness that he was perceived to embody. Indeed, the repeated descriptions in the press of how both Brian and Nadia had been 'crowned'

winners of *Big Brother*, perhaps inadvertently, constructed these figures as emblematic of a post-modern media age in which the ability for foreign queers to become famous and adored via reality television exemplified how British cultural icons were to be found amongst diverse and democratically elevated media figures, rather than royalty and aristocracy ascribed into fame by historical lineage, tradition, or elite social status (Rojek, 2001).
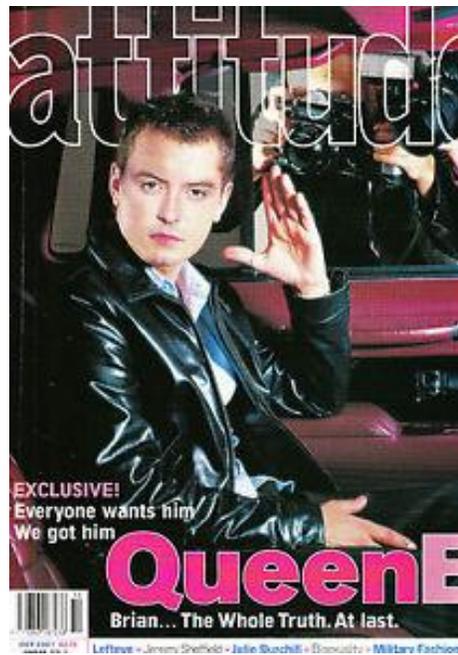
Figure 8: Brian Dowling on the cover of *Attitude*, 2001.

The nationalistic framings of queer reality TV participants such as Nadia and Brian appears at odds with a long-standing argument within queer studies that sexual minorities have been traditionally excluded from hegemonic imaginings of nationhood and national identity. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998) proposed the term 'national heterosexuality' to conceptualise and critique the ways in which heteronormativity is embedded within the discursive apparatus of state-making. In this framework, the citizen is addressed invariably as heterosexual, most potently through the valorisation of the 'family form' as 'mediator and metaphor of national existence,' part of 'a constellation of practises that everywhere dispenses heterosexual privilege as a tacit but central organizing index of social membership' (ibid: 555). In the twenty-first century, however, the borders between which identities are, and are not, constituted as belonging within the national fold have become increasingly porous. Reality television programmes such as *Big Brother* have become central spaces in which certain envisionings of Britishness - an

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unstable and contingent concept comprised of a series of intersecting and mutating discourses - are constructed.

In her study of the well-known *Big Brother* star Jade Goody, Kimberly Springer (2014: 212) has argued that British reality TV has celebrated an ideal of 'cosmopolitan Britishness,' in which the British nation is imagined as a kind of multi-cultural meritocracy where all citizens have equal opportunity to become successful, irrespective of their background or identity.[16] The intertextual circulation of LGBT reality TV celebrities is very much part of this process, playing out particular narratives of nation; producing and reproducing the national sign through a discursive lexicon of multiculturalism, diversity and holistic plurality. Reality television's role in the discursive construction of diverse and multicultural 'New Britannia' (ibid) is encapsuled in this statement from the former Chief Executive of Channel 4, Michael Jackson:

> The [Big Brother] house represents a melting pot for a broader, more understanding and inclusive society. White, black, Asian, gay and heterosexual contestants entered the house. We have watched them, we have got to know them and we liked or disliked them for who they are, not what they are (Jackson, 2001).[17]

In this passage, Jackson evokes the popular arguments I outlined previously, which have located a transformative political potential in the purportedly subjectifying qualities of the emotional and intimate tropes of the *Big Brother* format. This narrative of nation evokes a British people bound together by bonds of personal and emotional connection, over and above any formal criteria of personhood or identity. In this context, the fact that Brian and Nadia's queer identities intersect their non-British ethnicities – Brian is Irish and Nadia is Portuguese – further emphasise how Britishness is constructed within this text as an experience of affective connectivity, rather than a formal identity pertaining to certain morphological or political signifiers. In this framework, national inclusion is contingent upon 'who' not 'what' you are, so that foreign-born queers such as the gay, Irish Brian Dowling and the Portuguese, transgender Nadia Almada become integrated

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[16] Springer discusses how this vision of Britishness mirrored the political project of New Labour in the early-to-mid 2000s to redefine the nation as 'New Britannia'. Yet, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, in relation to *Big Brother*, this apparent championing of onscreen diversity has remained a consistent discourse within the show into the second decade of the twenty-first century.

[17] This is, of course, a highly debatable statement considering how the format of Big Brother is often structured to incite conflict, not harmony, between the housemates, but is, I believe, applicable to the specific empirical cases of Brian and Nadia's narratives.

as part of the national fold, because viewers have connected with their common, essential and transcendental humanity. Britishness, in this representational frame, becomes a state of feeling, an affective register, in which the para-social relationships of celebrity culture[18] become an intense, emotionally-charged, nation-making force.

'I don't want to rub it in people's faces': Performing Queer Suffering in *Big Brother*

The inclusion of sexual minority participants in *Big Brother* UK has been repeatedly framed in a vociferous rhetoric of 'acceptance'. Broadcast textual representations, in combination with popular commentary and institutional discourses, have asserted that, as a domain of 'authentic' emotional revelation, reality TV allows viewers to 'look beyond' these participants' differences to heterosexual norms of subjectivity, and connect with the transcendental 'humanity' of LGBT participants. In this way, *Big Brother* has envisaged a twenty-first century Britain in which emotional and affective connections have become the binding forces of a pluralistic and diverse national body.

These discourses are, however, a lot more complex than they may first appear. Interrogating the representations of LGBT participants within the texts of the show itself reveals something of a representational paradox. The emotional displays identified by commentators as enabling the legibility of an apparent *sameness* between queer participants and assumed-heteronormative viewers, stems directly from these LGBT participants' *difference* to heteronormative conceptions of personhood.

It is important to emphasise that *Big Brother*'s representations of queer participants are nothing if not multifaceted. In the case of Brian and Nadia, and Mark Byron of *Big Brother* 2014 who I discuss below, their constructions through images and discourses of emotionality coexisted with theses figures' simultaneous construction as comedic, camp and fun (see Chapter 5). The many-sidedness of these mediations is emphasised in Mark Frith, the former editor of *heat* magazine's comments on Nadia:

> Our readers adore her […] Yes, she's been on this journey, yes, it's all very serious. But
> there's this other side to her that's all about this incredibly infectious laugh and how

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[18] Para-social relationships refers to Feelings of emotional connection with individuals one has only encountered in mediated forms (Horton and Wohl, 1956).

entertaining she is. Considering what she'd been through, it was even more admirable that she was kicking back and having the time of her life (quoted in Ellen, 2004).

Indeed, the importance of LGBT reality TV participants being perceived as upbeat and tenacious in the face of their continuing marginalisation is central to the ways in which the show produces and circulates 'idealised' neoliberal, queer subjectivities. I interrogate this process in detail in Chapter 5. In the context of gay male identity, the show has repeatedly drawn upon established media constructions of the effeminate gay man as a comedic archetype (Medhurst, 2007), which have been amalgamated with an alternate emotional register, articulated through highly negative emotional expression. It is this latter facet of their representations which forms my focus in this chapter. Further, the amount of broadcast time given to 'positive' and 'negative' emotional expression is not the same in each empirical case, and it is not the intention of this thesis to collapse differences in representation between LGBT reality TV celebrities; rather, I seek to bring them out. There is, however, an ongoing thread which unites the representations of many different sexual minority *Big Brother* participants: the suggestion that many of the negative emotional experiences during their time on the show are directly connected to their non-heterosexual identities.

The representation of LGBT identities through images and discourses of emotionality is far from unique to reality television. As noted in Chapter One, throughout modern history, non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming people (alongside other subordinate social groups, such as women and people of colour) have been closely associated with emotional excess. Western popular culture has played host to a plethora of recognisable stereotypes of over-emotional queerness: lesbians and gay men, for example have been repeatedly constructed as figures of depression, sadness and melancholia (Dyer, 2002; Ahmed, 2010), whilst transgender people have often figured within popular representations as mentally 'disturbed, erratic and unstable' (Keegan, 2013). In this way, the social, cultural and political marginalisation of queer people has been repeatedly legitimated through their association with the lesser value within Darwinian hierarchies of reason/emotion. In this hierarchy, emotionality is subordinated to the 'higher' human faculties of reason and rationality, which are thus demarcated as the property of the white, heterosexual male (Ahmed, 2004). Indeed, much of the cultural devaluation of *reality television* itself has been bound to an implicit perception of the form as inherently 'feminine' due

to its emphasis upon emotional (and bodily) exposure. Reality TV has therefore been constructed as less culturally 'valuable' than more 'serious', 'rational', masculine-coded forms of broadcasting, such news, documentary or drama, through an inherently gendered optic (Holmes and Jermyn, 2004; Weber 2014; Joyrich, Kavka and Weber, 2015).

In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that it is in the female-coded domain of reality programming that LGBT identities have become most visible in the British popular media. Historically, it has been the theatre (and musical theatre in particular), a cultural form similarly denigrated as space of emotional and bodily display, which was considered a 'haven' for sexual dissidents (Schanke and Mara, 1998: 9). Reality TV can thus be conceptualised as a contemporary iteration of the historical linking of non-heterosexual people with culturally de-valued contexts of emotional performance and display. Reality TV has come to function as a space in which subjects traditionally excluded from other forms of public culture: sexual minorities, women, people of colour, and the disabled, have been able to attain public visibility, accruing different kinds of value (celebrity status, monetary gain) through engaging in forms of emotional labour (Skeggs and Wood, 2012; Sender, 2014).

For LGBT people, I would argue that their ability to attain public visibility in reality TV has been largely contingent upon performances of emotional suffering which are explicitly tied to their statuses as sexual minority subjects. Within both critical commentary and the shows themselves, the emotionality of LGBT *Big Brother* participants has been repeatedly positioned as emanating from the highly contradictory construction of LGBT subject positions in contemporary British popular culture. By this, I mean that whilst the apparent 'acceptance' of sexual diversity has become discursively and legislatively consolidated as a core 'value' of the twenty-first century British nation (Haritaworn, et. al., 2008), social life continues to be structured upon a default assumption that the vast majority of people are heterosexual. Therefore, to identify in any way other to the heterosexual norm is to take on a complex and ambivalent subject position, which is at once (relatively) *normalised*, yet distinctly non-*normative*. Whilst it may now be acceptable to be LGBT (or so mainstream discourses claim), to be LGBT is still to be inherently *different* to hegemonic (heteronormative) conceptions of personhood and identity. This existential contradiction of modern queer life has been discussed by queer theorists as a source of highly negative emotion: 'hard feeling, difficult feelings - shame, resentment, rage,

grief' (Sender, 2014: 207). Writing in the context of phenomenology, Ahmed has argued that the experience of being queer in a straight world can feel 'like a bodily injury [...] one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled,' through the sense that one does not 'fit' within a sociality structured upon heteronormativity (2004: 147-148).

These kinds of negative, elusive emotional experiences described by Ahmed, have been highly visible in the texts of *Big Brother*. In the very first episode of *Big Brother* 2001, Brian Dowling articulated to other housemates his anxieties that he would be the first person to be evicted because, in his own slightly euphemistic terms, 'I'm quite outgoing and I camp things up a bit, I think people won't like that, some of the guys won't like it...that's my biggest fear.' Despite verbal reassurances from many of the other participants that they had no issues with Brian's flamboyant homosexuality, the suggestion that his gay sexuality did not entirely 'fit' within the heteronormative spatial organisation of the *Big Brother* house was repeatedly played out throughout the series. In particular, the seeming irreconcilability of Brian's gay identity with the gendered division of sleeping quarters (a 'girls' room' and a 'boys' room'), became the source of numerous conflicts and debates, most potently in the third week of the series, when a new arrival, Josh Rafter, entered the house. Whilst Josh in fact identified as gay, he was initially perceived by all of the other housemates to be heterosexual, and so a group decision was made that Brian would move out of the male bedroom and into the female bedroom in order to make way for Josh. Brian was reluctant to switch bedrooms, but clearly realised that, as a gay man, his claim to inhabiting the male room was the least legitimate, as the very necessity of a gendered bifurcation of sleeping space corresponded to heteronormative logics of social organisation, which appeared to render Brian's own identity incoherent, extraneous and redundant.

This instance made intensely visible the ways in which the sleeping quarters of the *Big Brother* house functioned as a kind of disciplinary architecture, demarcating normative relationships between gender and the flow of sexual desire: men to women and women to men. Writing in the context of public toilets, Sheila Cavanagh (2010) has identified the 'harm incurred' by queer people in relation to 'gender-exclusionary spatial designs.' In a similar way, the bedroom incident was shown to cause something of an existential crisis for Brian, culminating in an aggressive and emotional, drunken confrontation with Josh the following day. Brian articulated how the sense of integration and belonging he felt he had achieved in bonding with the others

was ruptured by a visible intensification of his inherent otherness to the norms of heterosexual personhood, wrought (ironically, considering Josh's own sexuality) by the arrival of Josh.

Moving forward to 2014, it is perhaps difficult to imagine a gay contestant stating they fear being disliked purely due to their sexual orientation, as Brian did over a decade prior. However, *Big Brother*'s representations of queer identities continued to be bound to expressions of unease, anxiety and distress, born of the inherent failure of queer subjects to live up to what Ahmed has termed the 'hey you too' of heterosexual social organisation (2004: 147). One of the major storylines of *Big Brother* 2014 concerned a romantic relationship between two gay male housemates: Mark Byron and Christopher Hall. Mark and Christopher's relationship was widely celebrated in the press and on Twitter, and the couple's potential statuses as role models for young gay and lesbian viewers was discussed within the broadcast texts, with housemates praising the couple's courage for articulating their same-sex desires within the mass mediated spaces of the *Big Brother* house.[19]

Despite the celebratory rhetoric surrounding their representations, within the show, the open expressions of their relationship - kissing in the storeroom and under the bedcovers - were

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[19] Interestingly, the online newspaper *The Huffington Post* described the relationship as *Big Brother*'s 'first ever same-sex romance' (Welsh, 2014), which, in fact, it was not. The first relationship between two male participants in *Big Brother* UK to be constructed, through inter-textual representations, as a 'romance' was between Gerry Stergiopoulo and Seany O'Kane in 2007. Journalist Paul Flynn (2007), writing in *The Guardian,* even speculated that, through Gerry and Seany, *Big Brother* was about to offer the first representation of 'real gay sex on [British] TV.' Flynn positioned Gerry and Seany's relationship - and the promise of sex that he read it as harbouring - within a trajectory of taboo-breaking representations of gay sex broadcast on Channel 4, starting with *Queer as Folk* a decade before (this turned out to be a false prophecy: the first sexual activity between two men in British reality TV was in *Geordie Shore* in 2015). Two years later, Charlie Drummond and Rodrigo Lopez of *Big Brother* UK 2009 were similarly described as '*Big Brother*'s first gay couple' by the *Daily Mail* (Smith, 2009) so that, according to press discourses, *Big Brother* UK has had three 'first' gay romance narratives (and counting). This seeming amnesia on the part of popular critics, who have repeatedly asserted the newness of *Big Brother*'s representations of gay sexuality and implicitly dismissed the historical existence of these discourses, is a central process by which the show's popular legacy as a space of 'ground-breaking' socio-cultural transformation has been reproduced throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, and well into the second. Discourses of the new remain stuck to *Big Brother*'s emotionally-charged representations of LGBT people, even though many of these representations are strikingly similar to others which have come before.

represented as inducing much anxiety in both men, particularly around the damaging effects this could have upon their relationships with their families in the 'outside world'. At one point, Mark was shown sobbing alone in the bathroom. Framed by a static, high-angle camera, positioned in the corner of the room (evoking a surveillance camera), the bracket of the door hinge obscuring the shot, this moment was aesthetically coded as a voyeuristic intrusion upon a private moment of emotional vulnerability. Mark later explained this outburst in a conversation with housemate Zoe:

> **Mark:** I don't think that the way I've carried on is going to make [my family] proud of me...the situation with Christopher.
> **Zoe:** It's just one kiss, that's all you've had.
> **Mark:** Yeah but on the fucking telly [...] All the time I've been here I've been worried about it [...] I don't want to rub peoples' noses in it at home that don't know [that I'm gay], not that they don't know, but they've never heard them words come out me mouth [sic].

Mark suggests that it is not so much the personal sensations of same-sex desire that form the source of his negative feelings, but the *public* articulation of this desire in the mediated space of reality television. His narrative thus exemplified the extent to which, even at a cultural and historical moment in which 'pride' has become the watchword of LGBT visibility (Love, 2007: 4) (I discuss this in more detail in relation to reality TV in Chapter 5), the open expression of a non-heterosexual identity continues to be bound to feelings of discomfort and distress. As a space of emotional intimacy, revelation and excess, *Big Brother* plays host to the emotional costs of modern queer existence. Indeed, in many ways, the logic of the acceptance trope requires this lingering of queer abjection in order to attain coherence. If participants' emotional articulations of their queer suffering is what purportedly enables the public acceptance of their non-normative identities then, paradoxically, queer abjection must persist in order for this process of acceptance to take place. Moreover, central to Mark's unease around the mediation of his gay sexuality was the perception of *Big Brother* as a space of *authenticity*. Mark could not hide or suppress his sexuality, as this would contravene the mandate of authentic self-expression at the heart of reality television. Thus, it was the discursive conventions of reality TV which produced Mark's negative emotional performances, which in turn corresponded to another core reality TV convention: outbreaks of raw emotion (Aslama and Pantti, 2006).

In similar continuity with this convention, in *Celebrity Big Brother* 2014, Kellie Maloney was represented almost exclusively in sequences which tied her process of gender transition to experiences of emotional suffering. She was frequently shown sitting alone, arms wrapped around herself, head bowed, in postures of vulnerability, often crying and rocking back and forth. At other times she appeared consumed by fits of rage, squaring up aggressively to other housemates, threatening them with violence. These dramatic oscillations between passive, 'feminine' vulnerability and violent, masculine aggression were attributed by Kellie herself, other participants, and popular commentators as symptomatic of her unstable and fractured gender identity. Throughout the show, Kellie's fractured gender identity was connoted visually through her physical appearance, her dishevelled wig sitting messily above her makeup-less face. As I discuss in detail in Chapter 4, consonant with a zeitgeist of 'body culture media' (Marwick, 2007), in the inter-textual spaces of British reality TV celebrity, the corporeal has repeatedly functioned as a signifier of the affective and existential state of transgender individuals. In this representational frame, looking good equates to feeling good, and a physical appearance which falls short of normative standards of female beauty is configured as signifying a damaged and deficient emotional life. What is significant for my focus in this chapter is the extent to which Kellie's emotionally fraught and excessive representations suggest that her inclusion within the show was contingent upon the congruency of her transgender biography with the generic emotionality of *Big Brother* (possibly above any commitments to diversity and cultural transformation on the part of the series' broadcasters).

Of course, my textual methodology cannot lay claim to the motivations of producers in the programme's mediation of Kellie, nor can it offer any conclusions as to whether her representation did, or did not, alter viewers' awareness or conceptions of transgender individuals. What I *have* sought to do, thus far, is to interrogate how a complex representational frame of LGBT visibility has circulated in British reality television. This 'acceptance' trope extends a history in which queer identities have been sutured in negative emotionality in the popular imaginary into the discursive matrices of reality television celebrity, *through* discourses of acceptance and political transformation. This discursive process, I would argue, is a central means through which the ambivalent, normalised non-normativity of LGBT life – where being LGBT is normalised but still far beyond the heterosexual norm - is produced. These queer subjects are discursively integrated within the national fold, though it is the performance of their

difference from the norm which secures this inclusion. As such, an emotional and visual regime has emerged in which non-heterosexuality continues to circulate as an intensified signifier of otherness, yet one which is positioned as not incompatible to with social cohesion and belonging. Through this complex dialectic, the unmarked ubiquity of heteronormativity persists as, in order to access the acceptance of mainstream, heteronormative society, LGBT people in reality TV must make visible their departure from the norm, which works to reproduce and solidify the norm as the norm. This cultural process is deeply bound to, though perhaps not the explicitly intended result of, the commercial logic of reality TV. As Graeme Turner (2010) has noted, the aims of reality TV producers are, by and large, to create successful formats. Yet, as reality TV is predicated upon emotional display, as a cultural by-product, programmes such as *Big Brother* have an interest in reproducing the normalcy of heterosexuality so that the emotional suffering which this produces for queer people can be mined as visual spectacles which fit squarely within pleasures of emotionality, excess, authenticity and intimacy central to reality TV.

Queer suffering in structured reality TV: Charlie King and *The Only Way is Essex*

Representations of the emotional costs of queer existence enabled by the inclusion of LGBT participants within the affectively-charged spaces of reality TV, are not confined to *Big Brother*. Throughout 2012 and 2013, for example, the structured reality show *The Only Way is Essex* featured an ongoing storyline concerning participant Charlie King's struggle to come to terms with his sexual identity. Charlie's existential insecurity formed the basis of many sequences of high drama, conflict and emotion which, like *Big Brother*, are central to *The Only Way is Essex*.

Interrogating the representations of Charlie, I would argue that these emotive sequences were enabled and produced by the affective results of the insertion of Charlie's queer identity within the highly heteronormative narrative structures and spaces of the show (which I discuss below). Charlie's narrative trajectory culminated in his official coming out as gay on the daytime magazine programme *This Morning* (ITV, 1988-) in 2014, after he had left *The Only Way is Essex*. In the interview, Charlie self-consciously articulated how it was only his removal from the show that enabled him to actualise his 'true' gay self. Like the representations from *Big Brother* which I have analysed so far in this chapter, the mediation of Charlie's existential journey in the inter-textual spaces of reality television celebrity was endowed with a socially transformative potential. Post coming out, Charlie has remained a consistent feature in the British media,

particularly the gay-targeted media, where he has been repeatedly framed as a 'role model' for young gay people; constructed as an exemplar of the ontological rewards of LGBT people being true to who we 'really are' (for example, King, 2014), discourses which I interrogate further in Chapter 5.

For the purposes of this chapter, it is useful to cite at length an extract from Charlie's interview on *This Morning* in 2014, including the moment in which he came out:

> Anyone that might know me knows I've come off *The Only Way is Essex*, and on that show they followed my storyline, which was very much about that subject, because I never really knew where I belonged, and never really knew where I fitted in. And it was something that I had to address, and it's taken me a good few years to get here now and say: I'm Charlie, I'm 29 years old, I'm a gay man, and I'm very comfortable with that […] I told the producers [of *The Only Way is Essex*] that I was not this stereotypical Essex boy from day one [...] I'd said that my journey was very different. I'd had a business, I'd been successful. From an exterior I kind of fitted the package, but internally I'm struggling a bit. I don't really know where I belong. I'm a bit of an island.

In this statement Charlie distances his self-identity explicitly from the 'stereotypical Essex boy.' Through the 'island' metaphor, he positions his intertextual construction as a liminal figure in relation to the established male subject positions made legible by *The Only Way is Essex*'s heteronormative narratives. Congruent with its branding as a 'living soap' (Faragher, 2011), each episode of *The Only Way is Essex* takes place over the course of one day.[20] The daytime sequences generally involve single-gender groupings in which the participants' (heterosexual) relationships are conversationally dissected. These gendered groups then come together at the end of the episode, in a nightclub or at a party, where the romances, dramas and conflicts of these heterosexual relationships are played out.

Whilst, unlike the studio complex of the *Big Brother* house, these spaces are not custom-built to facilitate the creation of a reality TV show, they nonetheless also function as architectures of discipline, reproducing the primacy of heterosexuality as a social, as well as narrative, organising principle. Within this heteronormative bifurcation of narrative space, the only coherent and fully-formed non-heterosexual subject positions which are able to become legible are what Joshua

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[20] See Geraghty (1981) on the concept of 'unrecorded existence' in soap opera.

Gamson (2014), writing in the context of makeover television, has termed the 'style maven' and 'gay best friend' archetypes of gay masculinity. This gay subject position is exemplified in *The Only Way is Essex* by Harry Derbidge and Bobby Norris, who are each omnipresent figures in the show's female-coded spaces: the beauty salons and boutiques in which camp and excessive styles of femininity, which Faye Woods (2012) has argued the show celebrates, are constructed. As such, Charlie was only able to become legible as an openly gay man after leaving the show precisely because of these archetypes, with which his own identity did not fit.

Harry's first scene in the show's first episode, for example, takes place in a bridal shop. Accompanied by his female cousin Amy and friend Sam, Harry's blonde highlighted hair, artificially tanned skin, made-up complexion, soft vocal tone and slender frame are in congruence with the highly feminine signifiers of the mise-en-scene: wedding dresses, bouquets of flowers and floral wallpaper. This seamless harmony of person and place is further emphasised by the verisimilitude cutting between mid-shots, and smooth panning between characters through which the sequence is constructed. Later, Harry accompanies female friends who are having a 'vajazzle' - a beauty treatment in which a woman's pubic region is decorated with crystals and glitter, which was popularised by the show - the intimate corporeal location of this procedure reinforcing his embeddedness within the spaces of female intimacy and consumption. This positioning has extended to Harry's inter-textual representations and commercial endeavours: he owns 'Harry's World', an online fashion store for women and girls,[21] which is regularly cross-promoted on his Instagram and Twitter profiles.[22]

Much of the show's constructions of gay identity thus mobilise stereotypical conceptions of an essentialised affinity between gay, men, femininity and consumption, which have a long history in Western popular culture (Dyer, 2002). This train of association is central to many reality makeover shows which feature gay men in the role of style gurus for heterosexual women. *The Only Way is Essex* marks a migration of the gay 'style maven' into the arena of structured reality programming, an inter-generic borrowing made evident most blatantly in the introduction of hair salon owner Bobby in 2012, whose physical resemblance to Gok Wan, a celebrity fashion stylist who has hosted a number of different makeover shows on UK television, was remarked upon repeatedly by other cast-members in Bobby's early scenes.

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[21] http://www.harrysworldonline.co.uk/
[22] @mrharryderbidge

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Indeed, these gay characters' effeminate mannerisms and physical appearances - slender, clean shaven, often carrying handbags and wearing make-up and ostentatious jewellery – position them at odds with the alternative male subject position made legible in the show: the 'Essex boy'. Historically, Essex, as a geographical region, has been associated with particular kinds of masculinity, and the term 'Essex boy' emerged in the 1980s to describe a brash, entrepreneurial and socially mobile working class male, who was perceived to have benefitted from the free-market economics of Thatcherite policy (Smith, 2013). *The Only Way is Essex* knowingly melds this historical type with forms of contemporary masculinity labelled by journalist Mark Simpson (2014b) as 'spornosexuality': fashion-conscious, muscular, sexually prolific and inherently heterosexual.

Charlie King *visually* adheres to the corporeal signifiers of 'spornosexual', Essex-boy masculinity (athletic physique, artificially tanned skin, well-groomed facial hair, tattoos), and was introduced as a heterosexual love interest for the female cast-member Gemma Collins.[23] Yet, the irreconcilability of his identity with the show's established dichotomy of straight/gay masculinity - the heterosexual Essex Boy and the effeminized gay best friend - construed the 'true' nature of Charlie's sexuality as an ongoing narrative enigma. When Gemma first mentions Charlie in conversation with her friends, she describes how he has invited her to attend a concert by Nicole Sherzinger, an American popstar with a large gay fan base, prompting a friend to instantly retort, 'Do you think he might be gay?' This ambiguity continues to be played out into the date sequence (which, puzzlingly, takes place at Charlie's house rather than at the aforementioned concert), where Charlie says that his favourite film is *Titanic* because he dreams of a 'fairy-tale' romance, and that his favourite book is the autobiography of Ricky Martin, a gay Latin-American pop singer, as he can relate to Martin's struggle to be confident in his true self. Over the next four series of *The Only Way is Essex* (series five to series nine, spanning 2012 and 2013), Charlie's representations centred upon his status an incomplete subject, who repeatedly claimed to be suffering from an 'identity crisis' and who needed to 'find himself.' The show narrativised Charlie's attempts to become 'one of the lads', that is, to integrate with the heterosexual male cast-members, alongside an on-going conflict with his former girlfriend Gemma, who repeatedly implied that Charlie was secretly gay.

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[23] Even this worked to 'queer' Charlie's sexuality due to Gemma's position as a largely overweight woman – not an 'appropriate' object of desire for a handsome, normatively-sexual man.

In particular, Charlie was shown to be ill at ease with the aggressive and predatory sexualities of the straight male participants, which was constructed a form of sexuality with which he could not easily identify, but was nonetheless trying to adopt, asking the other characters for tips on how to attract women (some of the, deeply troubling, advice he receives includes, 'You need to just pounce on your prey and penetrate'), and taking up boxing to become more masculine. During a sequence in which one of the show's heterosexual 'hunks', Mario Falcone, is bragging to the other men about how many women he has slept with, Charlie states: 'I want to be like one of the boys, I really do' but claims that he is 'uncomfortable' with conversations about sex. The sense of distance from this sexually prolific heterosexual subjectivity[24] verbally evoked by Charlie is emphasised by the juxtaposition of this sequence with a preceding sequence in which the gay cast-member Bobby (sipping a dainty spirit with a straw and wearing a shirt unbuttoned to display his slim, androgynous physicality) socialises in a different part of the nightclub with a group the show's female participants. The juxtaposition of these two gendered groupings brings to the fore how non-heterosexual identities within the show can only find space within female-coded spaces and social groupings by conforming to a highly normative typology of effeminised gay masculinity.

Figure 9: Charlie (far right) and the boys in *The Only Way is Essex*, 2012.

Figure 10: Bobby (centre) and the girls in *The Only Way Is Essex*, 2012.

In series 8, Charlie was shown planning his twenty-seventh birthday celebrations, which he envisaged as his final moment of transition into a normative, masculine, heterosexual subject. Drawing upon an established cultural repertoire of conventional 'ladish' interests, he stated to the other male participants:

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[24] This kind of aggressive, heterosexual masculinity is abundantly represented across 2010s British reality TV, particularly in formats such as *Geordie Shore, The Valleys* (MTV, 2012-2014) and *Ex on the Beach* (MTV, 2014-).

I kinda just want a good lads' night out. I wanna get smashed [drunk], plenty of birds [women], get a kebab because, c'mon, I've never had a kebab [...] I've never been to a stripper in my life. I've never experienced oral sex [...] I just went into my own little cocoon, I never came out, and now I'm hanging around with you boys...

Here Charlie is interrupted by another participant, Ricky, who says, 'it's time to come out,' finishing Charlie's sentence for him. This is followed by a pause which disrupts the scene's established flow of conversation. This diegetic silence is laden with implicit meanings, playing upon the double meaning of 'coming out' as a revelation of a gay identity. Charlie is constructed as a subject-in-the-making, yet what kind of identity will eventually emerge from this process of becoming, and particularly what kind of *sexuality*, is left deliberately open and ambiguous within the show.

Much like the representations from *Big Brother* analysed in the previous section, Charlie's mediation within *The Only Way is Essex* frequently foregrounded the emotional contours of his apparent existential liminality. I outlined in the previous section how Ahmed has tied the phenomenology of queer existence to highly negative feelings of being 'out of place' in relation to heteronormative modes of social organisation. In the case of Charlie, the seeming implacability of his identity within the heteronormative bifurcation of male subjectivity constructed within the show was positioned as the locus of much affective volatility and interpersonal conflict. For example, in one sequence, Charlie confronts Gemma about a remark she had previously made referring to Charlie and Bobby as being 'Like Elton John and David Furnish':

> **Charlie**: Why was it the other day when me and Bobby were having coffee you had to say, 'Elton John and David Furnish?' What are you getting at? What are you saying?
> **Gemma:** I'm saying just that.
> **Charlie:** What does that mean then? Are you saying, 'Are you two gay? Are you two having sex?' Cause that's what those two do isn't it? They're a gay couple'
> [...]
> **Gemma:** You're hiding. You're hiding behind what you really are [...] I never came up with this gay thing. This gay thing has always been there [...] It's all in your head.

Following these remarks, the exchange descends into the hurling of abuse and expletives between the pair, culminating in Gemma throwing a drink in Charlie's face – a classic signifier of high emotion within the series, and its generic antecedent, the British soap opera. The representation of Charlie's coming out process through a rhetoric of emotional suffering also permeated his post-*The Only Way is Essex* celebrity image, where in press interviews he reflected upon the 'damaging' emotions of costs of his attempts to replicate the heterosexual masculinity displayed within the show:

> I have gone round the houses, trying to be someone that I wasn't, trying to fit in at times and play into who I thought I should be. I guess in the end there is only so much fooling yourself you can do before it causes damage and actually gets very tiring (King, 2014).

On one level, these kind of comments could be read as a critique of the limited range of subject positions which the show makes available for male participants, whereby any deviation from the sexually aggressive 'Essex boy' norm is construed as compromising a male participant's ability to occupy a heterosexual subject position. I would argue, however, that Charlie's circulation in fact worked to solidify the narrow repertoire of masculine sexualities proffered by the show, by refracting Charlie's emotional conflict surrounding his self-identity through the lens of his inter-textual coming out narrative. Implicitly, in press interviews Charlie's has positioned the 'emotional turmoil' of his struggle to come out as stemming from a perceived inability to be gay *and* hegemonically masculine within the textual world of *The Only Way is Essex* (King, 2014). Indeed, much of the commercial appeal of his post-coming out celebrity image, particularly in the gay-targeted media, is located in the erotic spectacle of his 'masculine' muscular corporeality, and interest in fitness and sports.[25] As an intertextual, discursive entity, Charlie's celebrity has thus circulated as a site of conflict between competing constructions contemporary gay masculinity. This tension is produced by the different brand identities and target demographics of the different media texts which comprised Charlie's celebrity image. Whilst mainstream gay culture has long valorised the 'straight-acting' or masculine presenting gay man (Richardson, 2009), the televisual texts of *The Only Way is Essex* itself were, at this time, broadcast on the channel ITV2, a broadcaster of many structured reality programmes centred

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[25] For example, the photo-shoot accompanying the above-cited article in the gay lifestyle magazine *A-Teen*.

upon female friendship, fashion and consumption, such as various versions of the *Real Housewives* franchise.[26] In these shows, the gay 'style maven' and 'gay best friend' archetypes are firmly established figures (Gamson, 2014). Structured reality television's usual exclusion of the 'masculine' gay man was, however, central to the ways in which Charlie's own represented struggle to reconcile his queer, not-yet-fully-formed identity with the kinds of gay identity which *were* slotted easily within the show's heteronormative spatiality, was able to be mined as a source of emotional conflict. Whilst in the context of Charlie's broader coming out narrative, his ability to embrace his 'true' gay self necessitated his displacement from the texts of *The Only Way is Essex*, the mediation of the process of getting to this point, particularly in its emotional dynamics, proved highly reconcilable with the commercial imperatives of reality television, a form predicated upon the display of turbulent affectivity.

Conclusion: Exploring the dynamics of queer emotionality

This chapter has sought to critically interrogate the discourses of acceptance and social transformation which have recurrently structured the representations of LGBT identities in British reality TV throughout the twenty-first century. It would be highly problematic to claim that the representations of LGBT people found in reality TV shows such as *Big Brother* and *The Only Way is Essex* have been directly implicated in shifting public attitudes towards sexual minorities in the UK, as the textual and extra-textual discourses I explored in this chapter have done. However, the fifteen years since the show's emergence on British TV have seen exponential transformations in the civic status and cultural visibility of LGBT people. As the sociologist Mark McCormack (2012) has noted, the advances in legislative rights for sexual minorities in the UK, have been largely predicated upon the notion that LGBT people are 'humans' like any other. Within mainstream discourses, LGBT rights are now mostly considered to be *human* rights. If we recall the journalistic claims I outlined above, where the emotionally-saturated representations of LGBT *Big Brother* participants were endowed with a socially transformative, 'humanising' function, it would be difficult to argue that reality TV has *not* been involved in the discursive re-constitution of sexual minorities as recognised 'human' subjects. Of course, through textual analysis alone we cannot know whether these representations actually worked to alter specific viewers' perceptions of LGBT people. That said, in terms of the inter-

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[26] In 2015 *The Only Way is Essex* was moved from ITV2 to a newly created channel ITVBe, which specialized in female-targeted, structured reality programming, cementing the show's association with the feminine.

textual constructions of queer reality TV celebrities, their humanity has been recurrently centralised. On a discursive level, British reality television has (re-)situated LGBT people under the cultural sign of the human. These emotive representations have worked to augment the discursive contours of 'the human' to encompass some, select forms of non-heterosexual identity. Judith Butler (2009: iii) has argued that notions of 'humanity' - 'who counts as human' and consequently, 'whose lives count as lives,' are differentially allocated, operating frequently along axes of 'recognisable' and 'unrecognisable' formations of sexuality and gender. Further, she asserts that it is the acknowledgement of the physical and emotional vulnerability of a person, or particular social group, which often functions as a recognition of the essential 'humanity' of these persons (2004b: 20). In this framework, the emotive intimacy, revelations and breakdowns which characterise reality television, bear a political charge, circulating within, and at the same time transforming, existing, hegemonic grammars through which legible personhood is made sense of.

Further, in bringing to the fore queer participants' experiences of emotional suffering, British reality television has worked to expose and acknowledge some of the ways in which queer people have been traditionally positioned outside of the norms of heterosexual personhood. The visibility of difference (sexual or otherwise) does possess the potentiality to augment and destabilise the 'unsteady contours of normalcy' (Adams, 2001: 9), bringing to light the exclusionary conditions under which these categories operate, undoing and reconstituting their borders to integrate lives previously designated outside this fold. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is difficult to image a contestant on a British reality TV show stating they fear being disliked purely due to their sexual orientation, as Brian Dowling did in 2001. This points towards the real change in the social, cultural and civic status for LGBT people – the making 'human' of (some) sexual minority populations - in twenty-first century Britain, a process in which reality TV has circulated as a core discursive agent.

At the same time, the social and political implications of representing the emotional suffering of marginalised identities within cultural texts are incredibly complex and ambivalent, at once reifying the subordinate position of those depicted by mining their non-normativity as a source of capital, and potentially resisting the causes of this subordination. In this way, my argument here is congruent with a history of analysis in media, film and cultural studies which has asserted that largely hegemonic media texts can contain moments at which political questions are raised and

possibilities for resistance to normative power dynamics attain representational form. Throughout this scholarship, representations of emotion within seemingly quotidian, domestic and private scenarios have figured as particularly potent sites of political resistance. Feminist analyses of film melodrama are particularly paradigmatic in this regard: arguing that the emotionality of melodrama (signified not only through performance, but music, costume and set design) could engender moments of recognition amongst female viewers of the 'pent-up aggression, bitterness and disillusion' caused by women's subordination within the patriarchal structures of family life (Mulvey, 1987: 75-76).

These kinds of arguments have travelled into scholarship on of reality TV (Skeggs and Wood, 2012). In his analysis of *Wife Swap*, John Corner (2006: 73) suggests that the enunciation of 'private' emotions within domestic settings through the publicly-mediated and artificially constructed space of television 'exposes some of the rhythms, tensions and contradictions of everyday living and indeed the structures of wealth, class and culture, in ways no open to more conventional treatments.' In a similar way, in their study of the same programme, Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (2008: 244-245) argue that the show's emotive, domestic dramas can 'lead us to question and reflect on conventional gender roles […] The programme *stages* 'reality' to play out questions that ultimately affect everyday life,' offering up the potential for viewers to as 'how might [the world] be different?' In the particular context of queerness, discussing queer participants of the US reality show *Project Runway*, Misha Kavka has argued that the emotional excess of reality TV has enabled the circulation of what she terms 'affective knowledge', opening up a space for the representation of queer subject positions which cannot be 'cognitively deciphered' in relation to heteronromative scripts of self-identity (2008: 160). Whilst I would not discount the queer potential of the emotionality of reality TV, I would also argue that Kavka's emphasis upon the affective dimensions of reality TV does not engage adequately with how far reality texts are embedded within the discursive tropes of therapy culture, where cognitively deciphering one's feelings is very much positioned as a prime imperative for reality television participants (see Chapter One). In this way, I would argue that whilst Kavka's focus is on 'affect', it may be more accurate to state that reality television is increasingly invested in the representation of *emotion*.

The distinction between 'affect' and 'emotion' is more than just a question of semantics. As defined by scholars such as Brian Massumi (2002), affect refers to non-conscious, pre-subjective feelings or intensities, whilst emotion is 'conscious, qualified, and meaningful "content" that can be attributed to an already constituted subject' (Shaviro, 2010: 3). Emotion is affect 'captured' by a subject, cognised, named (sadness, for example), and interpreted in light of material events and life circumstances (ibid). If, as Kavka suggests, the circulation of affect is integral to the reality televisual form, and this affect enables specifically queer kinds of communication, I would argue that reality TV is *also* defined by an impetus to 'capture' this affect and translate it into emotion. As discussed previously, much reality television borrows heavily from discourses and imagery of psychotherapy, and thinking about and interpreting how one feels, and why one feels this way, is central to the action of the show. In this way, within *Big Brother*, the kinds of queer affect which Kavka describes, comes to be made sense of through inherently heteronormative frameworks for understanding the self. These are frameworks in which to be queer is to be distinctly outside the norm of (heterosexual) subjectivity, and in which this otherness is demarcated as the cause of the emotional turmoil and unease faced by LGBT participants.

In this context, I would argue that queer emotional suffering has found such pervasive representational space within British reality television because these depictions are highly congruent with the viewing pleasures of this particular media form. As I outlined in Chapter One, reality TV is a space of 'emotional labour', in which visibility is governed by certain 'feeling rules', which demarcate the expectation of specific kinds of emotional performances (Biressi and Nunn, 2010). Whilst *Big Brother* participants must be 'sincere' and 'authentic', at the same time, their affective expressions must, somewhat contradictorily, never be boring or banal, and must be 'adequately performed' so as to be worthy of mass mediation (Ellis, 2009: 104). Sexual minority identities are easily reconcilable with this demand. As popular epistemologies configure gay sexualities and transgender identities as innate and intrinsic essences of these peoples' very beings, and as the emotive performances of LGBT participants are frequently constructed as emanating from the heart of their 'otherness' to heterosexist norms of personhood, these individuals embody almost completely the ambivalent amalgamation of authentic-extraordinariness demanded of those who enter reality TV. Thus, in contrast to popular appraisals of the inclusion of sexual minority participants in *Big Brother* as emblematic of the diversity-centric values of contemporary Britain, I would argue that the mainstream visibility of

queer identities within the show has been largely contingent upon the ability of these representations to 'fit in' with the emotional pleasures of both reality televisual texts, and the celebrity economy more broadly. Indeed, it is in these terms that some queer cast-members have accrued no small amount of celebrity status in the broader media realm following their appearances on the show. In late 2004 and throughout 2005, Nadia Almada became a regular feature in the tabloid press and celebrity gossip magazines. Here, she divulged the details of her troubled past: how her gender reassignment surgery was paid for with money she earned as a sex worker, how disaffection with her gender identity had almost driven her to suicide (Perry, 2004), and her continuing despair at being unable to find a romantic partner who would accept her transgender identity (Compton, 2005). Nadia's gender transition narrative was thus resituated from one economy of authentic self-exposure (*Big Brother*) to another: the inter-textual spaces of tabloid newspapers and celebrity magazines, where 'exposure' is coded through written and photographic depictions of (mostly female) celebrities in various states of pathological turmoil and emotional distress. In 2014, many months after the *Celebrity Big Brother* series, the mainstream media (and Kellie herself) continued to mine the commercial appeal of the traumatic aspects of Kellie Maloney's on-going process of gender transition. Images of her swollen, bruised and disfigured face following complications during facial feminisation surgery dominated the front pages of both the Saturday and Sunday editions of the tabloid newspaper *The Mirror* in late 2014, and circulated prolifically online, and she appeared on *This Morning*, discussing her ordeal.

Clearly, representations of queer suffering have come to possess commodity value in the contemporary British media marketplace. That said, whilst I do not wish to uncritically celebrate these representations, nor fashion them into a simplistic progress narrative, I would *distance* my argument from those of commentators who have discussed the inclusion of sexual minorities in British reality TV as evidencing the genre's reification of the cultural afterlife of the Victorian freak show. Rachel Adams has argued that labelling somebody a 'freak' 'evacuates her humanity, authorizing the paying customer to approach her as an object of curiosity and entertainment' (2001: 10). This argument exemplifies the complex contradiction at the heart of LGBT visibility in reality television and celebrity culture more broadly. LGBT reality TV celebrities are framed explicitly in discourses of intimacy, emotionality and, ultimately, humanity. At the same time, however, these representations circulate within a commercial media

landscape, which is dependent upon their simultaneous constructions as figures of 'curiosity and entertainment.' The discursive construction of sexual minorities as humans thus operates within a hierarchy of humanity, in which heterosexuality remains the norm, and sexual minorities occupy a kind of marginal humanness, accepted but distinctly outside the normative.

Further, media producers, and reality contestants themselves, are able to exploit the commercial capital of queer suffering whilst appearing to celebrate diversity and sexual plurality. Despite being framed as beacons of liberal 'tolerance' and 'inclusion', the visibility of LGBT people in reality TV is contingent upon the mandate that they perform their differences from heteronormative conceptions of gender, sexuality, and the self. The visibility of LGBT identities in British reality television is therefore highly complex, and fraught with internal contradictions. I would argue that reality TV *has* played a central role in making sexual minorities legible as *subjects* rather than objects, as human and more 'knowable' – on a representational and discursive level, at least - through the claims to authentic emotional intimacy and excess which are central to reality formats. Simultaneously, however, these same representations have repeatedly situated sexual minority identities as 'other' to normative logics of heterosexual personhood, thus working to *produce* the suffering and marginalisation of queer people they purport to expose and resolve.

In this way, the inclusion of queer identities within the reality television necessarily involves the reification of heterosexuality as the normative mode of social organisation. These representations are invested in the ambivalent construction of contemporary LGBT subjectivities as at once 'accepted', yet decidedly beyond the parameters of the 'normal'. This is not to claim that *Big Brother*, and those involved in its production, casting, editing, and such, are willfully anti-queer. However, as Turner (2010) has argued, the interests of media producers lie in the promotion of behaviours and identities which make for successful media products. In this context, the continuing longevity of many reality shows as successful franchises in the UK is, in part, the result of the perpetuation of queer marginalisation, and the emotional suffering which this produces. The 'acceptance' of LGBT people purportedly enabled by reality television in many ways extends to the proliferating availability for public consumption, of media representations predicated upon the emotional costs of heterocentric differentiation.

Chapter Three:

'I am Brian and I'm just happy to be gay': Authenticity and Queerness in Reality Television

> *Big Brother* provides a platform for people who are diverse in a way that you hadn't even imagined existed before. And so you're getting stories from people who are not just niche, they're niche within a niche within a niche within a niche.
>
> (Paul Flynn in *Big Brother: A Decade in the Headlines*, 2010).

In this quote from *Big Brother: A Decade in the Headlines*, a programme which marked ten years of *Big Brother* on British television screens, the journalist Paul Flynn pointed towards *Big Brother*'s reputation as a space of media visibility for a diverse range of identities. Flynn's quadruple layering of 'niche within a niche' suggests that these representations have been difficult to pin down as representative of particular identity categories, circulating as messy and highly specific amalgamations of different facets of identity and subjectivity. In the context of sexuality, across various formats, British reality television has represented many different permutations of queer identity, which have often appeared resistant to reductive positioning as tokenistic metonyms for any coherent 'LGBT community.'

Whilst Chapter Two interrogated the discourses and images of acceptance, suffering and humanity as they have traversed LGBT identities in British reality TV, in this chapter I focus specifically upon some of the key discourses which have structured the representations of gay and lesbian identities within British reality programming. Devoting a chapter specifically to lesbian and gay identities is important because, whilst UK reality shows have featured a multiplicity of gay and lesbian participants, whose sexualities have each intersected with other facets of subjectivity: gender, ethnicity, class background and sometimes religion, in complex and individualised ways, running through almost all of these representations has been a striking conceptual *continuity* regarding the very nature of gay sexuality. Despite their myriad differences, the circulation of lesbian and gay participants through the intertextual spaces of

reality television celebrity has repeatedly reproduced a conception of sexual orientation as a defining essence of personhood, an ontological and unchangeable core of the self.

In this chapter, I interrogate the discursive construction of this norm of gay subjectivity in two typologies of reality programming: the 'gamedoc', in this instance *Big Brother*, and the reality pop shows *Pop Idol, Fame Academy* and *The X Factor*. I argue that within the texts and inter-texts of these programmes, the notion of gay subjectivity as an ontological core of the self has become legible through the resonances of this sexual episteme with the broader, discursive tropes of authenticity, self-actualisation, and 'being yourself', which are integral to reality TV. After a consideration of this process in relation to *Big Brother*, I explore how, in the context of reality pop shows, the apparent authenticity of gay participants' sexualities have traditionally been constructed in press discourses by being counter-posed with the apparent heteronormative exclusions of the popular music industry embedded within the shows themselves. This, I argue, has worked to reproduce the very notion of an authentic gay self through the evocation of these exclusionary tropes. I then probe this framework of exclusion further, arguing that the generic specificities, regulation, scheduling and audience address of the reality pop shows have enabled gay and lesbian sexualities to become legible within these texts almost exclusively through two narrow tropes: the flamboyant and 'entertaining' gay man, and the 'resistant' lesbian contestant. Thus, whilst perhaps seemingly apolitical, these programmes, and the discourses of sexuality which they produce, operate at the level of deeply ingrained, everyday epistemologies, which work to delimit and enable the ways in which identity, sexuality and the self are able to be understood.

Gay ontology and the authentic self

The notion of an 'authentic' gay subjectivity is far from unique to reality television. Throughout media, activism, politics, science and law, across the global West, a lesbian or gay identity has come to be most commonly understood as an innate and immutable facet of subjectivity. In striking resilience to the assertions of queer and poststructuralist theories from inside the academy - which have conceptualised sexuality as fluid, contingent, and forged in and through discourse (e.g. Butler, 1999 [1990]) - popular epistemologies have continued to bind sexuality to the very fabric of the self. Pop-cultural conceptions of sexuality as intrinsic and innate come to the fore particularly visibly in the context of coming out. In media narratives and representations,

coming out as lesbian or gay is normatively construed as a revelation or liberation of an ever-present, deeply felt , 'true' sexuality, which is integral to gay and lesbian people's senses of *who they are* (Herman, 2005; Santana et. al., 2014). In this dialectic, openly articulating one's gay or lesbian sexuality is conterminous with simply 'being yourself'. As Rosemary Hennessey (2000: 118) has claimed, 'the labels "lesbian" and "gay" are often read as referring to *authentic* identities [emphasis added].'

It is therefore no coincidence that reality television – a form of media fixated with the notion of authenticity, and ultimate primacy of 'being yourself' – has offered many textual incarnations of these normative conceptions of 'authentic' and essential gay sexuality. The inter-textual media of reality television celebrity are not only core spaces in which these discourses have *circulated*, but sites at which the idea of gay subjectivity as essential and innate has been dynamically *produced*, through the particular aesthetic and discursive tropes of reality television, and celebrity culture more broadly. For example, the companion book to the first series of *The Only Way is Essex* contained a section entitled 'Harry's Guide to Coming Out'. In this segment, Harry Derbidge, a young gay cast-member, offered readers/viewers advice for coming out as lesbian or gay to friends and family. It stated, 'Harry feels very strongly about other teens not being as supported as he was when talking about their sexualities and who they really are,' followed by a quote from Harry in which he proclaimed, 'You should never have to hold your feelings in about who you are. Let it out!' (Hines, 2011: 101). Here, being open about one's gay sexuality is positioned as a central part of being true to one's authentic self. This discursive convergence of gay subjectivity and authentic self-expression is enabled through the text's mobilisation of broader discursive registers associated with the show. The segment is part of a chapter entitled 'The Pride of Essex', playing upon the polysemy of 'pride', so that Harry's proud affirmation of his gay sexuality becomes integrated with broader ideals around taking pride in one's roots and regional heritage. Harry's pride in his gay identity is produced through the programme's universal, discursive investment in embracing, and not seeking to change or hide 'who you are', as exemplified by *The Only Way is Essex*'s casts' apparent championing of the (formerly derogatory) 'Essex boy/girl' label and a specifically 'Essex' way of life (Woods, 2012; Biressi and Nunn, 2013).

In existing scholarship, the mainstreaming of the gay authenticity discourse – which is often referred to as the 'born this way' or 'born gay' paradigm (e.g. Funke, 2014) – has been attributed

to a series of different political, economic and scientific transformations and imperatives. The media, however, has been approached within these studies primarily as a peripheral entity: a platform upon which discourses generated in other, separate domains – science, law, politics, and activism – are made publicly legible. Yet, as I outlined in the Introduction, Media and Cultural Studies has long argued that the media do not just 'reflect' a pre-existing social world, but actively shape and construct the ways in which reality is able to be understood. In this chapter, I therefore take media texts, and reality television in particular, seriously, as productive forces for the creation and circulation of sexual knowledges in their own right. I make an intervention into existing academic debates around the cultural dominance of essentialist conceptions of gay subjectivity, arguing that the striking conceptual convergence between normative paradigms of gay authenticity – the perception of coming out as the realisation of one's true self – and the kinds of authentic self-expression valorised in reality TV, has played a central role in constructing, circulating and consolidating the concept of sexual orientation as a defining essence of the self.

Thus, whilst the empirical context I address is relatively contemporary, my approach within this chapter is indebted to a tradition of gay historiography, as practised by sociologists and historians of sexuality, such as Jeffrey Weeks (1981), Ken Plummer (1981) and Michel Foucualt (1998 [1972]). Weeks (1981: 107) has argued that in attempting to understand why a particular conception of sexual identity has come to predominate at a particular cultural moment, we must locate sexual categorisations 'within a complex of discourses and practises,' including 'external referents', which may not be 'about' sexuality in any straightforward or obvious manner. Mobilising this conceptual framework, in this chapter I contend that the pre-occupation with authenticity, confession and emotional and subjective truth which has come to characterise reality television, and contemporary celebrity culture more broadly, have enabled certain specific, culturally-situated ways of understanding and making sense of human sexuality. These discursive and semiotic tropes are in many ways the *conditions of possibility* of the normative conception of innate, essential and authentic gay subjectivity.

I do not wish to imply, however, that the representations I interrogate here have necessarily or of themselves enacted the rise to dominance of the normative paradigm of 'authentic' gay subjectivity. Rather, the narratives of gay reality TV cast-members form highly visible

literalisations of a far broader discursive climate that has enabled the consolidation of this essentialist episteme within the contemporary popular imaginary. As I outlined in Chapter One, reality television is one, particularly visible, node within a matrix of cultural forms in which ideals of authenticity and 'being yourself' have attained vast cultural purchase in the juncture of twenty-first century neoliberalism. Recent years have been characterised by a zeitgeist of authenticity, which has traversed social, cultural and political life. It is in this context that the notion of sexual orientation as the essence of the authentic self is able to *make sense*, and to take hold of the popular imagination.

Historically, the mass media has played a central role in making visible certain culturally and temporally specific ways of categorising and conceptualising the relationship between sexuality and self-identity. In Britain, subcultural groupings based upon shared, same-sex sexual object choices or non-conforming modes of gender presentation have existed throughout history (cf. McIntosh, 1981 [1968]). Yet, as Alan Sinfeld (1994) has argued, it was the widespread circulation of newspapers and other print media in the nineteenth century, which enabled emergent medical categories such as the 'homosexual' and the 'invert' to attain mainstream visibility as a recognisable forms of identity, through the mediation of public figures such as Oscar Wilde, and the novels such as *The Well of Loneliness* by Radcliffe Hall.

Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that the late nineteenth century was a decisive moment in the consolidation of homosexuality as a form of identity. It was in this time period that a conception of sexual attraction to members of the same sex as constitutive of a specific form of personhood, which was unique to some people, but not to others (or indeed most), was born (Weeks, 1981: 81). Whilst in the Britain, subcultures based upon shared feelings of same-sex desire can be traced back to at least the seventeenth century (McIntosh, 1981 [1968]: 38), in the pre-modern era, 'the homosexual' as a category of personhood, did not exist in the manner in which it is commonly understood today. Discourses of sexual normativity and difference operated at the strata of acts and deeds (sodomy, for example), which were not perceived as necessarily symptomatic of any specific form of selfhood or identity. In the nineteenth century, however, practitioners in the emergent field of sexology sought to bring sexual behaviour into the sphere of scientific knowledge, aiming to define experiences of same-sex desire as symptomatic of a

discreet typology of subjectivity. As Foucault (1998 [1972]: 42-43) influentially argued in the first part of his *History of Sexuality*:

> As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions […] It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature.

Sexuality, at this time, became configured not merely as something one *did*, but something that one profoundly *was*. Yet, as John Marshall (1981: 133) has explored, until at least the mid-twentieth century, it is unlikely that many people who experienced homosexual feelings would have explicitly thought of themselves as 'being 'homosexual''. Whilst the sexological conception of homosexuality is in many ways foundational to modern scripts of gay essentialism, until the late twentieth century, non-heterosexual sexualities were largely tied to discourses of criminality and mental pathology, circulating as objects of medical, scientific and juridical scrutiny, rather than positions of 'legitimate subjective agency' (Halperin, 2012: 57).

The discursive 'transformation of homosexuality from a sexual perversion into a social identity' (Halperin, 2012: 77) in the latter decades of the twentieth century has been attributed in large part to the 1970s gay liberation movements. David Halperin (ibid: 57), for example, has described the gay rights movements in Britain and the USA as 'one long struggle to reverse the discursive positioning of homosexuality […] from the position of an object of power/knowledge to a position of legitimate subjective agency.' By these accounts, the appropriation and relabelling of homosexuality as 'gay', and the construction of said gayness as part of one's 'natural' ontology, a form of identity to which one would self-consciously and publicly identify, was configured as a radical manoeuvre with the potential to contest and disavow dominant understandings of sexual normativity, which had hitherto worked to pathologise, medicalise and criminalise non-heterosexual identities.

Broadly speaking, within the gay rights movement of the 1970s, two competing versions of this script vied for cultural legitimacy. On the one hand, many more radical gay liberationists conceived coming out not as the affirmation of an intrinsic gay subjectivity, but as a *rejection* of heterosexuality and the normative sex roles which heterosexuality was perceived to entail, as epitomised by the concept of political lesbianism (Weber, 2012). These 'universalist' or 'liberation-oriented' approaches to gay emancipation competed with a contrasting discursive register, which prioritised legislative reform and the integration of gay and lesbian people within the hegemonic, and heteronormative, institutions of national citizenship (rights to marriage, adoption of children, and military service, for example). Here, homosexuality was conceptualised as 'a fixed and discreet condition' (Waites, 2005: 555), and the 'innermost essence' of the self (Lancaster, 2003: 260). In the current moment, this latter position has come to predominate in mainstream gay politics through organisations such as Stonewall in the UK. The dominance of the authenticity discourse within gay politics and activism, over more liberationist or queer conceptions of sexuality, has been attributed to the former's political utility in countering many traditional, homophobic myths around gay sexuality as being variously an 'unnatural' lifestyle choice, contagious, or that gay people can and do attempt to 'turn' heterosexual people (especially children and young people) homosexual (Lancaster, 2003; Waites, 2005; Bindel, 2014; Walters, 2014).

Such ideals of gay ontology were first mobilised politically in the nineteenth century by liberal sexologists such as Havelock Ellis (Weber, 2012). In the 1970s, this notion of an 'inner gay truth' began to attain more widespread recognisability through the gay rights movement (Villarejo, 2014: 95). In the UK, for example, the first Gay Pride march was held in London in 1970. Significantly in relation to my argument within this chapter, Amy Villarejo, writing in an American context, has argued that it was also in this period that *television* became a core space for the circulation of essentialist conceptions of gay subjectivity. Villarejo has analysed a scene from the US programme *An American Family* (PBS, 1971-1973) - a kind of pre-cursor to contemporary reality TV, which documented the day-to-day life of the Louds, an 'ordinary' upper-middle class family living in Santa Barbara, California - in which the family's eldest son, Lance Loud, attempted to come out as gay to his mother. Villarejo (2014: 110) argues that in this sequence, '[a particular conception of] queerness and television collide.' Lance's coming out of the closet functioned within the show's established self-construction as representing the authentic

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lives of the Loud family, the 'ongoing melodrama of its revelation and the apparent access to inner truths' (ibid: 97). In this instance, these particular textual conventions of *An American Family* became the discursive matter through which the notion of an innate and authentic gay identity, embodied in the figure of Lance Loud, was able to attain cultural legibility. The twenty-first century British reality TV representations I interrogate within this chapter, in which the notion of gay authenticity is similarly produced through the reality TV tropes of self-realisation and ontological truth, therefore have a historical precedent, which stenches across continents, and trails back several decades.

Other scholars have attributed the consolidation of the gay authenticity discourse, to a series of economic factors and transformations. These include the rise of industrial capitalism which relocated work, and thus survival, outside of the nuclear family and onto the urban labour market (D'Emilio, 1983); and the late twentieth century consolidation of (some) gay people (particularly young, Caucasian gay men) as a consumer demographic, whereby certain forms of fashion, leisure and lifestyle consumption have been marketed as means of articulating, expressing and enjoying one's 'natural' gay subjectivity (Hennessey, 2000). Further, the gay authenticity paradigm has been positioned as part of a 'public and scientific obsession with genetic origin stories' spurred on by the Human Genome Project of 1989 (Walters, 2014: 88). Scientific studies for 'gay brains', 'gay genes' and so on have 'produced both a journalistic and a popular perception that gayness as innate, immutable, predetermined in some finite and marked and knowable way' (ibid: 92; also Lancaster, 2003).

In the remainder of this chapter, I intervene into and expand this existing dialogue. I explore how normative epistemologies of gay sexuality as 'being yourself' have also been centrally and prolifically produced through a striking conceptual convergence between the apparent authenticity and truth of gay identities, and broader, contemporary, cultural mandates to *know* and *discover* 'who you are.' The media circulation of gay and lesbian reality television celebrities is paradigmatic of this process. David Halperin (2012 285) has argued that in mainstream epistemologies of gay sexuality:

> When we're in love [...] we're just doing what comes naturally. We are yielding to the laws of our nature, expressing our real selves, testifying to the profound truth of our feelings, achieving and manifesting our *authenticity* [emphasis added].

The synthesis between subjective interiority and external signifiers of embodiment, action and self-presentation encapsulated in this statement, is exactly what is celebrated in the textual worlds of reality television celebrity. As I explored in Chapter One, reality TV has exhibited a vociferous fixation with the idea of the authentic self. Reality programmes, and their surrounding inter-texts, frequently call upon viewers to assess the moral fibre of participants in terms of how 'real' their behaviour is perceived to be (Holmes, 2004a). Participants are interpolated to conduct themselves in a manner which is congruent with an apparently essential core character or personality, which is seen to pre-figure their insertion within the media (Dubrovsky, 2011), whilst they are also expected to be 'naturally' entertaining, telegenic, comedic, and so on. Not only this, but reality television has attained a cultural legacy as a form of mediation with the power to *bring out* or reveal the inner selves of participants. In this dialectic, being on reality television enables participants to discover and connect with their 'true' selves, and who they 'really are' (Corner, 2002; Holmes, 2006b; Dubrovsky, 2007). This is a deeply contradictory dialectic. On the one hand, participants are mandated to 'be themselves' from the outset of their mediation. Yet, this 'real' self is *also* expected to be somehow discovered or unearthed by the reality television 'experience' in a way purportedly not accessible to these individuals had they not participated in the show (Holmes, 2006b). Moreover, it is the explicitly *constructed* environment of reality TV which is positioned to have enabled a connection with the profoundly non-constructed, ontological and 'real' self.

As a norm of subjectivity, the authentic self has a long and diverse history in Western culture, stretching back to Enlightenment philosophy (cf. Taylor, 1991). Since this time, the ideal of an authentic, essential subjectivity, unique to each individual, has become firmly rooted in popular thought (Elias, 1991). In the current conjuncture of neoliberal capitalism, where stable referents of self and identity are perceived to be increasingly under threat (see Chapter One), the notion of the authentic self – an irreducible essence of personhood where the 'truth' of selfhood is located - has attained ever-intensified cultural currency. In particular, the concept of 'finding' or 'knowing' this authentic self has become consolidated within popular discourses as a central imperative for contemporary subjects. As Kim Allen and Heather Mendick (2013: 460-461) have noted, 'the ability to overcome obstacles to 'knowing oneself' is central to the neoliberal project of self-actualisation.' The concept of an atomised, unique and bounded self or identity is central to the individualistic tenets of neoliberal culture, and the competitive, entrepreneurial and

acquisitive behaviour which characterises the 'ideal' neoliberal subject (Gilbert, 2013: 9). In this context, 'being yourself' and connecting with who you 'really are' is conceived as the means by which all manner of personal, social and political problems are able to be assuaged.

Matthew Waites (2005: 553) has positioned the notion of the *gay* authentic self as partly a response to the 'generalized public uncertainty and doubt' associated with selfhood in the contemporary context of neoliberal capitalism. Writing in the 1990s, Plummer (1995) similarly argued that lesbian and gay 'coming out stories' had become prominent within popular culture as they spoke to modernist conceptions of selfhood as a 'journey' to make tangible an authentic, inner self. Reality television is a space in which the notion of the authentic self is produced and circulated, and a prolific spaces of gay representation. Reality TV thus makes visible, in highly literal fashion, a cultural process in which essentialism and authenticity have been, and continue to be, produced as the dominant discourses of gay sexuality, through the optic of broader, neoliberal ideals of authentic self-expression.

Finding and revealing the authentic gay self in *Big Brother*

Normative conceptions of coming out as the 'liberation' of an authentic identity have converged almost seamlessly with wider discourses of the therapeutic and self- affirming qualities of reality TV participation in the narratives of numerous gay *Big Brother* housemates. Since its inception in the UK, appearing on *Big Brother* has been textually configured as a conduit through which gay participants have been able to 'discover' and 'express' their intuited and authentic gay selves, functioning as profound and significant phases within these cast-members' broader 'journeys' of gay self-actualisation. *Big Brother*'s textual and inter-textual construction as a form of media in which the 'true' selves of participants emerge into visibility for public consumption has been positioned as directly enabling the revelation of gay participants' 'real' selves. This has in turn produced and reproduced the idea of the authentic gay self through the reality TV tropes of self-discovery and self-realisation.

The inter-textual narratives of Brian Dowling, and another gay male participant of *Big Brother* 2001, Josh Rafter, are particularly illustrative in this regard. It was widely reported that Brian had only revealed his sexuality to his family very soon before appearing on the show, and was shown to be in fear of how his parents in particular would react upon witnessing him expressing his gay identity on the show. As the tabloid newspaper *The Daily Record* (2001), reported:

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He came out as gay just days before going into the Big Brother house and admitted he was worried about what his parents thought of his camp antics. But mum Rose – who overcame her fear of flying to travel from Ireland to the Big Brother studio – said: "Brian is Brian and we love him."

His mother's statement, 'Brian is Brian', evokes a causal and motivational linkage between Brian's 'camp' antics and *who he is*, on an ontological level. *Big Brother*'s inter-textual representation as a space of authentic self-revelation had worked to code Brian's camp and flamboyant behaviour as expressive of a fixed, intrinsic essence of personhood. Furthermore, the therapeutic qualities of reality TV participation were discussed as having affirmed Brian's authentic gay self, and resolved an ontological uncertainty which had reportedly characterised his sexual identity prior to his involvement in the show. The *News of the World* (2001) quoted Brian as having stated during the press conference following his win, 'Going into the house there were a few confusions concerning my sexuality, where I was going in life, what I planned to do [...] I hope people will see me as an honest guy, just being who I am,' and the *Mail on Sunday* (2001) described how 'Brian said being in the house had helped him sort out a lot of confusion about *who he was* [emphasis added].' His mediation through *Big Brother* had not only allowed Brian's true sexuality to be publicly displayed, but had also enabled a solidification of Brian's own sense of his apparently authentic sexuality/self.

At one point during the 2001 series, the participants were each allocated a period of time spent off-camera speaking to a psychotherapist. Josh Rafter was shown discussing his conversation with the therapist in an exchange with another housemate, Dean, where, like Brian, Josh fore-grounded his anxieties about how his family, who were previously unaware of Josh's sexuality, would be affected by watching him articulate his gay identity on national television. He stated, 'I do have concerns about my family, and I don't want to hurt them. I said I feel selfish coming in here actually,' to which Dean was shown to reply, 'But at the end of the day, it is about you, isn't it mate? [...] You might think [being open about your sexuality] is selfish 'cause you might hurt people because they don't know about that, [but] the reality is, they have to know about it, 'cause that's you.' In this sequence, Josh articulates a conflict between his default social positioning as a heterosexual subject, and what he perceives to be his authentic identity as a gay man. Yet, as Dean suggests, and to quote the official companion book to the series, the *Big Brother*

participants' 'only job is to be themselves' (Ritchie, 2001: 7). In being part of the show, Josh is obligated to present himself in an 'authentic' manner. Moreover, under the gaze of the *Big Brother* cameras and the programme's claim to the real, it is suggested that he *cannot* 'hide' his sexuality. As Rachel Dubrofsky (2007: 275-276) has noted, in popular discourses, reality TV is seen as 'verifying a self as "authentic" and the production, editing, and all the work that goes into creating a show becoming a "natural" way of doing this.' One of the core claims to the real made by reality television is the assertion that under the glare of reality TV surveillance, participants' 'real' selves will irrepressibly emerge for public consumption. In this dialectic, Josh's gay sexuality was unable to be obscured, as it formed the intrinsic and inseparable essence of his authentic self – 'that's you.'

Throughout the show's lifespan on British television, the ultimate impossibility of gay participants concealing their 'true' sexualities within the authenticity-affirming domain of *Big Brother*, has been a recurring discourse. Recall Mark Byron and Christopher Hall's similar anxieties about their families reacting negatively to their onscreen performances of the authentic selves, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Returning to the example of Josh, in Dean's euphemistic references to Josh's expressions of his gay identity as simply 'who he is,' Josh's sexuality is located as the essential 'truth' of his personhood. Being open about his sexuality is smoothly assimilated into the format's broader mandate to 'be yourself'. The signifiers of therapy culture in which this sequence is framed, as the cast-members essentially recreate Josh's conversation with the therapist, as they sit upon easy chairs, talking in slow, measured paces and reflective, pensive tones, edited through smooth and unobtrusive continuity cutting, worked to anchor Josh's conflicted gay identity as the locus of his authentic self, a self which is being liberated and released via the therapeutic reality televisual apparatus (I interrogate the construction of reality TV participation as a means of learning to accept and love the authentic gay self in Chapter Five).

By 2007, the apparently 'liberating' potentialities of mediation within *Big Brother* continued to circulate in relation to gay participants. The 2007 series of *Celebrity Big Brother*[27] featured Ian Watkins, a former member of the 1990s popular music group Steps. During his time in Steps, Ian has been known as 'H', which stood for 'hyper' in reference to his apparently boisterous and

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[27] This series has been discussed at length in relation to the Jade Goody/Shilpa Shetty racism row. See, for example, Gies, 2009; Holmes, 2009.

playful personality. On the day of the broadcast of the live launch of *Celebrity Big Brother* 2007, an interview was published in the tabloid newspaper *The Sun*, in which Ian, who had previously been presumed heterosexual, publicly came out as gay. In the interview he stated, 'I could never have done this [come out] years ago, never [...] But I'm comfortable with who I am now and I want everyone to know' (quoted in *Metro*, 2007). These lines were echoed in Ian's launch night interview with host Davina McCall, who asked him: 'Today was a very big day for you, wasn't it, because you came out in *The Sun*. Why did you choose today...coming out just as you're going in [to the *Celebrity Big Brother* house]?' to which Ian replied, 'Just because I'm really proud of who I am, and I just want everybody to know.'

The promise of access to the 'real' self has long been a commercial strategy for the marketing of stars and celebrities (cf. Dyer, 1981), and appearing on *Celebrity Big Brother* was positioned as part of a cross-platform strategy for reinvigorating Ian's somewhat dormant media career, through an extended, inter-textual 'exposure' of his 'real' self. In his pre-assembled introductory montage he stated, 'I think people know me mostly for being in the group Steps, with cheesy dance routines, cheesy clothes... in fact, everything about it was cheese.' He was no longer 'H', the manufactured pop star, but Ian, the man behind the 'cheesy' (read: synthetic, superficial, depthless) pop facade. Being openly gay was configured as the ultimate ratification of the apparent authenticity of the new Ian persona.

Ian's narrative demonstrates how, throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, normative conceptions of coming out as the affirmation of an inner truth have been produced through the broader reality televisual tropes of confession, revelation and authenticity. In the example of Ian, this production also extended to the aesthetic conventions of *Big Brother*. For instance, at one point early in the series, he was shown recounting to another housemate, Jo O'Meara, a recurring dream in which he imagined falling in love with a fantasy partner, also identified as male. The technological assemblage of this sequence was composed of cross-cuts between two different shots: static, high-angle shots encompassing both Ian and Jo, evoking a CCTV surveillance camera fixed high upon the wall of the house, juxtaposed with shaky close-ups of Ian's face, which drew upon long-established grammars of documentary filmmaking, in which technical imperfection, mobility and closeness connote rawness, the real and emotional truth. Further, during Ian and Jo's conversation, muffled sounds of other participants talking and

moving around in another part of the house could be heard off-screen, emphasising that this exchange was taking place in semi-privacy, away from the other participants. In this way, this sequence was coded as a kind of voyeuristic intrusion upon a private moment of emotional intimacy and revelation; the semiotics of the segment, which were very typical of *Big Brother* as a whole, fed into the textual production of Ian's gay sexuality as an authentic essence of his self-identity (Figure 8).

Figure 11: Ian talks about his sexuality in *Celebrity Big Brother* 2007.

"Kemal could potentially be playing a game of his own": Refusing the authenticity script

Through the generic, aesthetic and discursive tropes of surveillance, therapy and self-realisation, *Big Brother* and *Celebrity Big Brother* have not merely housed, revealed and represented the authentic selves of gay participants, but, this chapter argues, worked to produce and circulate the very notion of gay identity as a form of essential and abiding subjectivity. In so doing, I now go on to argue, the show has disciplined forms of queer self-expression which are not reconcilable with normative conceptions of gay authenticity. This was particularly the case with Kemal Shahin, a participant of *Big Brother* 2005, whose public refusal to adopt a discreet and coherent sexual and gendered subject position placed him in a complex space in relation to the show's fixation with 'being yourself'. Kemal, a nineteen year old, Turkish, Muslim, student from Liverpool, was identified as male, but adopted something of a gender-ambiguous persona during his time on the show. He entered the house on the series' live launch night dressed as what he

described as an 'Indian bride', clad in a voluminous red sari and head-dress, dripping with gold jewels, strutting down the red carpet, slowing moving his outstretched arms in exaggerated, grandiose gestures (Figure 9). In the series' broadcast texts, he was frequently shown wearing items of female clothing, stiletto-heeled shoes, make-up and jewellery, often whilst imitating fashion model-like poses and moving as if on a fashion catwalk.

Figure 12: Kemal enters *Big Brother* 2005 as an 'Indian bride'

Kemal's behaviour and appearance therefore centralised artifice and performance in relation to gender and sexuality, over the discourses of stasis, security and ontology in which non-heterosexual identities are more usually framed. Kemal evoked (perhaps unintentionally) a history of queer subcultural practises, such as drag queens, drag kings, genderfuck, and butch/femme lesbian identities, in which various kinds of gender non-conformity have worked to resist or subvert normative 'depth models' of identity as 'unique, abiding, and continuous' (Meyer, 1994: 2-3). Rather, these forms of embodied, 'specifically queer cultural critique' potentially expose how supposedly foundational vectors of subjectivity, such as sexuality and gender, are effects of discourse, rather than ontological realities. Certain forms of embodied queerness have long been conceptualised as in some sense anti-essentialist. Judith Butler (1990: 186-187) has influentially argued that drag potentially 'subverts the distinction of an inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks […] the notion of a true […] original or primary' sexuality or gender. *Big Brother*, as a contemporary media text, has, however, worked to separate queer identity from these kinds of anti-authentic modes of embodiment, performance and identity.

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Whilst initially claiming to identify as bisexual, when asked by Davina McCall during his eviction interview, 'Are you gay or bisexual?' - a question which is itself revealing of a cultural reliance upon a limited taxonomy of categorical 'types' to make sense of human sexuality - Kemal replied, 'I don't even know. Bisexual? Gay? This? That? I don't know!' thus refusing to align his self-identity with established, essentialist taxonomies of sexuality. Yet, that is question was posed at all by Davina, in her positions as the textually-constructed figure of heteronormative identification and mouthpiece for the onscreen and at home audiences (as noted in Chapter 2), suggests the programme's laying down of a mandate for queer lives to be pinned down into legible, discreet taxonomies of identity in order to be able to be made sense of by heterocentric society.

Moreover, Kemal's recurrent playing with the signifiers of gender, and the apparent fluidity of his sexual identity, were repeatedly evoked by other housemates as evidence that he was 'acting' for the cameras or 'playing a game' (the cardinal sins of *Big Brother*), and thus hiding or submerging his 'real' self. Early in the series, when faced with such accusations by a white, male, heterosexual housemate, Maxwell, Kemal retorted, 'I admit I'm a drama queen, I'm over the top, I'm diva-esque... this is my personality, this is how I got in here.' Maxwell then aggressively asked, 'What if I walked around in stilettos? Would you think I was doing it for the cameras?' to which Kemal replied, 'That's me! That's what I'm like!' In a similar vein, several weeks later, another participant, Makosi, speculated, 'We all know that in the outside world Kemal does not wear high heels. In the outside world he does not wear girly tops, he's admitted it. So Kemal could potentially be playing a game of his own.' Kemal's seeming implacability within normative sex and gender binaries was thus mobilised by other housemates as evidence of duplicity, coded in highly gendered terms, and as a refusal to 'be himself'. Kemal's representations bring to the fore how, in *Big Brother*, the reality televisual imperative towards authentic self-expression: that is, behaving in a manner congruent with a supposedly fixed and impermeable, essential self, has worked to demarcate 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' forms of queer identity. The rubric of authenticity has functioned as an index of acceptable queerness, whereby the 'acceptable' queer person is the 'authentic' gay subject. Forms of queerness which belie the notion of an integral and authentic self are denigrated as inauthentic, and thus morally suspect.

Kemal's queerness, then, lay not only in his otherness of heterosexuality, but his troubling of recognisable categories of sex and gender more broadly. He became, in Sara Ahmed's (2006: 158) terms, a disturbing and disorienting queer 'object.' His very presence within the house/show pointed towards the inability of established epistemologies of innate gay (and straight) subjectivity, and identity stasis more generally, to account for the fluidity and polyvocality of selfhood and desire in its lived actuality: 'the failure of organisation to hold things in place' (ibid). Late in the series during an exchange with Big Brother in the diary room, Kemal reflected upon the other housemates' negative reactions to his anarchic sex/gender identity. He stated, 'People just think I'm the crazy, slightly odd, man-boy, boy-girl, nutty thing that runs around a lot […] I'm too much, I'm too much and things that people don't understand, or things that people cannot contain, people want out.'

Perhaps in order to mitigate the negative reception of Kemal's queer identity within the programme texts, certain sites of inter-textual representation offered a counter-discourse, which sought to reconcile Kemal's implacable sexuality/gender with normative ideals around being true to yourself. An article in *heat* carried family photographs of Kemal as a child, purporting to evidence his apparently innate desire for showmanship and dressing up by locating these characteristics within his pre-fame life (a common trope of reality TV celebrity magazine reporting (see Holmes, 2004a)). These images were accompanied by quotes from Kemal's mother, such as, 'He's always been a showman - he was a flamboyant character even at the age of one' (quoted in Perry, 2005: 11), and, 'Kemal loved to be in shows in the leading role. He had to be the centre of attention and always wanted to be famous' (ibid: 12). In so doing, the magazine seemingly pre-empted reductive designations of Kemal's appearance and behaviour as 'attention seeking', by offering an ontologization of not only his embodied queerness, but also his desire for fame as a transcendental facet of his being. These discourses could be read as working to contain the transgressive, disorienting and disruptive threat of Kemal's queer performances by 'explaining' and reducing them to emanations of an innate and essential core. In the inter-textual matrix of reality television celebrity, queerness appears inconceivable beyond a narrow framework of 'authentic' and essential gay subjectivities.

Competing for the real gay self in reality pop celebrity

So far in this chapter, I have explored how the notion of gay sexuality as an integral and innate core of the self has been prolifically produced through the reality TV conventions of authenticity, self-discovery and self-revelation in relation to *Big Brother* and *Celebrity Big Brother*. This is not the only format, however, in which this discursive process has taken place. Much like the *Big Brother* contestants I discussed above, the mediation of gay contestants of reality pop franchises, such as *Pop Idol*, *Fame Academy* and *The X Factor*, have in many cases drawn upon the discourses of authenticity already attached to these programmes in order to construct these figures' sexual orientations as the very essence of their authentic selves, and thus reproducing the very idea of the authentic gay self.

There are, however, some crucial points of *difference* between *Big Brother* and the reality pop franchises in relation to their construction of 'authentic' gay sexualities. Unlike *Big Brother*, in the context of the reality pop shows, revelations of authentic gay subjectivity have been most often displaced onto the contestants' *extra*-textual circulation, rather than produced within the programme texts themselves. The articulations of these participants' 'real' sexualities are embedded within a broader commercial strategy in which the extra-textual media seek to wrestle claims to ultimate representational 'truth' from the shows themselves, and resituate these claims within their own representational spaces. The coverage of *Big Brother* also mobilises this strategy of purporting to offer 'the reality behind the reality,' but what is unique to the context of reality pop is way in which the 'burden of realism' within extra-textual commentary (Holmes, 2004a) is located, in these instances, in the contestants' sexualities. Whichever media site carries the 'truth' of their sexual orientation is thus able to represent itself as offering the most direct and unexpurgated access to the 'real'.

This key difference in textual/inter-textual dialogue between reality television subgenres is partly due to the pop programme's embeddedness within the discourses and mechanics of the popular music industry. In press commentary surrounding these programmes, the heteronormative and commercial mandates of the mainstream popular music industry have been frequently positioned as blocking or inhibiting gay participants from expressing their 'authentic' gay sexualities within the texts of the shows themselves. Contestants of the pop programmes have often been identified as gay in their extra-textual representations, yet constructed as heterosexual within the show,

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such as Marcus Collins and Craig Colton from *X Factor* 2011. Alternatively, participants have been constructed as heterosexual during their initial broadcast, and come out as gay when the series has concluded, as was the case with the winner of *Pop Idol* in 2001, Will Young, and the winner of *The X Factor* in 2009, Joe McElderry. This is not to suggest that this onscreen/offscreen asymmetry has characterised every non-heterosexual reality pop participant. As I explore later, homosexuality is frequently coded within the shows though the lexicon of camp, and what few lesbian contestants have appeared on these programmes, such as Alex Parks of *Fame Academy* 2003 and Lucy Spraggan of *X Factor* 2012, have figured as 'resistant' contestants to the heteronormative logic of the popular music industry.

Will Young, whilst not represented as resolutely and unambiguously heterosexual, was constructed within the show as something of a 'heart-throb' figure for young, female viewers during his time on *Pop Idol*, and his first single, 'Evergreen/Anything is Possible', was a hugely successful, heterosexual love ballad. In March 2002, however, when Will came out as gay in the now defunct British tabloid newspaper *News of the World*, a dichotomy was evoked by numerous commentators between Will's 'authentic' gay sexuality, and the apparent artificiality, and even duplicity, of his manufactured *Pop Idol* image. Will's gay sexuality was discursively positioned as the innate and transcendental antithesis of the commercial, the corporate, and the synthetic (Holmes, 2004c). As journalist Nadia Cohen (2002) of *The Daily Mail* speculated:

> The Pop Idol winner's frank disclosure will jeopardise his pinup status with millions of girl fans, and baffled many in the music industry who knew of a campaign to suppress news of his homosexuality. Although many people involved in the ITV talent show were well aware of Young's homosexuality [...] it was hoped to keep it secret to avoid putting off female fans.

Cohen implicitly mobilises established hierarchies of value, taste and ethicality in musical production and consumption, in which pop music has been culturally positioned as the commercial and manufactured (and thus less valuable) 'other' to supposedly more 'authentic' musical genres such as country or rock music (Leach, 2001: 143). The apparent 'suppression' of Will's homosexuality is here inserted into this dichotomy, appearing to exemplify the manipulative, profit-driven, and ethically-dubious nature of the popular music/reality television

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industries, which are seen to have stifled Will's ability to express his true identity. Will's sexuality is constructed as an uncontainable truth which exceeds the heteronormative parameters of his carefully managed *Pop Idol* image.

These debates hinge upon a binary logic, in which a false and manufactured heterosexual image is pitted against an apparently authentic gay identity. This homo/hetero, authentic/inauthentic opposition has enabled a critique within popular discourses of the apparent irreconcilability of non-heterosexual identities with the commercial mandates of industrially-produced pop. Indeed, it was perceived by various commentators that BMG, the record label affiliated with *Pop Idol*, were expending more resources promoting the pop career of the show's heterosexual runner-up, Gareth Gates, instead of Will, as this passage from the *Evening Standard* speculated:

> Why is BMG apparently backing second best? Could it be that, despite having the weaker voice, Gareth's working-class roots, conventional good looks and heterosexuality make him more marketable - or should we say malleable? Soon after winning Pop Idol Will took the controversial and perhaps ill-advised step of announcing that he was gay (Hewitt, 2002).

As Holmes (2004c: 157) has noted, in the case of Gareth Gates, his working class background was repeatedly invoked within textual and inter-textual discourses as a guarantor of Gareth's authenticity, and his continuing ordinariness in the face of his new-found celebrity/pop career. In Hewitt's piece, however, Gareth's working-class heritage and age is construed as a signifier of 'malleability', and an inability to assert agency in the construction of his celebrity persona. In contrast, Will was championed by critics writing in various 'quality' publications, as a resistant winner, a resistance which was discursively located in his middle-class upbringing, university education, political awareness, and queer sexual orientation. To quote Esther Addley (2002) of broadsheet newspaper *The Guardian*:

> Sharp-eyed viewers of the show's finale will have noted [Simon] Cowell's barely concealed panic at the surprise result, when Will beat the favourite Gareth Gates and Cowell suddenly found himself managing a bolshie, queer politics graduate instead of a malleable, spiky-haired teenager with a stammer.

Gareth's heavily gelled 'spiky' hairstyle is mobilised by Addley as synecdocal for the hegemonic, commercially-motivated television/music industry with which he is aligned. In contrast, the victory of Will is positioned as evidencing the democratic potentialities of the viewer interactivity of the *Pop Idol* format, which is perceived to have enabled a subversion of the show's corporate machinations (Holmes, 2004c: 166-167).

The idea that a participant with a sexual minority identity winning a British reality pop show subverted the ideologies of commerciality and manufacture embedded within these formats (even if Will's coming out after the show had ended complicates this logic somewhat), emerged visibly again in 2003 in relation to Alex Parks, the lesbian winner of *Fame Academy*. Rather than narrativising the audition process (as in *Pop Idol* and *The X Factor*), the format of *Fame Academy*, the BBC's relatively short-lived attempt to rival ITV's *Pop Idol*, (even) more centrally incorporated representations of the process of creating a pop star than in other reality-pop franchises. In this show, the participants became 'students', and were trained to become pop stars, through vocal coaching, dance and fitness classes, and styling sessions, in an eponymous 'academy' - a seemingly isolated mansion where they were filmed 24-hours a day. Like the other reality-pop shows, during a Saturday evening broadcast slot, the students would perform live for public votes before a studio audience and panel of judges, with the lowest-scoring student eliminated each week. *Fame Academy*'s centralisation of the intensive labour, ambition and dedication required to become a pop star, combined with a heightened emphasis upon traditional conceptions of talent (participants were shown writing their own songs, for example, although these were not performed in the live shows), was part of the BBC's claim to the show's public service potential, attempting to mitigating popular assumptions that reality TV had divorced fame from ideals of hard work, talent and skill (see Chapter One for a discussion of these discourses).

While, unlike Will Young, Alex Parks was open about her lesbian identity whilst on the show, her win was similarly constructed in the British press as a resistant or subversive outcome in relation to the programme's perceived attempt to manufacture a conventional, commercial pop star, especially in relation to the normative femininity associated with *female* pop stardom. Alex was praised for having held on to a creativity, integrity, and agency, in which her lesbian identity centrally figured. In critical commentary, Alex was repeatedly contrasted with the normative

caricature of reality TV participants: fame-hungry 'wannabe's eager for their short moment in the limelight' (Porter, 2003), 'the pretty marionettes the industry usually favours' (McCormick, 2003). She was, 'Someone whose qualities shine bright in her world of tarnished celebrity and cheap stars' (Moir, 2003), 'a jaw-dropping thing for tacky old prime-time to deliver' (Brown, 2004) (these kinds of discourses are strikingly similar to those surrounding Lucy Spraggan of *X Factor* 2012, who I discuss later). Like Will Young, Alex's sexuality was configured as the location of the 'real' in opposition to the tropes of construction and manufacture associated with reality-pop formats. She was described by Glyn Brown (2004) in the *Independent* as, 'Delivering songs of edgy, sometimes angsty openness that aren't the usual reality-pop show fodder [...] Ruffle-haired, short, the product of a wild Cornish upbringing and, to top it all off, gay.' Further, in interviews Alex claimed that much of the emotionality of her performances on *Fame Academy* stemmed from her recent breakup with her ex-girlfriend, and she asserted the centrality of love and relationships to her inspiration and creativity (Moir, 2003).

To this end, Alex was discussed by Charlie Porter (2003) in the *Guardian* as being *more* authentic than Will Young, in her apparent willingness to bring her sexuality into her music:

> Young's public image is that of a gay man in the least sexual way - the fluff and niceness without the lust and hard-knocked soul. Young is known to bat away questions about his homosexuality; Parks, on the other hand, is perceptive enough to recognise how it affects and shapes her character [...] Parks fiercely wants to sing, and to do so as openly as possible. This honesty comes in part from freely admitting her homosexuality.

Precisely where Alex's lesbianism manifested itself in her musical output is a matter of interpretation. Her debut album, *Introduction*, consisted mostly of cover songs she had performed on *Fame Academy*, although none of these featured gendered pronouns. Nonetheless, the discursive location of Alex's musical authenticity in her lesbian identity offered a mainstream iteration of historical perceptions of music performed and/or produced by lesbians as resistant to the commercial and heteronormative mainstream. An integral part of the lesbian feminist movement in the 1970s involved the development of 'womyn's music' - independent music production, performance and distribution contexts outside of the perceived patriarchal and sexist genres of pop and rock music (Taylor, 2012: 40-41; Wilton, 1995). Since the 1980s there has

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been some, limited movement of openly lesbian performers into the musical mainstream, such as kd lang and Tracy Chapman (Wilton, 1995). Yet, in the twenty-first century, gay women remain largely absent from mainstream popular music. Arlene Stein (1995: 416) has argued that, 'Because images of heterosexuality, and more specifically, female sexual accessibility, are central to pop music's appeal, out lesbians are generally not thought to be "crossover" material.'

Somewhat contradictorily, in the case of Alex Parks, her irreconcilability with the economy of heterosexual female availability associated with mainstream pop music was discussed in critical commentary as the locus of her commercial appeal. Alex's victory on *Fame Academy* was positioned as evidence of the democratic potential of interactive reality TV formats, a disillusionment amongst viewers with the apparent sameness and normativity of the performers these shows featured and produced, and an increasing acceptance of sexual diversity in early twenty-first century Britain (Porter, 2003). In this commentary, Alex's resilience and authenticity in relation to the manufactured world of mainstream pop was repeatedly read through her non-conventionally feminine appearance. As Porter stated in the *Guardian*, 'We expect reality TV winners to be pretty and hair-flicky, like Caroline [sic], the Corrs lookalike who came third,'[28] likening Alex to Michelle McManus, the overweight winner of *Pop Idol* in 2003, who was also discussed in press discourses as a 'resistant' victor due to her departure from traditional ideals of feminine beauty. Further, in comparing Alex to Carolynne Poole, the second runner up in *Fame Academy* 2003, who largely embodied an image of conventional feminine beauty - long dark hair, make-up, fashionable clothing and a tall and slender physique - Porter brings together cultural conceptions of femininity as a performance or construction, forged through consumption (McRobbie, 2010) (I discuss this in detail in the next chapter in relation to transgender reality TV celebrities) with discourses of interactivity, audience power and democratisation in relation to reality TV, coding an opposition between authenticity and artifice trough the corporeal.

Throughout her time on *Fame Academy*, and in the years following, in TV interviews, music videos and CD cover art, Alex's short and solid frame was dressed in a boyish uniform of t-shirts, hoodies, denim jackets, baggy jeans, combat trousers and trainers, with short, spiky hairstyles. She was thus visually aligned with a tomboy or 'boi' lesbian identity: softer and less masculine than a traditional 'butch' subject position, but nonetheless characterised by a rejection

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[28] In a similar vein, at one point in the series Carolynne was told by judge/coach Carrie Grant that she looks like a cast-member of the TV drama series *Footballers Wives* (ITV, 2002-2006).

of the embodied trappings of normative femininity (Skeski, 2011). Like Will Young, Alex's sexuality was constructed as the location of the 'real' in opposition to the tropes of construction and manufacture associated with reality pop formats, an authenticity which, in Alex's case was signified through her clothing and physical appearance. Her authentic sexuality/self was made tangible in representational form through the lesbian body.

Some feminist scholars have conceptualised the tomboy as a more agentic form of female identity, enabling young women to access spaces and activities traditionally coded as male (Halberstam, 1998). Karin Quimby (2003) has argued that the tomboy circulates within popular culture as a subversive and queer figure, which refuses to abide by heteronormative gender roles and power structures. In the context of Alex Park's narrative, cultural notions of the tomboy as resistant to cultural norms were a central frame through which her lesbian sexuality was discursively positioned as at the heart of her authentic self. However, that her extra-textual construction as a resistant and subversive *Fame Academy* contestant was incorporated into the 'official' construction of her celebrity image suggests that this was more of a commercialised *image* of resistance to the pervasive heteronormativity of the popular music industry. Alex's first album sold over 600,000 copies in the UK (double the amount required for a record to go 'Platinum'), which suggests that her construction as lesbian artist resistant to the heteronormative standards of commercial pop, was recuperated as a marketing strategy, and worked to bolster *Fame Academy*'s (and her record label Polydor's) ultimate aim of creating a commercially-successful pop star.[29]

"Maybe you didn't need to change the gender references?" Regulation and queer potential in reality pop

The coming out of Will Young in 2001, and the victory of Alex Parks on *Fame Academy* in 2003, were each discussed in press discourses as bringing into focus the ways in which the representational spaces of the popular music industry, which have included reality pop franchises such as *Pop Idol* and *Fame Academy*, are often predicated upon 'selling' normative ideals of heterosexuality, particularly as this is played out in images of desire, and the sexualisation of male and female bodies (Deller, 2012). The gay sexualities of these two celebrities were

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[29] This image did, however appear to lack commercial viability in the long term, as evidenced by Alex's relatively short music career consisting of only two albums.

constructed as the essences of their authentic identities, through discursive counterpointing with the apparent artificiality, construction, manufacture and commerciality of the normative, mainstream music market. Yet, it would clearly be problematic to argue that pop music is inherently and insurmountably heteronormative. Writing about the openly gay American pop star Adam Lambert (who rose to fame on the reality pop show *American Idol*), Anita Brady (2011: 301) has noted that 'any consideration of Lambert's queerness must [...] acknowledge his location within an industry in which the cultural capital of transgression can be utilised to enhance commodity value.' Brady points out that the marketability of pop stars is frequently located in their perceived transgression of hegemonic social values. There is an established history of commercially successful pop stars whose celebrity images have been characterised by a relatively explicit queer sensibility: from David Bowie to Boy George, Annie Lennox to Prince, Madonna to Lady Gaga.

However, in the context of reality pop programming, I would argue that the convergence of the pop music industry with prime-time, weekend broadcast slots on the broadcaster ITV (or BBC1 in the case of *Fame Academy*), has rendered the representations on non-heterosexual identities offered by these programmes highly limited, both quantitatively and qualitatively, especially in comparison to *Big Brother*. Scheduling is important here; as well as its different target audience, *Big Brother* was/is broadcast on Channel 4 and Five after the 9pm watershed. This is not to suggest, however, that gay and lesbian identities have been all but absent from these shows. To the contrary, as Ruth Deller (2012) has noted, gay men have frequently appeared as participants in reality pop programmes, particularly *The X Factor*, as spectacles of entertainment and 'fun', coded through imagery desexualised, camp excess. The construction of these figures has drawn upon the historical, light entertainment tradition of what Andy Medhurst (2007) has called 'comedy queens' – flamboyant and desexualised gay men - as an integral part of British comedy culture (I analyse the extension of this history into reality TV in Chapter Five).

In this way, the gay subject positions made legible within reality pop programmes have been consonant with these shows' perceived address to a mainstream, family audience. In the British press, *The X Factor* in particular (alongside other reality formats such as *Strictly Come Dancing* (BBC1, 2004-)) has been discussed as reviving a nostalgic and traditional television viewing experience, defined trough a heteronormative idealisation of the nuclear family unit. Writing in

the conservative *Daily Mail*, Sandra Parsons (2010) stated that the show had 'to some extent recreated the golden age of the Seventies, when families did sit together to be entertained in what was a shared and unifying experience.' Parsons' reference to a 'shared and unifying' viewing experiences carries a series of ideological implications around *The X Factor*'s capacity to function as disseminator of apparently collective, social values. It is certainly the case that, throughout its lifespan, *The X Factor* has faced sustained moral scrutiny, whereby any content deemed outside the normative, particularly regarding sex and sexuality, has been subject to regulatory judgement. This is in part due to the programme's intertextual construction as a bastion of traditional, family viewing. The show has become the centre of an unstable, discursive, moral matrix, comprised of press and social media commentary, and the judgements of the British TV regulatory body Ofcom, which have recurrently re-affirmed the apparent 'acceptability' of only certain forms of heteronormative sexual expression within the show.[30] In this context, the coming out narrative of Will Young following his rise to celebrity in *Pop Idol*, or the victory of Alex Parks in *Fame Academy*, can be read as moments of queer potentiality within the history of British reality television. This was a moment in which the exclusionary, heteronormative assumptions embedded within, and orbiting around, the representational spaces of the reality pop franchises were exposed. Critics such as Addley were quick to celebrate the 'breaking through' of Will's authentic gay self from beneath the commercial, heteronormative veneer of his *Pop Idol* persona, and ally this to the democratic promise of an emergent interactive media culture.

These rare moments of queer exposure have also broken into the broadcast texts of the shows themselves. The 2009 series of *The X Factor* featured a contestant named Danyl Johnson. While Johnson had revealed that he identified as bisexual in an interview with the *News of the World* (Wiley, 2009), on the first live show of the series, his performance of the song 'And I'm Telling You' by Whitney Houston (who, ironically, is considered an iconic diva in many queer subcultures), switched the song's original male pronouns to female. Following the performance, one of the judges, Dannii Minogue, stated that Danyl had 'turned a girl's song into a guy's song, but if we're to believe everything we read in the paper, maybe you didn't need to change the

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[30] The regulation of sexuality in relation to the show has not only concerned the representation queer sexualities, but also the bounds of 'appropriate' female sexuality. The sexually connotative performances of established popstars Christina Aguilera and Rihanna on the show in in 2010, and Lady Gaga in 2013, each provoked a large number of complaints to Ofcom (cf. Johnson, 2011; Sweney, 2013).

gender reference in it,' referring to the interview in which Danyl had affirmed his bisexuality. Simon Cowell, off-camera, is immediately heard replying, 'What?', and the editing cuts to a shot encompassing all four judges, as Cowell leans away from his microphone and rapidly asks, 'What did you say? What did you say? What did you say?' in a performance signifying a loss of control of the unfolding events. Minogue repeats herself to Cowell directly, 'I said, if we're to believe everything we read in the papers then maybe he didn't need to change the gender reference in it,' followed by an awkward pause in which some members of the live audience are heard shouting and booing. Rather abruptly, the next judge, Cheryl Cole, begins her appraisal of Danyl's performance.

In this brief moment, the liveness of the broadcast enabled the text to inadvertently draw attention to its own role in the reproduction of heterosexuality as the normative mode of social and sexual organisation. Villarejo (2009: 55) has speculated that there is an inherent queerness to live television, pointing towards 'a convergence between television technologies of reproduction and liveness, on the one hand, and technologies of queer life on the other.' Queer, in certain theoretical contexts, refers to forms of identity which are unexplainable and uncontainable by heteronormative understandings of self and subjectivity, and to forms of action or being which can unsettle cultural assumptions around the defaultness and normativity and heterosexuality (Edelman, 2004). In the Danyl/Minogue sequence, the liveness of *The X Factor* became a queer force, effecting a rupturing of the episode's hitherto seamless reification of heteronormativity, exposing the heteronormative assumptions embedded within, and reproduced by, the show. The potential promise of the unexpected attached to the show's status as live broadcast, contains within it the queer promise that events within the text cannot be totally contained and controlled by the heteronotmative logic of the reality pop genre.

Despite the fact that knowledge of Danyl's bisexual identification was already circulating within the public sphere, following the broadcast Minogue's comments were the subject of almost four thousand complaints from viewers to Ofcom (Sweney, 2009). While Ofcom cleared the broadcast of breaching any regulatory guidelines, the regulator 'stressed that broadcasters need to take care when dealing with private and sensitive issues, such as sexual orientation, on peak-time entertainment shows' (quoted in Sweney, 2009). By 'sexual orientation' Ofcom mean *non-heterosexual* orientations: the Danyl/Minogue incident threw into the spotlight how *heterosexual*

orientations are abundantly articulated in almost every aspect of the show. In Ofcom's regulatory discourses around this incident, heterosexuality is constructed as not a sexuality at all, merely an invisible and default norm of subjectivity, yet one which can come under threat from 'inappropriate' forms of broadcasting. Throughout modern history, queer sexualities have been culturally demarcated as 'threatening' to 'acceptable' forms of kinship: particularly the heterosexual, nuclear family (Edelman, 2004), and, as Jonathan Bignell (2004: 244) has argued, 'the regulation of television depends on the ideological assumptions about what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in a given culture.' In the context of reality pop franchises, regulatory bodies, and the discourses they produce, have positioned queer sexualities (or some, overt kinds of queer sexuality at least) as unsuitable for family consumption, permissible only in post-watershed broadcasting, in ways that heterosexuality is not. In combination with the broadcast texts and their intertextual discussion, regulation is therefore also key to the cultural work of reality television celebrity, producing and circulating scripts of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' forms of queer identity.

Camp queens and resistant lesbians: Commerciality, value and self-reflexivity in reality pop

Self-reflexivity is central to reality pop franchises. As Tom Mole (2004) has stated, 'Just as postmodern architecture displays the ducts and pipes that make a building function [reality pop programming] foregrounds the mechanisms that manufacture celebrities.' Shows such as *The X Factor* seek to reconcile two historically competing discourses of fame and celebrity: celebrity as a commercial construction, and celebrity as stemming from an innate 'star quality' (cf. Holmes, 2004c). These shows narrativise the process of combining the 'raw' talent of participants with the industrial mechanics of stardom in order to produce a pop star, and thus offer a large amount of representations space to images and discussions of the ways in which pop stars are created.

Figures 13-15. Rylan performs 'Gold' by Spandau Ballet (*The X Factor* 2012).

Over time, beginning in the second decade of twenty-first century, the broadcast texts of *The X Factor* have knowingly incorporated the heteronormative exclusions of the show, as produced through its intersections with the pop music industry, as part of its own claim to reflexivity. The idea that only certain specific types of queer identity are suitable for celebrification within and through this show, has been explored within the texts of the show itself. Deller (2012) has noted that the explicitly commercial mission of *The X Factor* is often mobilised within the show as a means of carefully managing expressions of queer sexuality. The economic and narrative functions of producing a contestant to launch into a career as a popular music artist, and the

show's position within highly synergised networks of television, music, and celebrity production (personified in the figure of judge Simon Cowell, an impresario whose influence straddles numerous pop cultural domains), have resulted in gay sexuality becoming legible, as I noted above, primarily in spectacles of camp excess, both in terms of gay participants themselves, and in the staging of an ironic camp sensibility more broadly within the show's musical performances.

Whilst *The X Factor*'s employment of a camp aesthetic during some of the live performances[31] nods to the historical relationship between pop music and gay subcultures and identities, as Deller (2012) has explored, these camp, queer contestants (Diva Fever in 2010, Johnny Robinson in 2011, and Christopher Maloney and Rylan Clarke in 2012), are often attributed a light entertainment, televisual function (being 'fun' and 'entertaining'), but are not considered to possess the requisite commercial viability for a pop career beyond the lifespan of the series itself. Moreover, these gay contestants have often been framed in discourses of risk, entering the live finals as 'wild card' contestants. Their performances are frequently appraised by the judges with comments such as: 'I don't think you guys are the best singers we've had, but you are fun' (Simon Cowell to Diva Fever, 2011); 'It is a bit of cheese, and a bit of karaoke, but it's blinking entertaining' (Tulisa to Rylan, 2012); 'You're fun, and you're playful, and you don't take yourself too seriously' (Nicole Scherzinger to Rylan, 2012); and are repeatedly discussed as having the 'entertainment factor' or as 'guilty pleasures.'[32]

The performances of Rylan Clarke, an openly gay contestant in 2012 (who has gone on to sustain his celebrity through a successful career as a television presenter in the 'camp' mould of Graham Norton, Paul O'Grady and Brian Dowling) are paradigmatic of the camp/kitsch aesthetic in which gay men have been recurrently represented within the show. Whilst Rylan's own song choices in the audition stages of the competition were ballads and love songs, in the live finals, he performed a series of high-energy pop songs, wearing extravagant costumes, and on elaborate stage sets and with extensive casts of dancers. In the first live show, for example, Rylan sang

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[31] 'Attractive, muscular male dancers are often used to enhance performances, and costumes and staging reference 'camp' cultural texts such as *Glee* and *High School Musical*, particularly for acts with presumed gay appeal' (Deller, 2012).

[32] This 'entertainment/fun' rhetoric has also extended to contestants who, whilst not gay, have occupied something of a queer subject position, outside of normative ideals of male pop stardom, such as Jedward in 2009 and Wagner in 2010.

'Gold' by Spandau Ballet, wearing a gold lamé vest with dangling gold chains, oversized gold jewellery, and dramatic 'ancient Egyptian' style makeup. Topless, muscular male backing dancers wore 'Egyptian' style headdresses and loincloths, and Rylan was carried onto the stage by the dancers, whilst sitting on a large gold throne. In an absurd and parodic evocation of gay sexuality, throughout the performance, the throne became a podium on which Rylan danced, surrounded by the writhing dancers, as a dramatic light display pulsated behind them [Figures 13-15]. This style of excessive theatricality in the live performances is almost exclusively reserved for queer contestants. 'Serious' (heterosexual) contestants often sing alone onstage, accompanied by little more than atmospheric lighting, and are styled in fashionable outfits, rather than outlandish costumes as the gay contestants are. When dancers are used in the performances of heterosexual participants, they generally occupy a background position on the stage, rarely interacting with the contestants, rather than taking a central element of the performance as in Rylan's performances.

This emphasises how far the value of gay contestants in *The X Factor* lies in their *visual* presentation, over any sonic talents they may possess. Queerness, within the show, equates to a visual spectacle for the television audience, which is seen as lacking the viability for a music career after the series has ended. Discourses of commerciality, in this way, operate as the aegis for heteronormative exclusion. Indeed, Rylan himself was subject to particular controversy during his time on the show. He was repeatedly saved from elimination by the public vote, whilst more conventional, heterosexual acts were sent home. This troubled the programme's usual teleology of camp gay contestants as 'entertaining' visual spectacles who are quickly voted out in favour of 'serious' (heterosexual) singers with the 'real' potential for a pop career, and Rylan thus came to occupy a fault line between a series of competing discourses on democracy, talent, fame and sexuality circulating in relation to the show. On one level, the public's repeated saving of Rylan worked to bolster the programme's claim to the inherently democratic nature of its celebrity due to the format's interactivity: that the decision of which contestants succeed and which do not lies with viewers, and is ultimately out of the control of the heteronormativelty-disposed music industry, as many of the discourses around Will Young's coming out maintained. Indeed, within the broadcast texts, Rylan was positioned in an ongoing narrative concerning the

judge Gary Barlow's opposition to Rylan's participation in the show.[33] At the same time, Rylan was subject to abuse, much of it homophobic, and even death threats, on Twitter, which was explored in the show itself. Further, Barlow's opposition to Rylan was explicitly articulated as concerning his perceived lack of conventional singing talent, which fed into the franchise's broader construction, embedded in its interactivity, as a space of struggle over power and narrative resolution between judges/producers and audiences. However, it is significant that it was a queer body which was the locus of this controversy. Rylan effectively became the most excessive example of broader cultural fault-lines of talent and entertainment, authenticity and manufacture, and audience and industry which the pop shows straddle. Queer contestants have operated at the apex of these debates, emblematising how, throughout the lifespan of reality pop programming on British television, the presence of queer people has itself been a site of struggle over the meanings and roles which queer identities are able to take on within the textual worlds of reality pop.

The entrenchment of the ideologies of market commerciality within these franchises has also resulted in the almost complete absence of openly lesbian performers. Lucy Spraggan, an openly lesbian contestant of *X Factor* in 2012 is, at the time of writing, one of the very few queer women to have appeared within the British reality pop genre. In a striking echo of many of the discourses surrounding Alex Parks in 2003, in Lucy's case, a rhetoric of authenticity, located in a resistance to the heterosexual norms surroundings female participants, enabled the visibility and open articulation of her lesbian sexuality. Not only did Lucy recurrently sing same-sex love songs she had written herself, but her lesbian identity was explicitly fore-grounded in her live performances. For example, during one performance, a troupe of scantily clad female dancers performed provocative, sexualised dance moves around Lucy, who directed several exaggerated desiring glances towards them. Following the performance, judge Nicole Sherzinger asked her, 'So Lucy, tell me, how did it feel when those four girls were booty-popping and on all fours?' to which Lucy replied 'I think you can tell,' gesturing to her smiling face.

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[33] In the final moments of one episode, when the presenter Dermott O'Leary announced that Rylan had again been voted to progress in the competition, Barlow stormed off stage, a sequence which has been widely circulated since, in press countdowns of *The X Factor*'s most 'controversial' moments (e.g. Robertson, 2012; Usmar and Greenwood, 2015; Welsh, 2015). In a moment of British reality TV history repeating itself, Carolynne Poole, who had previously appeared on *Fame Academy* in 2003 and lost out to Alex Parks, was the eliminated contestant.

I would argue, however, that Lucy's representation stands as exemplification of the manner in which, over time, the heteronormative ideologies attached to both *The X Factor* itself, and the pop music industry more broadly, have been knowingly acknowledged and taken into account within the texts, only to be perpetuated and reified under the auspices of commercial viability. In a similar manner to Will Young and Alex Parks, Lucy was constructed as a 'resistant' participant. Yet, in this instance, this construction took place within, rather than in opposition, to the television text. Under the banner of 'being herself', Lucy's lesbian identity was coalesced with traditional signifiers of musical authenticity: performing love songs to/about other females which she had written herself, whilst playing a guitar live on stage. In the figure of Lucy, lesbian identity was thus made legible through a convergence of discourses and semiotics of musical, sexual, and subjective 'truth'. For example, in a pre-assembled montage sequence broadcast before her first live performance on the show, Lucy stated, 'I'm a singer-songwriter and I'm a guitar player, what I do isn't the type of thing that's usually on *The X Factor*.' Whilst her acoustic sound, boyish fashion sense (a uniform of masculine shirts, skinny jeans and plimsolls) and 'natural' appearance (minimal make-up and simple hairstyles, often covered with casual hats) aligned Lucy with a highly recognisable typology of lesbian singer-songwriters, embodied almost a decade earlier by Alex Parks, these lines formed a sound bridge into a sequence emphasising Lucy's apparent divergence from the usually glamorous, feminine image of a female *X Factor*-produced pop star. This was coded through a centralisation of her interest in the technical mechanics of a new guitar she had recently acquired, pointing-out approvingly to her *X Factor* mentor, the pop star Tulisa, the instrument's 'built-in tuner' and 'rosewood back', which was contrasted with Tulisa's normative, 'girlie' femininity, as she interrupted with, 'I just like the sparkly bit'.

Indeed, during her time on the show, Lucy's guitar became an almost phallic symbol of her sexual and musical agency, and her represented refusal to compromise her authenticity in the face of the show's impetus towards manufacture. The sequence described above continued with a close-up 'talking head' shot of Lucy, where she stated, 'Not having the guitar there, it's not really an option for me, it never has been'. The broadcast then cut to footage of Lucy rehearsing her performance with the show's choreographer, Brian Freedman, who asked her, 'What would happen if you grabbed the guitar, and pulled it round to the back [held it behind you], and just grabbed hold of the mic[rophone]?' Lucy then attempts this clumsily and replies, 'I don't know

about that, it's just not me'. Here, Lucy is shown explicitly resisting the process of pop star manufacture (Freedman's attempts embellish her performances of her self-written, and thus emotionally truthful, lesbian love songs with complex choreography), in the stated pursuit of 'being herself'. Indeed, these scene cuts to footage of Lucy and Tulisa, involved in a mentoring session, where Tulisa tells her, 'You know there's gonna be people in here [involved in the show] going, 'Do this...' But at the end of the day, no one can tell you what to do...,' which then cuts to Lucy on her own, saying 'Tulisa, she gets me, she understands that I just want to be who I am.' Following her performance (a self-written love song called 'Mountains'), Lucy was praised by the judge Nicole Sherzinger as 'Brilliant in your own, spunky, honest, and witty way', followed by Tulisa describing Lucy as:

> One of the most unique artists this competition has ever seen. I want people to know that you wrote that song yourself tonight, and it stood up against all the covers that I've heard. You're best when you're doing you, and I wouldn't have it any other way, and neither would you.

Lucy's authenticity is here explicitly counter-posed with the show's conventional programme of cover performances, and her departure from the established norm is legitimated by her individuality, uniqueness and tenacity in 'being herself'. Here, lesbianism becomes legible through the construction of authenticity as a transcendental value, which overrides the normative, heterosexist regime of the show. A rhetorical framework of subjective, musical and sexual authenticity has therefore enabled an opening up of the heteronormative fabric of the text, to include some forms of queer identity which would (and have been) otherwise rendered invisible by the show's aggressive perpetuation of heterosexual privilege under the banner of commercial viability. At the same time, however, this process has worked to bind sexual orientation ever-more firmly to the fabric of the self, and the political ramifications of this are certainly ambiguous.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how commonsense epistemologies of gay sexuality as essential, immutable and innate, are both located within, and produced through, a broader matrix of commercial discourses which assert the primacy of authenticity and 'being yourself'. As key sites for the circulation of normative ideals of authentic self-representation, and as prolific spaces of

gay visibility, the texts and inter-texts of reality television celebrity stand as preeminent sites at which this conception of gay ontology has been, and continues to be, discursively produced.

This discursive binding of sexual orientation to the very fabric of the self, enabled by the pervasive reality televisual tropes of therapy, self-discovery, authenticity and self-actualisation, is implicated within 'real life' political scenarios. The trajectory of political reform throughout the 2000s and into the 2010s, which has endowed basic citizenship rights to gay and lesbian people (adoption, marriage, military service, anti-discrimination legislation), has been largely predicated upon what Waites (2005: 545) has termed 'fixity claims' (2005: 545): a conception of gay sexuality as an unchangeable and ontological facet of being. As the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair argued in parliamentary debates around the repeal of Section 28, 'It is not against the nature of gay people to be gay: it is in fact their nature. It is what they are' (cited in ibid: 547). Reality television programmes, and their extra-textual discussion, are some of most widely-circulated textual fabrics through which the notion of 'being who you are' has become consolidated as a seemingly transcendental, British cultural value. As the quote from Blair demonstrates, the legislative integration of (some) gay and lesbian identities within the hegemonic institutions of British polity has been largely enabled by this very dialectic. In this way, the ability to lay claim to a common identity, and thus speak as a group, unified by shared experiences of oppression and marginalisation is, in many ways, politically useful in the on-going fight to secure legal protections and entitlements for those outside of the normative, heterosexual frame, both in the UK and elsewhere (Butler, 2004; Weber, 2012).

However, in becoming legible only within these ontological parameters, what is perhaps lost is the ability for the mainstream visibility of non-heterosexual identities to pose ways of conceiving of human subjectivity outside of the essentialist and hierarchical heterosexual/homosexual binary, which, as I explored in the previous chapter, is the source of much emotional and physical suffering for many queer people. Within the normative paradigm of gay authenticity, gay sexualities remain a distinctly minority counterpoint to heterosexuality, which retains its position as the default, invisible and unmarked standard. Writing in the 1970s, the philosopher and gay liberationist Guy Hocquenghem (1993 [1972]: 50-51) argued that:

> [Sexual] desire emerges in multiple form, whose components are only divisible *a posteriori*, according to how we manipulate it. Just like heterosexual desire,

homosexual desire is an arbitrary frozen frame in an unbroken and polyvocal flux [...] an abstract division of desire which allows even those who escape to be dominated, inscribing within the law what is outside the law.

Whilst the social and political context which Hocquenghem was addressing differs from the contemporary culture which has been my focus here, he describes how the designation of 'the homosexual' as a clinical and pathological entity, worked to contain non-normative sexualities within a delineated taxonomic type. This, he claims, mitigated the potential for the visibility of forms of life which exist outside the heterosexual norm to expose the arbitrariness of heteronormative modes of social organisation.

In the twenty-first century, reality television has continued this process, containing the ontological threat of queer life, not through discourses of pathology, but through a far more positive rhetoric of authenticity, self-realisation and subjective truth. As Suzanna Walters (2014: 94) has argued, the cultural construction of gay identity as a discreet and *a priori* sexual type has worked to demarcate gay and lesbian people as, 'a small but stable population, always there but always a minority. Timeless but bounded, transcultural but not transient.'   Representations such as those I have analysed here, which locate subjective 'authenticity' within sexual orientation, as they work to naturalise gay identities as ontological, pre-discursive, who we are/how we are born, by necessity entail a simultaneous naturalisation of *heterosexuality* as *also* historically, socially and culturally transcendent: something which 'just exists.' In this process, gay sexualities become consolidated as a 'natural', yet nonetheless, minority counterpoint to a more normative and pervasive heterosexuality, which is shielded from deconstruction or critique by the rhetoric of 'authenticity' in which gay identities are framed. Despite the legibility of certain essentialist visions of gay subjectivity enabled by reality TV, this binding of sexuality to the very fabric of the self largely entrenches the socio-cultural dominance of heteronormativity as it is imprinted into the structures of social organisation.

Indeed, if reality TV has been involved in reproducing heterosexuality as the default, majority frame of identity through scripts of authenticity and self-realisation, in reality pop shows this apparent universality of heterosexuality has operated as a highly exclusionary framework, delimiting queer visibility within these shows to two primary archetypes: the flamboyant and 'entertaining' gay man, and the 'resistant' lesbian contestant. Within the explicitly commercial

logic of reality pop formats, both of these kinds of queer figures accrue their meanings from their apparent otherness to the univeralised heteronormative subject position produced and put forth by these programmes.

Chapter Four:

Making and making over transgender identity in reality television celebrity.

> Transgendering has moved from the peripheries of 'deviance' and 'perversion' in Euro-American societies to the centre of mainstream celebrity. As we write, the Portuguese transsexual Nadia Almada has recently won the UK reality show *Big Brother 5* and is among the hottest 'celebs' featured on the covers of major celebrity magazine weeklies (Ekins and King, 2006: 1).

In *The Transgender Phenomenon*, Richard Ekins and Dave King (2006) pinpointed the year 2004 as significant 'moment' in transgender visiblity in the United Kingdom. In particular, Ekins and King argued that the victory of Nadia Almada in that year's *Big Brother* competition emblematised a palpable shift in the discursive construction of transgender people, from strange, marginal beings located at the periphery of society, to accepted and integrated members of the British social body. Moving forward to 2014, reality television, this time in the form of Kellie Maloney and *Celebrity Big Brother*, was once again being hailed as a central text in the changing parameters of acceptance and understanding of transgender identities in contemporary Britain. As the headline of a *Guardian* think-piece by Alya Holdom (2014) proclaimed, 'Kellie Maloney shows times are better for transgender people.' Moreover, Kellie was repeatedly evoked in journalistic commentary as evidence that the 'transgender tipping point' declared by TIME magazine in the US in reference to the increasing awareness of transgender issues purportedly engendered by the circulation of transgender celebrities such as Laverne Cox, was also occurring on this side of the Atlantic (Lees, 2014b).

Despite the apparent newness of transgender media visibility asserted within this commentary, transgender identities, or 'transsexual' to use the terminology of the time, have featured within mainstream media texts since at least the 1950s, particularly in the form of celebrities such as Christine Jorgensen (Stryker, 2000; 2009; Meyerowitz, 2006; Skidmore, 2011). Until the early twenty-first century, however, transgender identities were largely mediated through discourses of pathology, deception and deprecating humour (Garber, 1992; King, 2006; Serano, 2007; Richardson, 2010). Analysing both fictional and factual representations from 1990s film and television, Julia Serano (2007) identified two major tropes of trans representation: the 'deceptive

transsexual' who successfully passes as a 'real' woman in order to seduce unwitting heterosexual men, and the 'pathetic transsexual' whose inability to pass is construed as a source of comedy. Serano argued that each of these stereotypes worked in different ways to construct transgender women's feminine physical appearances (or attempts at femininity) as 'an artificial mask or costume, ' so that their 'real' identities are discursively located in their birth-assigned maleness.

In the context of this representational history, what has shifted in the last decade or more is not only the increased amount of media space which transgender identities now occupy but, more profoundly, the discourses through which these identities are understood. In stark contrast to the media types identified by Serano, in the contemporary moment, normative epistemologies of transgender subjectivity posit trans people's intuited genders as their 'true' or authentic selves. Transgender people are perceived to possess an authentic gendered core which is located within an initially mismatched corporeality. This model of trans subjectivity is often described as feeling like being 'born in the wrong body,' dysphoria which is made 'right' through corporeal alterations to physically resemble the 'true', intuited gender (Barker-Plummer, 2013).

Whilst a small body of academic work has sought to outline the discursive contours of the 'wrong body' trope of trans subjectivity as it has come to circulate throughout the popular media (Richardson, 2010; Barker-Plummer, 2013; Keegan, 2013), I would argue that the more complex questions of *why* and *how* this paradigm has come to stand as the normative epistemology of transgender selfhood in the contemporary moment, and why it possesses much rhetorical force, remains underexplored within existing scholarship. In this chapter I seek to address this epistemological gap through the localised context of transgender celebrities who have emerged from British reality TV.

At the crux of this chapter is the fact that this profound shift in the ways in which transgender identity has come to be culturally understood has occurred at the same time that the ideal of authenticity - of being true to who you 'really are' - has attained ever-intensified cultural purchase. As I discussed in Chapter Three, reality television is paradigmatic of this twenty-first century zeitgeist of authenticity, and is a prolific site in which the notion of the authentic self is produced and circulated in the contemporary moment. As such, it is no coincidence that in a British context, reality television programming, particularly *Big Brother* and *Celebrity Big Brother*, has offered some of the most 'wide-reaching' (Hines, 2007: 2) representations of

transgender identity, with participants such as Nadia Almada, Lauren Harries and Kellie Maloney attaining no small amount of celebrity status in the broader media realm.

My main arguments within this chapter are twofold. Firstly, I explore how the construction of these transgender celebrities' intuited, 'inner' selves as the locus of their authentic identities has been discursively and semiotically produced through the discursive and visual tropes of authenticity, self-discovery and self-realisation attached to reality television and celerity culture more broadly. Indeed, in their post-*Big Brother* lifespans, each of these trans-female celebrities have circulated within highly gendered media economies centred upon narratives of making over the physical body in order to realise or make tangible the authentic self. I argue that the ability for these transgender women to circulate *as celebrities* was contingent not only upon the reconcilability of their trans identities with these broader commercial conventions of authenticity via bodily work, but also upon the ways in which the production of their transgender subjectivities through this discursive optic made literal one of the core mandates of contemporary consumer culture for all citizens: to make one's authentic self legible on and through the body. My analysis of these women's celebrity texts also seeks, from these localised examples, to make the larger intervention that the fixation with authenticity which has come to characterise contemporary popular culture, particularly an authenticity made tangible on the body, has *enabled* the wrong body narrative of transgender identity to take hold as the normative understanding of trans subjectivity in the twenty-first century. I maintain that this commercial and cultural milieu is one of the core *conditions of possibility* for the continual reproduction of the wrong body trope, the discursive context in which it is able to make sense.

Finally, this chapter also interrogates how the production of transgender identities through the visual and discursive optics of reality television celebrity has worked to delineate certain normative ideals of 'acceptable' transgender identity. The period 2000 to 2014 was a highly contradictory cultural moment in relation to trans subjectivities, characterised by an increasing pop-cultural visibility and civic integration of transgender people in British society, alongside, particularly from the late-2000s onwards, a neoliberal, recessionary, austerity-driven dismantling of support networks for transgender people within the public sphere, tied, somewhat contradictorily, to the discursive consolidation of transgender people as (potentially) productive and 'integrated' members of the social body (Irving, 2008; Mitchell, et. al., 2013). My analysis

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therefore enables an understanding of how transgender images in popular culture have spoken to this social context, and how these representations work to construct the self-sufficient, self-managing, hegemonically-feminine transgender person as the 'ideal' trans subject, capable of overcoming dysphoria through individualised and atomised means, thus further marginalising those outside of this regulatory frame.

As a note on terminology, I acknowledge that some writers have used the term 'transgender' to refer to a whole spectrum of gender variance and non-conformity, from lesbian 'butches' to transvestites to drag queens (for example, Feinberg, 1996). In this chapter, however, I use the term, to denote the very particular model of transgender identity made legible through the wrong body discourse, as it has been embodied in the figure of transgender reality TV stars. I also occasionally use the abbreviated 'trans' for semantic variation. At times, however, I cite sources, particularly those from the mid-2000s, which use the term 'transsexual' to refer to the same phenomenon. Whilst this was the established term for these identities at this particular historical juncture, I am mindful of the critiques that many transgender writers and activists have made of the term 'transsexual' due to its origins in medical and psychological literature, and concomitantly clinical undertones, and so I have chosen not to use this term in my own text.

It is also important to signal that my analysis in the chapter almost exclusively concerns transgender women. Simply, this is because transgender males have remained largely unrepresented in British reality TV. A notable exception here is Luke Anderson, the winner of *Big Brother* 2012. Luke's celebrity was, however, ephemeral, his post-*Big Brother* presence in the British media lasting on for a matter of weeks, and Luke has been routinely criticised as one of the most 'boring' winners *Big Brother* UK has so far produced (Tarley, 2012; Wightman, 2014). I would suggest that Luke's denigration as 'boring' and 'unmemorable', and his highly limited mobility within the celebrity marketplace following his win, exemplifies the relative implacability of trans-male identities within popular culture, in comparison with the comparative longevity of Nadia Almada, Lauren Harries or Kellie Maloney's celebrity. Transgender male identities are not easily commodifiable for the female-gendered celebrity culture of bodily makeovers in which the transfemale participants were able to circulate, a commercial and cultural context which, as I argue throughout this chapter, has been integral to the consecration of normative ideals of transgender subjectivity in twenty-first century Britain.

Transgender identity and the 'wrong body discourse'

As I outlined briefly above, in the wrong body discourse, the essential 'truth' of gender is located not in or on the body, but within the more intangible regions of the psyche or the soul. The transgender person *feels* as though they are a woman or a man, and has felt this way throughout their life, yet, their bodily materiality (genitals, chromosomal makeup, and so on) signify the opposite gender. Any processes undertaken by the trans individual to alter their physical body, from clothing and hairstyling to hormonal and/or surgical interventions, are therefore configured not as *changing* anything about the self in any fundamental way, but as bringing their mismatched corporeality into alignment with an already-present, eternal and essential self (Prosser, 1998; Barker-Plummer, 2013).

Transgender reality television participants have replicated this 'wrong body' trope almost completely. In the UK, the wrong body paradigm is the received understanding of transgender in the medical and legal domains and so, on one level, the articulation of this script by trans reality TV stars perhaps points to their own reliance this narrative within medical contexts as a means of being 'officially' certified as transgender, and thus able to access hormonal and surgical means of corporeal transformation and/or the legal re-classification of their gender. As texts, these celebrities are indicative of how far the public acceptability of transgender identities is largely contingent upon the repeated mobilisation of the wrong body discourse, as well as themselves perpetuating of this discourse as the dominant frame of contemporary trans visibility. In a tabloid interview, for example, Kellie Maloney stated:

> I was born in the wrong body and I have always known I was a woman. What was wrong at birth is now being medically corrected. I have a female brain. I knew I was different from the minute I could compare myself to other children. I wasn't in the right body (quoted in Drake, 2014).

Moreover, the appearance of Kellie on *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2014 emphasised how far this paradigm has permeated popular consciousness by the second decade of the twenty-first century. Kellie was previously known as boxing promoter Frank Maloney, and entered *Celebrity Big Brother* as a public 'outing' of her transgender identity. She discussed the Frank persona as a

self-conscious façade, an aggressive, heavy-drinking, at times violent, and even homophobic[34] character which she adopted to assimilate with the hyper-masculine world of professional boxing. Kellie claimed that via her appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother* she was attempting to shed the residuum of 'Frank' and release the softer, feminine Kellie who was inside all along. I discussed in Chapter Two how, in 2004, Nadia Almada's appearance on *Big Brother* was attributed a pedagogic function in enabling a large portion of the British public to 'learn' about transgender people, particularly in terms of the way the revelatory and intimate domain of reality television allowed her to articulate her 'authentic' female identity. By 2014, however, the wrong body discourse which structured Nadia's mediation was drawn upon by non-transgender participants and commentators as a common-sense explanation for Kellie's liminal gender identity. For example, on an episode of the ancillary discussion programme *Big Brother's Bit on the Side* (Five, 2011-), when a member of the on-screen audience remarked how Kellie often appeared 'uncomfortable', the show's host, Emma Willis, replied matter-of-factly, 'Well, it must be strange for her, this is the first time she's appeared [in the media] *as herself*'.[35]

Textual moments such as this make clear how far the wrong body trope has become sedimented as the dominant epistemology on transgender identity in the contemporary moment, particularly in popular culture. That said, it is important to emphasise that within academic thinking transgender identity has long been, and remains, a site of conceptual struggle. For instance, Jay Prosser (1998: 17) has argued that the wrong body paradigm has become the dominant script of trans subjectivity because it most adequately speaks to the ways in which transgender people experience their own identities, through very real feelings of, or 'belief in an immanent gender.' In contrast, other writers in feminism, queer theory and transgender studies, such as Sandy Stone 1992), Kate Bornstein (1994), Riki Wilchins (1997), Judith Butler (2004) and Susan Stryker (2006), have conceptualised transgender people as occupying a potentially resistant, disruptive or subversive position in relation to essentialized categories of binary gender. Bornstein (1994), for

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[34] In 2004, whilst living as Frank Maloney, Kellie stood, unsuccessfully, as the candidate for the right-wing UK Independence Party in the London mayoral elections. Maloney commented that he had not campaigned in the borough of Camden because 'too many gays' lived in this area of the capital, responding to critics of this comment with the statement, 'In public, let's live a proper moral life [...] I don't think [gay people] do a lot for society. I don't have a problem with gays, what I have a problem with is them flaunting their sexuality'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these comments were reproduced numerous times the press and social media when Frank re-emerged into the public eye as Kellie in 2014.
[35] 19 August 2014.

example, has argued that, as a transgender woman, she embodies a 'third space' outside the dimorphism of male and female. Bornstein claims that trans people make legible alternative modalities of gender, defined by plurality, fluidity and unfixity, and therefore potentially expose binary gender as an arbitrary, discursive construct. The media representations which I interrogate here are therefore particularly visible nodes within a matrix of complex, competing and contradictory discourses through which transgender has become legible, both inside and outside of the academy, as a deeply unstable 'social, cultural and psychological zone' (Garber, 1992: 106). I assess their position in relation to these competing academic conceptions of transgender subjectivity later in this chapter.

It is also crucial to note that the normativity of the wrong body paradigm is ratified medically and legally in many Anglo-American nations via the demarcation of what, in the UK, is termed gender dysphoria as an official medical condition. The National Health Service defines gender dysphoria as, 'discomfort or distress caused by a mismatch between a person's gender identity and their biological sex assigned at birth.'[36] In the UK, a diagnosis of gender dysphoria is a prerequisite for both the prescription of body-altering hormones and/or surgical alterations of the genitals or other parts of the body, and legal recognition of a transgender person's acquired gender under the Gender Recognition Act (GRA). The GRA, which was passed through Parliament in 2004, is itself a reinforcement of the dominance of the 'wrong body' discourse, as it enables the issuing of new birth certificates to 'officially' re-gender transgender people under the law, demarcating for all legal purposes that they are, and have always been, their acquired gender (cf. Whittle and Turner, 2007).

I would argue, however, that the visibility of wrong body narratives within popular culture cannot be conceptualised *only*, or indeed primarily, as mediated echoes of medico-legal discourses. Far from simply a platform for the representation of discourses and debates generated in other domains, media texts are dynamic sites at which cultural identities are produced through the internal logics and conventions of these particular media forms. Rosemary Hennessey (2000: 146) has argued that incarnations of transgender identity found within mainstream cultural texts are sculpted by 'historical conditions of possibility by which the visible comes to be seeable,' which in turn produce certain recognisable forms of subjectivity. Transgender identities attain

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[36] http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/Pages/Introduction.aspx

coherency in representational form through the extent to which groups of established and recognisable, historically and culturally specific images, discourses and epistemologies (which may not be 'about' gender or sexuality in any straightforward way) feed into one another within the text, in order to produce 'transgender' as a legible subject position that *makes sense* within a particular social and historical context.

For example, both Susan Stryker (2000; 2009) and Joanne Meyerowitz (2006) have utilised this approach in their respective studies of Christine Jorgensen, an American GI who travelled to Denmark in 1952 to undergo one of the first widely-reported cases of gender reassignment surgery. Stryker has argued that it was media representations of Jorgensen which, in the 1950s, 'would make transsexual a household word.' Stryker and Meyerowitz have argued that transsexuality, as it was embodied in the figure of Jorgensen, was made legible through the optic of established Cold War ideals, particularly the apparent mastery and triumph of science and technology over nature and biology, discourses which possessed existing cultural currency in relation to, for example, the atomic bomb. It was by implicitly evoking this broader context in press reporting of the Jorgenson case that Jorgensen's transsexual identity was able to make sense to readers who had likely never before encountered the phenomenon of transsexuality (Stryker, 2000). Jorgenson was thus constructed as yet another, both wonderful and terrifying, glimpse of the ability for modern science to do what was previously considered only the province of 'nature' - in this instance the artificial construction of a human female body.

"Take a Luke at me now": Transgender celebrities and the power of fame

If Christine Jorgensen's transsexuality in the 1950s and 1960s was made legible through the mediated telescoping of discourses which already possessed cultural currency, what discursive frameworks have enabled the media visibility of contemporary transgender celebrities such as those emerging from reality TV? In this section I interrogate the role of discourses of celebrity and fame, particularly as these are attached to reality programming, in providing a discursive framework in which the wrong body narrative of trans subjectivity is able to make sense. I then move on to assessing the position of the female-coded media marketplace of corporeal makeovers in which these transgender celebrities circulated following their mediations on *Big Brother*, within this process.

During her time on *Celebrity Big Brother* Kellie repeatedly threatened to leave the show prematurely due to the emotional strain of enacting her pubic gender transition within the enclosed environment of the *Big Brother* house. During one such episode, Kellie's housemate Deidre Kelly (aka 'White Dee', star of Channel 4 documentary *Benefits Street* (2014)), argued with Kellie that she should stay in the house because it was a valuable opportunity for Kellie to be her 'real' self:

> **Dee:** Who are you now? Who are *you* now?
>
> **Kellie:** Kellie
>
> **Dee:** Yes. Who have you reinvented yourself as?
>
> **Kellie:** The real me.
>
> **Dee:** […] You have hidden Kellie for so many years. This is Kellie. Be Kellie. *Be Kellie!* […] You've never been Kellie. Be Kellie now, do you hear me?

Dee's vehement, repetitious emphasis upon the ontology of Kellie's female identity overrides the possible performative connotations of the suggestion that she has 'reinvented' herself. Rather, this short exchange exemplifies how far the conception of gender transition as a process of realising the transgender person's 'true' self, converges almost seamlessly with the broader reality televisual mandate that participants 'be themselves'. As I explored in Chapter Three, the concept of the authentic self – crystallised colloquially in the phrases 'being yourself' and 'being real' - is central to reality television, so much so that it is almost impossible to imagine reality programming disattached from this discourse. In reality texts and the commentary that surrounds them, participants are appraised in relation to how far they are perceived to be presenting themselves in congruence with their 'true' self: an essential character or personality, continuous across time and space, which stretches to the core of their very being. At the same time, however, reality show participants are *also* expected to connect with or 'discover' this authentic self during their mediation (Holmes, 2006b). As Su Holmes and Derborah Jermyn (2014) have noted, this contradictory imperative for reality cast-members to simultaneously be *and* discover their authentic selves works to reconcile an ambivalent duality at the heart of contemporary models of subjectivity. Echoing Anthony Giddens' (1999) concept of the 'reflexive self', Holmes and Jermyn argue that whilst reality programming perpetuates the notion of identity stasis through the suggestion the each individual possesses intrinsic, innate and authentic self which

must be 'found', realised and made tangible through 'enterprise and transformation [and is] in need of constant creation and "work"' (ibid: 40). Further, in his early studies, Mark Andrejevic (2004: 108-109) found that participants of reality shows such as *Big Brother* (US) and *The Real World* (MTV, 1992-) often described being on these shows as a kind of personal and therapeutic 'journey,' 'a process of self-expression, self-realization and self-validation.' In this framework, reality TV participation is configured within a circular narrative trajectory, in which through the course of their mediation participants are able to attain a clearer, more stable and solidified connection with a self which they already possessed.

Such themes of a journey towards an already-present self have functioned as a frame for representing transgender identities long before the advent of reality TV, in the domain of published transgender autobiographies. Prosser's (1998) analysis of texts published between 1954 and 1996 appears to suggest (though he does not make this point explicitly) that the conventions of the autobiographic form – the act of looking back upon one's life events to construct a coherent trajectory of personal growth and self-development – enabled transgender lives to attain representational form through a far more sympathetic discursive register than those traditionally found in other media such as newspapers or film (cf. Phillips, 2006; Skidmore, 2011), one which bears close parallels to the contemporary wrong body trope. Prosser identifies an 'archetypal story of transsexuality' organized around 'consecutive stages: suffering and confusion; the epiphany of self-discovery; corporeal and social transformation/conversion; and finally the arrival "home." Here, the transgender person's body may change, but their essential self is perceived to have stayed the same. Only now it has been realised and validated, and made socially and culturally visible and tangible through corporeal alteration. Paradigmatic of this narrative trajectory is a work like Nancy Hunt's *Mirror Image: The Odyssey of a Male-To-Female Transsexual* (1978), the title of which clearly draws upon the trope of an 'odyssey' of self-realisation common to modernist narrative forms (Taroff, 2014). The ways in which transgender lives have been culturally articulated have thus long been bound to broader cultural scripts through which selfhood is conceived and narrated within particular cultural moments.

Further, in many of the texts which Prosser addresses, this 'journey' to the authentic self is mapped metaphorically onto a geographical journey, where the author travels to an 'exotic' non-Western nation in order to undergo gender reassignment surgery. In the twenty-first century, a

fiction film such as *TransAmerica* (2005) has reproduced this narrative trope of the 'journey home to the self' through the conventions of the road movie (Keegan, 2013). In the context of transgender participants, British reality television, and the discourses of celebrity which it produces, has offered a particularly unique iteration of this long-established narrative of transgender life and subjectivity. Here, the validation of the intuited self, enabled by the physical/metaphorical journey is transposed onto transgender reality participants' movements from 'ordinary' person to a celebrity (in *Big Brother*), or their transition from a kind of liminal figure low-down in the celebrity hierarchy to a more visible and 'legitimate' inhabitation of celebrity status (in *Celebrity Big Brother*). Becoming a celebrity via participation in reality television has been positioned as a crucial phase within transgender participants' broader processes of gender transition. Like a Mobius strip, in these narratives gender transition and celebrification become enmeshed; articulated as two sides of the very same process.

This binding of transgender biography and celebrification hinges upon what Nick Couldry has conceptualised as the 'symbolic power' of the media and media institutions (2000). Couldry is concerned with the ways in which media discourses work, often in tacit and subtle ways, to construct the media as a source and site of undisputed power and authority. Most significantly for my purposes here, Couldry maintains that such processes entail, and are reinforced by, a hierarchical division of the social world into two domains: the 'media world' and the 'ordinary world'. By implication, this involves the symbolic categorisation of the people who populate these distinct domains into 'media' and 'ordinary' people. Reality television formats, such as *Big Brother*, which entail the transformation of a formerly anonymous person into a celebrity therefore enact a 'ritual transition' of participants from 'ordinary' to 'media' people, and a metaphorical spatial re-situation of these individuals from the 'ordinary' to 'media' worlds (2004). 'It is 'common sense',' Couldry claims, 'that the 'media world' is somehow better, more intense, than 'ordinary life', and that 'media people' are somehow special' (2000: 45). Becoming part of the media world is thus constructed as being of monumental importance for those involved; becoming a celebrity allows the celebrified subject to in some way tap into the symbolic power of the media realm.

For transgender cast-members, becoming situated within the media realm, through mediation on *Big Brother*, and becoming a celebrity through this, has been repeatedly endowed with the

capacity to in some way validate or confirm these transgender participants' intuited identities as their 'true' and 'authentic' selves. Such an idea of a power of mediation via reality TV to strengthen or legitimise one's sense of self is not unique to trans participants, as Andrejevic (2004: 110) noted in relation to the early series of US *Big Brother*:

> Willing subjection to surveillance on the *Big Brother* show comes to serve as a demonstration of the strength of one's self-image […] Furthermore, in a teeming society wherein one's actions often go unnoticed by others, the implication is that the reality of those actions can be validated if they are recorded and broadcast – they become more real to oneself to the extent that they become more real to others.

In the specific context of transgender cast-members, however, this concept does extra cultural work, sculpting and circulating particular understandings of what it means to be transgender in the contemporary moment. For example, it was reported that Luke Anderson intended to use the prize money he had received for winning *Big Brother* 2012 to pay for various surgical procedures to complete his physical transition into a man (Edwards, 2012). Yet, winning *Big Brother* and becoming a celebrity was suggested to possess a far more elusive and intangible power to consecrate Luke's authentic male identity beyond the surgical, corporeal transformations that he was able to purchase with the economic rewards of his new-found celebrity status. Reporting Luke's victory, *The Sun* produced the headline 'Take a Luke at me now'. Punning upon a well-known phrase and song title, 'Luke' became a substitute for 'look', implicitly foregrounding how upon receiving the 'look' of the Big Brother viewers and the mainstream press he had *become* Luke. His identity had become 'officially' constituted as 'Luke' by becoming the receptacle of the gaze of a mass-media consuming collective.

This textual process taps into a long cultural history in which being mediated, and particularly becoming famous through mediation, is perceived to solidify or authenticate a person's sense of selfhood. For instance, Leo Braudy (1997) has stated:

> The essential lure of the famous is that they are somehow more real than we and that our insubstantial physical reality needs that immortal substance for support […] Not everyone can be famous. But much of our daily experience tells us that we should if we possibly can, because it is the best, perhaps the only, way *to be* […] Fame is a quiet place where one is free to be what one really is, one's true, unchanging essence.

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Braudy suggests here that fame validates one's existence in some illusive and intangible, yet nonetheless profound way. Becoming famous is construed within this passage as the ultimate means of actualising the modernist imperative towards connecting with, realising and embodying one's authentic self. This ontological promise bound to the concepts of fame and celebrity has worked to naturalise a desire amongst ordinary people to become famous in order to reap such existential rewards. Distilling this argument more specifically into the context of television, Cecilia Tichi has explored how since the 1950s and the mainstreaming of TV as the dominant form of mass media, 'being broadcast began to constitute a new kind of ontological state in which the self, its place, its actions are ratified and validated' (1991: 137). Pre-echoing Couldry's media/ordinary dichotomy, Tichi evokes a hierarchy of subjectivity in which the self that is reproduced via mass media technologies becomes somehow more special, more able to lay claim to the status of a subject than those who remain anonymous and unmediated. Margaret Morse has taken this line of thought further, arguing that being on television works to 'satisfy the desire of ordinary persons to "be someone", and to be recognised or to speak as subjects' (1998: 39). In this configuration, being mediated becomes almost a condition of subjectification, we are only truly validated as recognisable subjects with desires, identities, agency and needs when we are able to access mass media representation.

For transgender reality television participants, the asymmetries of seeing and being seen which becoming a celebrity entails have been represented to validate their intuited identities as their 'real' selves. In becoming famous as Nadia or Kellie, for example, rather than their birth-assigned identities Jorge or Frank, constitutes their female selves as who these women *are* on an ontological level. In interviews, Nadia directly positioned her motivations for auditioning to appear on *Big Brother* as part of an imminent drive to finally 'become' her real self. She claimed to have applied to participate in the show twice previously, but that she had not completed the application forms which Endemol had sent her:

> Subconsciously I think it was because I just wasn't ready in my life and head. Then I had my sex change operation in 2004 [...] Because I'd had my operation I felt free, just free and more confident to go for it. I was always a woman – I was always Nadia [...] the breasts I'd had done the year before, then the rest, so I felt nothing could hold me back anymore: I was ready to take on the world and explode. I was really sensing that I could

face the world. Do you know what I mean? There was nothing to say anymore that I was different. I felt normal at last, so because of that, I went to the audition (quoted in Kaur, 2007).[37]

Nadia articulates her appearance on *Big Brother* as part of a trajectory of becoming visible as a woman following her gender reassignment surgery. Becoming a celebrity *as Nadia* worked to ratify, through visibility in the public domain, an identity which she had felt she had possessed all along: 'I was always a woman. I was always Nadia.' Furthermore, becoming a celebrity was represented to have ameliorated a broader sense of ontological insecurity around the inherently contested nature of Nadia's identity, which was discussed as having been a site of turmoil, conflict and a struggle over meaning, prior to her emergence as a celebrity. On the press reproduction of images from her life as man ('Jorge'), she stated, 'I saw all the pictures in the newspapers and I did feel quite comfortable, whereas before I wouldn't even tolerate my mum calling me by the name Jorge' (quoted in Gould, 2004: 98). Further, she told another interviewer, 'I can look at pictures from my past and I don't have to cringe anymore. Before I went into the house, if I'd seen old photos of me splashed across the papers I'd have hated it. Now I'm strong enough to accept it' (quoted in Cave, 2004: 7).

These statements characterise Nadia's transgender identity as the locus of conflict and contestation over where the truth of this identity lies in gendered terms. Discussing trans-male identity, E. Tristan Booth (2011: 200) has described how, for the transman:

> His identity as a man is never fully accepted by some people, regardless of his appearance, his behaviour, or the number of surgeries he has had. This refusal of acknowledgement often leaves the transman feeling cheated out of a stable and social identity that others take for granted. He exists as a stable identity within a queer body, fighting for consonance between personal identification and social interpellation.

Booth articulates here how transgender identities are caught within social structures in which laying claim to a 'stable identity' is contingent upon the social acknowledgement of the 'truth' of one's sense of self: we are what we are recognised as by our social milieus. In this context,

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[37] Of course, we don't know about Nadia's very possible own awareness that this would make her more marketable and more appealing as a media personality and so more likely to be picked for the show, and to sustain visibility on it.

becoming a celebrity, and accessing the symbolic power of fame to validate or make 'real' one's identity through mass-public recognition, worked to solidify Nadia's intuited female self as her 'real' and authentic identity.

Whilst, unlike Nadia, she was already known to the public prior to her appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2013, such a conception of the symbolic power of mediation to validate transgender subjectivities also resonates strongly with Lauren Harries' media narrative. Having been initially famous as a child-prodigy antiques expert on the television show *Wogan* (BBC, 1982-1992) in the 1980s as a boy named James, Lauren disappeared from the public eye when she entered her teens. In 2001 Lauren attained media visibility once again when she underwent gender reassignment surgery, as the British press exhibited a transient fascination with the unusual spectacle embodied by this transgender, former child star. Over the next decade Lauren maintained a minor and spasmodic media career, including being the subject of a Channel 4 documentary, *Little Lady Fauntleroy* (2004), participating in reality series *Trust Me…I'm a Beauty Therapist* (Five, 2006), and starring in her own television series *Lauren Harries: Working 9 to 5* on the now defunct digital channel Showcase TV in 2010.

Lauren is significant in the context of transgender representation on television as her mediations emblematise how the consolidation of the wrong body narrative as the normative understanding of trans identity has not emerged in a dramatic and clear-cut discursive shift in transgender representation, but as a gradual, complex and piecemeal process, whereby older, more straightforwardly oppressive representational histories have remained stuck to or threaded through the new. Before *Celebrity Big Brother* 2013 (and to some extent during and after, as I discuss below), Lauren's public profile was very much bound to traditional tropes of transgender people as pathological and mentally unhinged. Most vividly, her reputation as an oddity was consecrated in a bizarre outburst on *This Morning* in 2009 during a live interview with her in relation to a news item about a transgendered child. In the final moments of the live segment, and to the bemused protestations of the presenters, Lauren put on a pair of glasses, rose from her seat, cupping her breasts with her hands and bowed twice while making strange squeaking noises, a performance which reportedly resulted in Lauren being 'banned' from appearing on *This Morning* ever again (Fletcher, 2009).

Lauren's pre-*Celebrity Big Brother* celebrity text was thus made legible as a series of intersecting vectors of liminality, situated on the borderlands between not only the male/female gender binary, but also the symbolic division between 'media people' and 'ordinary people' (Couldry, 2000). Lauren was paradigmatic of what Garth Palmer (2005: 41) has called 'the D-list', the 'undead' of the celebrity system – a typology of zombified, half-celebrities: low-level, ephemeral media figures situated by their media representations at the ambiguous periphery between ordinary person and celebrity. Lauren had become, in anthropologist Mary Douglas' terms, a 'marginal being' with 'no place in the social system' (2002 [1966]: 121), a liminal status succinctly encapsulated by a 2005 local Welsh newspaper headline which described her as a 'sex change ex-child star' (*WalesOnline*, 2005).

Indeed, Lauren's child stardom is highly significant to the construction of her subjective liminality. Jane O'Conner has argued that former child stars are frequently represented in the media as 'damaged and transgressive' figures (2008: 71). The economic and symbolic success of the child star appears to defy normative boundaries between childhood and adulthood, and call into question the associated epistemological implications of this culturally-contingent divide (the notion that children should be financially and emotionally dependent upon their parents, for example). The dominant image of the former child star in contemporary Western media is of an individual fraught with mental pathologies. The former child star circulates as part of a regulatory schema in which the childhood transgressions of the former celebrity are demarcated as the causal factor of ontological instability in adult life, thus restabilising the normativity of the adulthood/childhood threshold. In this way, the apparent marginality of Lauren's identity prior to her appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother* was informed by the alignment of her dysphoric gender identity with the established biographical trajectory of the 'damaged' former child star, drawing upon a historic association of gender mobility as a signifier of deviance, pathology and psychic turmoil (Phillips, 2006).

In this context, Lauren's *re*-celebrification via her participation in *Celebrity Big Brother* was constructed as a means through which her marginal identity was re-integrated within the established, normative binaries through which legible social life is configured. Central to this process was the perceived cultural and commercial function of celebrity reality TV as a platform for celebrities (or former celebrities) to reinvent and rebrand themselves and their media careers.

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Holmes (2006b: 47) has noted that celebrity reality shows are 'often peopled by faces who have experienced a decline in auratic status, names jostling for the chance to relaunch or reinvent their personae.' Taking this line of argument further, Ruth Deller (2016) has argued that reality programmes are situated within a 'fame cycle', where participation in reality television can work to transition celebrities from one point in this 'cycle' to another. Lauren Harries, through her appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother* aligns with the typology of '(re)-purposed celebrity' within Deller's cycle. This refers to 'those participants who enter these shows with a very narrative 'journey' of re-branding themselves in some capacity,' those seeking, 'a change in public perception of them,' which Deller notes has included 'transgender celebrities looking for acceptance in their current, rather than former, identity' such as Lauren Harries and Kellie Maloney (ibid: 4).

Within this framework, Lauren's 'official' constitution as a woman was enabled by her recuperation as a *celebrity* within the 'media' world, during and after her involvement in *Celebrity Big Brother*. This validation of her female identity was symbolised most visibly by her return to *This Morning* as the host of a regular segment on antiques. In the short introductory VT broadcast immediately prior to Lauren's entry into the Big Brother house, she stated, 'There was James, and now there's Lauren […] I'm Lauren: what you see is what you get', lines which, more than comprising a clichéd promise that she would 'be herself' inside the house, alluded to the power of becoming a recipient of the gaze of a mass media audience to consecrate her intuited sense of selfhood as the 'true' and authentic version of *who she is*. Through becoming a celebrity (again) she had truly *become Lauren*.

"Talentless oompah-loompah": Disciplining the 'bad' transgender reality TV star

In each of these celebrification narratives, the transgender person is constructed as a liminal figure, embarking upon a not-quite-complete process of gender transition. Whilst both Nadia and Lauren had physically transitioned into their female identities some time before their appearances on the show, both were positioned to be in some sense lacking a more intangible, metaphysical inhabitation of a female subject position. Whilst framed in a rhetoric which asserts the existential rewards of mass mediation, becoming a celebrity in this framework enacts a disciplining of these liminal identities. Transgender attains a level of cultural legitimacy only through subjection to what Michel Foucault described as a 'politics of truth,' in which the

apparent 'truth' of selfhood can be narrated only within matrix of power relations which have demarcated in advance what can and cannot count as a rational 'truth' (Butler, 2004: 57): namely an intrinsic and essential male or female identity.

As noted above, scholars in queer and transgender studies have argued that the visibility of bodies which are resistant to binary gendered categorisation bear a disruptive, and possibly radical, potential. These binary-confusing bodies, it has been claimed, can unsettle some of the most basic understandings of what constitutes a human life. As Judith Butler (2004: 28) has asserted, 'Transgender lives have a potential and actual impact on political life at its most fundamental level, that is, who counts as a human and what norms govern the appearance of "real" humanness.' If normative epistemologies demarcate 'male' and 'female' as the only recognisable gendered subject positions from which human life is possible, then transgender subjectivity 'places its subject in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship' to this binary (Stryker, 2006: 248). In this framework, the visibility of the not male, yet not quite female transgender figure, such as Nadia Almada or Lauren Harries, can work to denaturalise these discursive norms, by exposing them as insufficient to make sense of human life in its lived complexity and actuality, and potentially opening up new ways of conceiving personhood and identity.

However, I would argue that the ascent of wrong body discourse as the normative explanation for transgender embodiment and subjectivity throughout the twenty-first century has worked to mitigate the kind of resistant, queer potential of the transgender figure conceptualised by scholars such as those I have cited above. In these reality television narratives, becoming a celebrity is represented to work to reconcile these liminal identities with normative understandings of what constitutes a socially recognisable self. The disruptive spectre of gender liminality becomes visible to the extent that it forms a temporary state of non-identity; attaining socio-cultural legitimacy only through narrative structures which culminate in the transgender person's final embodiment of a more normative pole of male/female gender. Booth (2011: 202) describes how the implacability of transgender identities within a strict binary logic is 'fundamentally at odds with hegemonic paradigms of sex, gender, and sexuality,' and so in the context of reality TV, discourses of celebrity-becoming and the power of mediation work to contain the unsettling potentiality of transgender visibility to throw into turmoil some of our culture's most basic

understandings of what constitutes a human life. Reality television's role as a site of governmentality (Palmer, 2003) thus extends to the regulation and delimitation of normative frames for articulating the self in gendered terms. Furthermore, the ability for some transgender people, and not others, to attain celebrity status through reality TV operates as an index of 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' forms of gendered embodiment, as the case study of Sam Brodie, a transgender female participant of *Big Brother* UK in 2006, works to illuminate.

Despite the widespread circulation of Nadia's transgender narrative only two years before, the extra-textual media repeatedly denied the legitimacy of Sam's claims to femininity, referring to her invariably as 'he', a 'man', a 'ladyboy' and a 'tranny'. Reporting Sam's entrance to the show (as a 'surprise' new housemate in the second week of the competition) the *Daily Star*, described how 'Camp shrieker Sam Brodie arrived in a frock and wig and fooled the gang into thinking that he was really a woman' (Dyke, 2006), instantly coding Sam's feminine appearance, not as pertaining to an innate and authentic female identity (as was the case with Nadia), but through discourses of deception, subterfuge and *inauthenticity*, mobilising the old stereotype of the 'deceptive transsexual' identified by Serano (2007).

Such a representation, I would suggest, was due not only to Sam's ambiguously gendered corporeality (having had no surgical or hormonal interventions, but wearing female-coded clothing, make-up, acrylic nails, and so on), but her adoption of a fluidly gendered subject position and her repeated refusal to reconcile her identity with established scripts of transgender self-narration. For example, when asked by another housemate if her ultimate goal was to undergo gender reassignment surgery ('get your breasts done' and 'the full thing'), Sam replied:

> Well, the way I've always wanted to sort of, perceive myself is not to be known as a stereotype, but as a person, being the fact that I was born this way and I haven't changed anything about me. Because, like, hair can be cut, makeup can be washed off, nails can be taken off, and chicken fillets [artificial breast inserts] can be taken off at the end of the day and I'm still me.

In a similar manner, in Sam's eviction interview with host Davina McCall, Sam was called upon to define, in her own terms, her sexual and gender identity:

Davina: There was a little bit of speculation in the house as to how to kind of pigeon-hole you, if you will. But I've always referred to you as a "she" because that's how I see you. But how would you define yourself?

Sam: The way I see it is I don't like to go under a stereotype. I'm my own person, I'm just Sam. Obviously I've got friends that call me Samuel, I've got friends that call me he, she – it honestly doesn't bother me, cause the way I like my life is nothing's permanent. Makeup can be washed off, hair can be cut off, nails can be cut off, and there's nothing permanent, and I'm just happy with the person I am, and this is the way that I'm born, and this is the way that I'm gonna die.

In each of these statements, Sam centralises the synthetic and performative nature of her feminine self-presentation. Mobilising the reality television mantra of 'being me', Sam draws attention to the instability and contingency of sexual and somatic categorisation. Instead, she offers a conception of selfhood as both fluid and essential, articulating a more intangible, yet nonetheless present and profound, sense of selfhood which is not reducible to binary of narrowly defined gendered and sexual categories. The aggressive vilification of Sam in the extra-textual media therefore brings to the fore the role of reality television celebrity in discursively policing the boundaries between recognisable and unrecognisable forms of gender and subjectivity. Whilst Sam explicitly mobilised the established reality televisual refrain of 'being yourself,' the demarcation of her transgender identity as a pathological façade emphasises how notions of the essential fixity of gender binary are so integral to received epistemologies of selfhood, that for a transgendered person to stake a claim to authenticity by rejecting discursive scripts of an essential gendered core was rendered un-cognisable within the popular cultural domain.

Again, notions of celebrity were central to this discursive process: the press' disciplining of Sam's unruly gender identity was enacted through a rhetoric which centralised a repudiation of her position within the hierarchy of the *celebrity* system. Both during and after her appearance on *Big Brother*, Sam's gender ambiguity was positioned by the tabloid press as emanating from an excessive and pathological fantasy of being a celebrity. Sam's feminine self-presentation (particularly her 'yucky orange' false tan (Douglas, 2006)) was configured as a confused misappropriation of the WAG aesthetic of British female celebrities such as Coleen Rooney, who

Sam made the 'outrageous claim' of being friends with (Steggle, 2007). Anne Graefer (2014: 114) has argued that, in celebrity culture, orange skin, and the artificial tanning practises through which it is produced, 'are often read as an attempt to 'pass' as an affluent, white, middle-class subject who can go on vacation and tan naturally. However, their excessive tanning is read as a class drag act, an unconvincing and inadvertently parodic attempt to pass.' In consonance with this assertion, 'pals' from Sam's pre-mediation life were cited describing how she would pretend to strangers to be a rich and successful American. It was also reported that Sam had claimed to be the father of her pregnant best friend's child, a story which was then discounted as a fabrication by Sam to garner press attention, and which her impressionable friend had gone along with, bewitched by Sam's façade of celebrity (Page, 2006). Sam was also widely accused of 'begging' paparazzi photographers to take staged pictures of her (*Liverpool Echo*, 2006; Steggle, 2007), and was even reported to have committed thirty-six thousand pounds worth of credit card fraud, apparently convincing shop staff that she was leading a glamorous and resplendent celebrity life (Lowry, 2007a).

Palmer has argued that this kind of ire and scorn directed towards some low-level, ephemeral public figures by media commentators and gossip columnists is often perceived as a 'punishment' for their attempted inhabitation of a celebrity status to which they cannot legitimately lay claim. Discussing reality television participants in particular, Palmer states:

> While they are legitimately (being featured as contestants etc.) on televisions their fame is automatic, or perhaps more accurately, a function of the media coverage of the shows. It is only when the individual seeks to challenge this by seeking to enter the world of more acknowledged stardom that they risk the venom of the columnists […] The rules of the game should be clear: wannabes should not trespass in those places where the legitimately famous roam (2005: 41).

Branded a 'loser' (Douglas, 2006), a 'reject' (Lowry, 2007b) and a 'talentless oompah-loomaph' (Leckie, 2007), Sam's identity was constructed as the locus of a series of repeated and interwoven transgressions of the boundaries between, most potently, man and woman and ordinary person and celebrity, but also middle/working class and white/non-white. Sam's transgender identity was thus reduced to a symptom of her stubborn refusal to relinquish her now-expired position in the media spotlight, characterised variously as an infantilised play-acting

of the glamour of female celebrity, and a pernicious disguise under which she was trying to deceive, trick and even defraud her way into some vague inhabitation of celebrity status.

The opprobrium directed by the press towards Sam is therefore testament to the entrenchment of male/female and celebrity/ordinary hierarchies in the ordering of contemporary western thought. As I discussed in relation to Kemal Shahin of *Big Brother* 2005 in the previous chapter, Sara Ahmed (2004: 87) has argued that cultural representations which signify a threat to such discursive boundaries and categorisations through which social reality is made sense of, frequently become sites of contention and volatility. The media's revelling in Sam's turmoil as she was reported to have been evicted from her house (Douglas, 2006), apprehended by police officers for using a female public toilet (Pyatt, 2006) and drunkenly pestering paparazzi to take her photograph (*Liverpool Echo*, 2006; Steggle, 2007), contrasts sharply with the rhetoric of affective warmth in which the narratives of Nadia and Lauren were framed. Nadia had, as I discussed in Chapter Two, 'won the hearts' of the British nation, whilst in Lauren's eviction interview Emma Willis emphasised Lauren's popularity with viewers who had voted to save her from eviction almost every week of the competition. Inverting Ahmed's conceptual framework, I would suggest that the positive affective tone of Nadia and Lauren's representations is informed by the solidification of the apparently essential border between male and female which these celebrification narratives entail. The participation of transgender people in reality television is thus subject to 'conditions of visibility' (Kolemaninen and Makinen, 2007), which operate through a rubric of affectivity. Transgender, in this context, becomes a site of positive emotionality as it works not to muddy the divide between male and female or the masculine and the feminine, but rather operates to momentarily bridge these poles of subjectivity and embodiment, so that they can be sealed off from one another once again.

Authenticity, femininity and the body

So far in this chapter I have explored how, in the context of reality television celebrity, the normative 'wrong body' paradigm of transgender subjectivity has been produced and naturalised though the optic of discourses of fame and celebrity attached to reality television and the celebrities which it produces. This processes has operated as a regime of disciplinarity, demarcating 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' formations of transgender life.

I now move on to interrogate how, in their post-show media careers, transgender female celebrities emerging from British reality TV have been situated in relation to a commercial context which Alice Marwick (2010: 22) has called 'body culture media.' Spanning advertising, cosmetic surgery discourses, makeover TV shows, and fashion magazines, body culture media has worked to consolidate a contemporary cultural norm of *cisgender* (non-transgender) femininity, whereby work on the body has become positioned as 'a morally correct solution to personal problems [and the] means to achieving an authentic self.' In the contemporary era that sociologists have called 'high modernity' (Giddens, 1999), dominant understandings of personhood posit the self as a reflexive project, in which both the responsibility and the potential for success (howsoever defined) and emotional contentment is located within individual narratives of self-discovery and self-actualisation. Somewhat paradoxically, perhaps, the corporeal body, particularly as refracted through body culture media, occupies a place of paramount importance within such existential narratives (Shilling, 2003). Vast swathes of the media and commercial industries are predicated upon the reassuring promise that the authentic self can be accessed and released via the effective application of appropriate, body-oriented consumption practises. In an intensely visual consumer culture, the external body has become one of the primary signifiers through which we are encouraged to 'read' the affective and psychological well-being (or lack thereof) of others and ourselves. Transforming or improving the look of the body is construed as means of improving the more intangible self encased within this corporeality.

This discursive collapsing of body and self in the imperative of self-improvement is, of course, deeply gendered, speaking primarily to a female consumer. Despite the increasing consolidation of male consumers as a target demographic for fashion and grooming products since the late 1990s, it has traditionally been, and remains, women who are disproportionately called upon to demonstrate and assess their happiness, authenticity and self-worth through the extent to which their physical appearances match up to hegemonic ideals of physical beauty. This asymmetry has been the subject of much feminist critique. Beverley Skeggs (2001: 297), for example, has explored how commercial culture's address towards female consumers has historically mobilised an implicit distinction between being a *woman* and being *feminine*. Whilst, in this consumer discourse, woman is considered an essential and biological category, femininity is a 'process' through which women 'become specific sorts of women,' measured largely upon how well (or

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how poorly) they are able to utilise the tools of corporeal beautification provided by the commercial industries. Skeggs argues that femininity was therefore largely inaccessible to women who lacked the economic means to engage in the consumer practises through which femininity was forged. Since at least the late nineteenth century, the social and cultural denigration of women from marginalised groups, such as working class women and women of colour, has centred upon their perceived failure to appropriately embody middle-class norms of feminine beauty. As the British press' damning reception of Sam Brodie's seemingly synthetic femininity makes clear, *transgender* women have also been pulled into these historical scripts of 'good' and 'bad' femininity. The inter-textual narratives of Sam, Nadia, Lauren and Kellie are all products of a cultural moment in which the recognition and legitimacy purportedly now afforded transgender identities in British society is conferred within very narrow parameters of corporeal normativity. Trans women are accepted *as women* so long as they adhere to the visual codes of female attractiveness.

In celebrity culture, however, transgender women must not only *look* like what is culturally codified as desirable femininity, but their representations must also make visible the processes and techniques through which this look has been achieved. Serano (2007) has noted that media representations of trans women have long been fixated with the means by which trans women construct their feminine appearances: almost invariably depicted applying makeup, wigs, female-coded clothing and undergoing surgical procedures. For Serano, the (pre-twenty-first century) media's pouring over the embodied production of trans-femininity worked to disavow the authenticity of the transgender woman's female identity: proffering a kind of female on the outside/male on the inside dialectic. For Nadia, Lauren and Kellie, however, I would argue that the opposite is true. The continuing visibility of these transgender celebrities after their appearances on reality TV was largely enabled by the extent to which intricate and detailed explorations of the work of sculpting the transfemale body slotted almost seamlessly within a media culture in which transforming the physical body as become construed as a means of making tangible one's internal, authentic self.

Moreover, Anglea McRobbie (2010) has argued that many contemporary, mainstream media texts have come increasingly to acknowledge the 'fictive status of femininity.' A permutation of the woman/feminine divide identified by Skeggs, here, essential femaleness is located primarily

inside the subject, and it is openly acknowledged that the majority of the visual signifiers of femininity are the result of artificial production and consumption. This culture emphasises that the attainment of a feminine appearance takes work: painful, pleasurable and rewarding, but ultimately mandatory in order to become socially legible as a female subject (ibid). Discussing makeover television, Shaira Kadir and Joanna Tidy (2013: 182) have noted that, 'a masculine corporeal and visual self is presented as being the inevitable yet unnatural state to which [cisgender] women will return' if they do not adhere to regimes of bodily maintenance. In this context, the impetus to self-realisation which characterises contemporary models of subjectivity attains a distinctly gendered inflection. It becomes a central imperative for female subjects to make their authentic and internal femininity manifest through the appropriate mobilisation of dieting, exercise, fashion and beauty. Offering something of a commercial spin upon Simone De Beauvoir's (1997 [1949]) famous contention that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,' adopting a female subject position is a deeply embodied process, where one's femininity must be perpetually ratified through the appropriate mobilisation of consumer technologies.

Transgender women in many ways stand as the ultimate exemplars of this model of female subjectivity. As their femaleness has no biological basis, it must be produced and reproduced in its entirety, through hormonal and surgical interventions and the styling of fashion, makeup and hair. Su Holmes and Diane Negra (2008) have argued that in regard to their circulation within a regime persistent bodily scrutiny, female celebrities represent an extreme version of the expectations of femininity addressed to all women in contemporary culture. Transgender female celebrities, I would argue, offer a particularly acute exemplification of this. Returning to the example of Nadia Almada, whilst, as I have argued, it was suggested that becoming a celebrity had worked to confirm and solidify Nadia's 'authentic' female identity, she was nonetheless represented to be not quite 'doing' femininity correctly. In order to fully become the 'authentic' woman she felt she was inside, it was represented as axiomatic that Nadia must learn to adhere to a strict regime of fashion, beauty and dieting imperatives, skills she appeared to be somewhat lacking during her time on *Big Brother*. Described by one of her housemates as 'about as sexy as a dead rat's anus,' and by another as looking like 'Mike Tyson with a boob job,' Nadia's 'muscular' masculine physique sat in jarring dissonance to her large, voluptuous, surgically-constructed breasts, which were frequently displayed, spilling out of low-cut tops as she vigorously and violently swept the house kitchen floor or stomped around in pairs of delicate

high heels. Nadia thus embodied a messy collision of masculine and feminine signifiers, a failing, misappropriation of the normative praxis of femininity (high heels, domestic chores) through an overt sexuality and excessive corporeality, rendered grotesque through the juxtaposition of the synthetic-ness of her breasts and the bodily-ness of her thick arms and corpulent thighs. When asked by *heat* magazine following her win, which part of her body 'bothered you the most' she replied, 'my waist and inner thighs. I loved to wear mini-skirts but I had friction burn from my legs rubbing together' (quoted in Cave, 2004: 11). The image evoked here – large, fatty thighs rubbing together as she moves, perversely sexualised in short and revealing mini-skirt – encapsulates the excessiveness (corporeal, emotional, and sexual) which characterised Nadia's initial celebrity image. In addition to her leg and cleavage baring outfits, Nadia, at various moments, pole-danced while being sprayed with water, mud-wrestled naked with another female participant, allowed two male housemates to lick jam off her bare nipples, drank and smoked profusely, and was involved in frequent and explosive arguments with other housemates, and tantrums directed at Big Brother/the production team when she would run out of cigarettes.

Nadia' apparently aberrant femininity was also coded through classed and racialized signifiers of 'bad' femininity. Whilst much of her sexual and bodily excessiveness was textually attributed largely to a Latin fieriness of Nadia's Portuguese heritage (a facet of her image mobilised most visibly her fitness DVD *Latino Dance Workout with Nadia* and pop music single 'A Little Bit of Action'), I would suggest that this association submerged the extent to which Nadia's 'unacceptable' femininity was in many ways coded through signifiers which aligned her appearance and behaviour with an abject, white working class femininity. Indeed, Nadia's post-*Big Brother* narrative in many ways echoed that of Jade Goody, winner of *Big Brother* UK in 2002. Vilified by the tabloid press for her 'weight, physical appearance and lack of education', Jade's post-series mediation was characterised by a media 're-education' in embodying a more 'respectable' femininity befitting her new celebrity status (Holmes and Jermyn, 2014: 39-40; Holmes, 2009; Biressi and Nunn, 2005). As Skeggs (2004: 99) has explored, 'the working class have a long history of being represented by excess, whilst the middle-class are represented by their distance from it, usually through associations with restraint, repression, reasonableness, modesty and denial,' particularly working class femininity. The celebrity-becomings of both Nadia and Jade can be situated within a tradition of pop-cultural narratives in which a working

class girl is trained to shed her working class excessiveness and cultivate a restrained and genteel middle-class habitus in a teleology of social mobility, epitomised in a British context by *Pygmalion*/*My Fair Lady*.

Indeed, I would argue that Nadia's celebrity circulation was largely enabled by celebrity culture's disciplinary conventions in relation the bodies and behaviours of female celebrities (Holmes and Negra, 2008; Holmes and Jermyn, 2014). Nadia's transgender body became a discursive site for a mapping of the 'normal' and 'desirable' topographies of female existence, particularly around the maintenance and control of the female body. Indeed, in something of a transgender inflection of the Pygmalion paradigm, post-*Big Brother*, Nadia's appearance became a site of intervention by the media, particularly celebrity magazines *heat* and *OK!*, which set out to 'train' her in the techniques of 'desirable' feminine self-presentation, disciplining Nadia's unruly transsexual body through a series of highly publicised fashion makeovers, photo-shoots, diets and exercise regimes, centralising her media-aided cultivation of a 'classy', 'stylish' and 'natural' look.

Figures 16-17: Nadia as *heat* cover-star, 2004.

heat featured a classic Hollywood style photo-shoot in which Nadia was styled reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe in the 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend' sequence from the film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Figure 15); *OK!* 'treated' her to a shopping trip in the designer fashion boutiques of Milan, and later photographed her in extravagant designer gowns by Bellville Sassoon and Jenny Packham in London department store Harrods. Commenting upon Nadia's appearance in this post-*Big Brother* period, the *Sunday Mirror* proclaimed, 'We can hardly believe BB5's Nadia's demure look, having ditched the basques and minis in favour of this Misoni-esque dress and shrug that ooze class and style' (Simpson, 2005). This statement encapsulates succinctly how Nadia's numerous makeovers functioned as a re-signification of her femininity, replacing the 'basques and minis' (read: working class, cheap and lewdly sexual) with the signifiers of luxury, glamour and high fashion. The classed connotations of Nadia's transformation are expressed most vividly in her description in an issue of *heat* about the bodily changes wrought by one of her diet regimes: 'My stomach is flat. I can see curves in my waist, whereas before it was like a beer barrel. I can feel my face getting thinner and my inner thighs don't rub together' (quoted in Cave, 2004: 13). In addition to the implications of Nadia's rubbing thighs (discussed above), the masculine and working-class semiotic associations of 'beer barrel' are transformed into the traditional, middle-class ideal of the 'hourglass' shaped waist, as popularly descended from the silhouette of Christian Dior's famous 'New Look' collection of 1947 – 'long and full skirt, rounded shoulders and a clinched waist' (Fields, 2007: 256) – which itself looked back to Edwardian styles of corseted femininity. In this way, Nadia's transgender identity was rendered 'acceptable' within the popular domain to the extent that the potentially transgressive threat of gender mobility, as I discussed above, was mitigated through her emphatic striving to embody highly normative mandates of feminine beauty.

Like Nadia, the broadcast sequences from *Celebrity Big Brother* 2013 centralised Lauren Harries' apparent inability to perform her femininity appropriately. As has become the normative, pop-cultural refrain of trans-female essentialism (Prosser, 1998), Lauren staked her claim to essential femaleness in an emphatic adoration of fashion and glamour, changing her outfit up to five times a day, and frequently critiquing the fashion choices of other participants. However, her mediation was largely structured upon chaotic and anarchic nature of Lauren's own femininity. She was shown to frequently fall over whilst attempting to walk in high heels, often at moments in which she was explicitly seeking to accentuate her purported knowledge and

skills in glamour and style. At one moment she marched proudly into a room, proclaiming, 'I've designed my own gown', only to immediately trip on the door frame and fall to the floor. At another whilst showing off the black evening dress she intended to wear on the live final she again, inexplicably, collapsed, hitting her elbow on a nearby table. Early in the series she was shown brushing the hair of another female housemate (Danielle Marr, star of the Irish reality show *Dublin Wives*). The sequence opened with a close-up of Danielle, with Lauren visible as a disembodied arm and a grandiose, layered pearl necklace dangling precariously in Danielle's face, at which point the brush became painfully entangled in Danielle's hair, and two other female housemates – Charlotte Crosby and Courtney Stodden – rushed over to intervene and untangle the hairbrush. During the untangling sequence, Lauren was recurrently situated in the background of shots, either in a focused close-up, while Courtney and Charlotte, out-of-focus, occupied the sides and bottom of the frame, or in mid-shots of Charlotte and Courtney where Lauren can be seen only as a shoulder and a shock of hair standing behind Charlotte. This spatial aesthetic composition, with Lauren positioned behind the other women as if blocked out from the scene of the hair untangling, rendered her literally and symbolically outside normative rituals of female beauty, and the forms of female bonding associated with these. Furthermore, the apparent grotesqueness of Lauren's physical appearance was repeatedly emphasised throughout the series by shots of her putting on make-up captured from behind a two-way mirror: Lauren's proximity to the camera and the stark, overhead florescent lighting of the bedroom, accentuating her sallow and wrinkled face and bloodshot eyes (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Lauren is rendered grotesque in *Celebrity Big Brother* 2013.

In a similar manner to Nadia, following her emergence in third place from the show, various media organisations intervened to assist Lauren in the realisation of her misplaced desire to embody an ideal of glamorous femininity. For example, in a photo-shoot for fashion magazine *Ponystep* she was styled in chic tailored outfits, posing on and beside expensively upholstered antique furniture. Another, a monochrome 1950s style shoot in *Attitude* magazine, for which Lauren was given (like Nadia in *heat* almost a decade before) a 'Marilyn Monroe makeover' (Flint, 2013), was introduced with the tagline 'Cardiff's blonde bombshell shows her true colours.' Positioning the results of the makeover as signalling the 'truth' of Lauren's identity, working upon the physical externality was again configured as a route to releasing and actualising an essential, interior femaleness.

While it would perhaps labour my argument to explore in detail another textual case study, it is significant that Kellie Maloney, following her appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2014, was also subject to a very similar narrative. She was given a make-up, hair and fashion makeover on *This Morning* in May 2015, and her public fashion choices are frequently reported upon in the discursive spaces of female celebrity surveillance, most notably *MailOnline* (e.g. 'Kellie Maloney glams up in yellow lace dress for dinner date' (Crawley, 2015); 'Kellie Maloney looks happy and confident as she hits Algarve beach in monochrome tankini' (Davison, 2015)). Further, in numerous newspaper articles and a TV documentary (*Kellie Maloney: No Going Back* (Five, 2015)), Kellie detailed her numerous surgeries of corporeal alteration, including a facial feminisation procedure in November 2014 from which she suffered major complications. The work of constricting transgender femininity was, in this instance, made viscerally legible in widely-circulate images of Kellie's bruised, disfigured and swollen face.

The continuing celebrity of Nadia, Lauren and Kellie following their appearances on *Big Brother* can be explained by the striking resonances between the established tropes of makeover culture and the discourses of transgender identity circulating in the figures of Nadia, Lauren and Kellie themselves. I would argue that the consecration within popular culture in the mid-2000s of dominant epistemologies of transgender identities as possessing an internal gendered reality made tangible via bodily transformation, was in many ways enabled by a pre-existing media culture in which corporeal alteration is configured as a route to affective harmony and the realisation of one's authentic self. As Brenda Weber has explored, 'The makeover doesn't create

but brings out one's inner woman […] looking like a woman thus paradoxically creates and expresses one's already present, but previously blocked, womanhood' (2009: 128-129). Crucially, both makeover and popular transgender discourses assert that whilst one's body and appearance can be altered, fundamentally, the subject remains ontologically unchanged. Rather, the external is transformed to the extent that it is brought into alignment with the potentialities of the internal self. Thus, via their insertion within makeover culture, these celebrities' biographies of gender transition became subsumed into a form of grand makeover narrative; rendering transgender cognisable within the dominant cultural imaginary via the optic of established ideals around the existential rewards of bringing into synthesis one's inner and outer selves.

However, if, within body culture media, bodily transformation towards a feminine ideals is construed as the route to authenticity, this discourse is also invested in the perpetual instability and inherent futility of any attempt to fully or finally embody normative femininity. One may *be* a woman, but has to work to *become feminine*. Angela McRobbie suggests that it is this endless instability upon which the commercial logic of the fashion and beauty industries are structured, intervening to offer new and ever-more advanced methods of self-perfectibility in the never realised quest to ameliorate the 'fraught state of non-identity which we all inhabit' (2009: 62). McRobbie describes how consumer culture 'produces a specific kind of female subject in the realm of its address' (ibid), a subject in deficit or negation, striving to embody an ideal of beauty, slenderness and style which is always, somehow, found lacking.

It is this non-subject position, created by the fashion-beauty complex, with becomes hyper-visible in the texts the transgender reality TV celebrities I analyse here, particularly in their post-*Big Brother* mediations. These celebrities' narratives literalised the ultimate impossibility of the quest for female bodily perfection, and this is perhaps one of the reasons why, as celebrities, they attained such popularity and possessed such cultural purchase. In the figures of these celebrities, transgender women became legible as negated subjects, constantly working to become appropriately feminine women, a characterisation which spoke to and was easily reconcilable with the subject positions of fashion and beauty culture. For example, in *Celebrity Big Brother* 2014, Kellie Maloney exhibited a self-consciousness of her own difficulty in mastering the nuances of feminine self-presentation, articulating her journey into womanhood as a process of self-education in the rituals of female beauty and fashion. She stated:

As Frank I'd just get up. I'd put a pair of jeans on, a t-shirt or shirt, and a jacket, and I'd just get my hair like [gestures simple brushing motion] and that was it. With Kellie, its' like, do I wear that dress? Do I wear *that* dress? Do I look good in that? And I try them all on and look in the mirror and I'm thinking, people don't realise, it's bloody hard being a woman.

Kellie expresses here a disconnection of any necessary linkage between an essential femaleness and the ability to 'perform' femininity with the requisite sophistication. Rather, learning to 'do' femininity correctly in one's external presentation is positioned as part and parcel of the actualisation of an essential, interior femaleness. After all, as the apparent materiality of gender extends to scientific truth claims around hormones, chromosomes and endocrines, transgender women can never fully or finally embody what is culturally codified as constituting the biological materiality of femaleness (Ekins and King, 2006). In this context, their claims to femaleness are legitimated by their very visible, continual manipulations of consumer technologies of fashion and beauty. I would therefore argue that the trans-female celebrity stands in many ways as the figure par excellence of body culture media, as the entirety of her femaleness is the product of artificial technologies of make-up, clothing, hormonal supplements and surgical interventions, which must be constantly and perpetually maintained. The transgender woman literalises the mandate that legible femininity must be produced and reproduced, right down to the morphology of her sexual organs.

It was seemingly this very logic through which, in numerous magazine articles, Nadia was endowed with intimate knowledge of the work of being a woman, constructed as a figure of identification and emulation for the, ostensibly non-trans, readerships. Standing as the poster-girl for celebrity dietician Dr Gillian McKeith's immensely successful *You Are What You Eat* franchise in the summer of 2004, it was suggested that Nadia's determination to become a woman in a far more profound biographical arc of bodily transformation had equipped her with the determination to succeed in her post-*Big Brother* diet and fitness regimes. She advised readers, 'Visualis[e] the end result […] Stick to your goals, imagine that flat stomach and realise that if I can do it, anyone can' (quoted in *heat*, 2004: 8). Furthermore, in 2005 Nadia was discussed by *heat* as the ultimate exemplar of the power of cosmetic surgery to increase women's confidence and happiness:

> If anyone can truly champion the positive effects that plastic surgery can have on a person's life, it's Nadia Almada. In the past she's talked candidly about the experience of going under the surgeon's knife. And seeing how much she loves her curves and revels in the attention they get her, you can't help thinking, "Good on her." (Ward, 2005: 25).

Whilst it is Nadia's 'curves' (particularly her breasts) which are foregrounded in this article, the present absence here is, of course, her vaginoplasty surgery, referred euphemistically in many of the discourses surrounding Nadia as the 'final surgery'. What is striking is the affinity evoked in these texts between Nadia and the normatively gendered, female consumer, whereby her gender transition is aligned with the practices of bodily modification which constitute the day-to-day imperative for all women according to the subject positions offered by body culture media. Returning to Nadia's statement above, it is significant how readily transformations in her physical appearance collapse into reinvigorations of 'feeling'. Within makeover culture, *looking* good coalesces into *feeling* good, the external body stands almost as the window through which the internal life of the individual is displayed to her social milieu.

"You look like a t**t": Transgender reality stars as abject femininity

Body culture media, and the norms and ideals of femininity produced and circulated within it, are intensely contradictory. Whilst the labour of femininity is poured over in intricate detail in a myriad of media texts, in order to be validated as appropriate or desirable, this work must be *concealed* within the final look. As Skeggs (2004: 101) has argued, 'It is the appearance of natural, rather than artifice that marks a higher cultural value. The binary between nature/artifice is mapped through hidden/apparent labour, read on the body through appearance.' Moreover, somewhat paradoxically, it is when the labour of femininity is most concealed that authenticity is seen to have been most palpably attained. As Weber (2009: 13) has discussed in relation to makeover television, 'the self emerges [or is perceived to emerge] as the participants' physical or symbolic body increasingly emits signs of the ideal.' Situated within this discursive context, for transgender celebrities to emit any corporeal signifiers of their trans identities by not 'doing' femininity 'appropriately', appearing too 'masculine' or, as was the case with Sam Brodie, drawing attention to the constructed nature of her gender, is to compromise her claim to an essential, internal femininity.

Within this cultural framework, transgender becomes a kind of stigmata. In neoliberal fashion, it becomes the reflexive project of the transgender subject to ensure that any visual signs of her birth-assigned male identity remain below the radar of public visibility. In this way, the critical potentiality of transgender identities to expose the discursive and contingent nature of gender binaries, hierarchies and norms is diffused through the assimilation of these identities into normative regimes of female governmentality. Somewhat contradictorily, in becoming visible via the celebrity media, transgender women are rendered *invisible*. In these inter-textual narratives, transgender identities do not become legible as subject positions in their own right, but rather become subsumed into a pervasive representational milieu, in which, as celebrity figures making claims to female subjectivity, they must walk a tightrope of cultural and corporeal surveillance. Holmes and Negra (2008) have explored how ideals of perfection in relation to the female celebrity body are so elusive that the celebration of a star's desirability, beauty or style at one moment can slide easily, and almost automatically, into opprobrium and derision the next. Moreover, as celebrity is itself a contradictory, fragmented and multi-modal textual entity, transgender female reality television stars have circulated not only as exemplars of the existential benefits of normative femininity, but as cautionary examples of 'bad' or abject femininity, bringing to the fore the perpetual instability, volatility and contradictions inherent to the female subject position within the disciplinary arena of celebrity culture.

For instance, by 2010, this alternative rhetoric had come to characterise Nadia Almada's celebrity image. After a period of lesser visibility between 2006 and 2009, she emerged again as a participant on *Ultimate Big Brother*, a commemorative show marking end of *Big Brother*'s broadcast on Channel 4, featuring some of the most well-known housemates from *Big Brother*'s (and also *Celebrity Big Brother*'s) temporal lifespan. In stark contrast to her mediation in *Big Brother* 2004, in *Ultimate Big Brother* Nadia was constructed as the 'villain' of the series, as broadcast sequences centralised her apparent bitchiness as she was shown making snide comments about other housemates' outfits, and bitterness as she repeatedly refuted the authenticity of a burgeoning romantic relationship between *Big Brother 10* participants Josie Gibson and John James. Seeming 'old and bitter and fat,' as Nadia herself would later remark, she was constructed as the antithesis to the naïve romanticism and regionally-coded (Bristolian) ordinariness of Josie who, having entered *Ultimate Big Brother* directly following her victory in *Big Brother* 2010, was yet to be exposed to realities of celebrity life.

In a rhetoric which echoed the media vilification of Sam Brodie in 2006, Nadia's apparent inauthenticity was closely tied to her seemingly diminishing capabilities to perform her femininity appropriately. As a viewer phone-in at Nadia's eviction proclaimed, 'What happened to glam Nadia? You were always showering in high heels before, and this time you spent most of your time in hoodies and trackies'. *Big Brother* host Davina McCall described Nadia's appearance as 'boyish', and the journalist Kevin O'Sullivan (2010) taunted her in the *Sunday Mirror*:

> We can call off the investigation into who ate all the pies. Step forward Portugeezer Nadia Almada – the former bloke who, since winning BB5, looks as though she's been stuffing her wide face on a round-the-clock basis. Man, she's huge!

O'Sullivan's irreverent accusation that Nadia had eaten 'all the pies' (read: unhealthy, low-quality delicacy of working class males), and his references to her as a 'geezer' and a 'former bloke' frame Nadia's identity in the lexicon of a coarse, working class masculinity, calling into question the validity of her inhabitation of a female subject position. Nadia's claims essential femaleness becomes discursively blocked here, and she is textually situated in a liminal state of non-identity. Due to its incoherence and instability this (non)subject position was rendered unlivable, and Nadia disappeared from public visibility with a widely-reported suicide attempt in September 2010:

> Following her suicide attempt, Big Brother star Nadia Almada has said she's in a "really bad place right now" and "needs some guidance". The Portuguese transsexual has also blasted reality show host Davina McCall for calling her "boyish", saying how she feels she needs more plastic surgery to "conform". The 33-year-old told Star magazine: "Davina's comment has made me hate myself. I feel fat, I feel ugly. I am disgusted by myself when I look in the mirror (McDonnell, 2010).

The urgency to change her appearance emphasises again how far, in the context of transgender identities, legible and legitimate femaleness is articulable only through the embodiment of beauty. In centralising Nadia's 'fat' and 'ugly' physicality, her very femaleness was constructed in a state of deficit, her identity had been re-situated on the abject margins of cultural intelligibility. 'I just feel my life isn't worth living any more. I'm in the gutter and I'm completely distraught,' she is quoted to have proclaimed (West and Haydon, 2010), the spatial

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metaphor of the gutter likening her unruly and implacable embodiment with waste matter, purged to the peripheries of vision. Nadia's failure to 'appropriately' embody the norms of femininity and the resulting incoherence of her identity was irresolvable, necessitating the literal near-death of her suicide attempt and the symbolic death of her erasure from public visibility.

Compared to Nadia's spectacular fall from grace, Lauren Harries' post-*Celebrity Big Brother* lifespan was been markedly less dramatic. That said, it is important to question how far her pop-cultural visibility hinged upon the comedic capital of her spectacularised, wayward trans-femininity. In the same month as hailing her as a 'positive transgender role model you can't ignore' (2013), the *Metro* newspaper published on its website a countdown of 'Lauren Harries' 7 best faces', showcasing various screenshots of Lauren from *Celebrity Big Brother*, describing her facial appearance as 'always sublime, always ridiculous, mostly nightmarish', captioning one particular image of Lauren pulling a disgusted facial expression with the line, 'The face that says: 'I've just caught sight of my face'' (2013). The website later published an irreverently-toned article listing the reasons 'Why Lauren Harries absolutely must win' *Celebrity Big Brother*, which largely amounted to a ridiculing of her singing abilities and physical appearance, of which the following extract provides a flavour:

> Lauren's insistence upon the costume jewellery-esque rings and bracelets with the Big Brother eye on them has such an air of innocence about it. It's like when you're a teenager and you get invited to a party roughly around Easter time and you think, 'This hairband with bunnies all over it might not be the most sophisticated thing I've ever owned, but I *must* wear it today because it's just so event-appropriate!' No, you look a t*** (2013).

Again here femininity is configured as a process of norms which must be learned, and the piece's likening of Lauren to a teenager denies her claims to womanhood by suggesting that she has not yet mastered the techniques to perform her femininity 'correctly'. Further, a search of 'Lauren Harries, *Celebrity Big Brother*' on YouTube yields a plethora of short clips captured from broadcast sequences of the show and uploaded by users, of Lauren's clumsiness, spilling of drinks and, most frequently, falling over. A small cross-section of the available clips include titles such as 'Lauren Harries being clumsy in big brother', 'Lauren Harries falls over BIG BROTHER FINAL 2013', 'big brother Lauren Harries falls over', 'Lauren Harries falls over

AGAIN', 'Lauren Harries falls over YET AGAIN!', 'Lauren Harries falls on big brother', 'I've designed my own gown – Lauren harries celebrity big brother CBB' [another clip of Lauren falling over], 'Lauren Harries spills drink Big Brother 2013' and 'Lauren Harries can't control her orange juice – celebrity big brother CBB'. Plentiful also are clips of Lauren's various attempts at singing and dancing, some of which are 'remixed' into parodic mash-ups with other lines of dialogue from Lauren's time on the show. Moreover, at the time of writing, Lauren has begun to circulate widely as a meme on the Instagram smartphone application. A screenshot of Lauren from *Celebrity Big Brother*: a close-up of her dishevelled hair, kohl-smudged eyes and sore-looking red lips, each accentuated by a blurring, gold-tinted filter, is accompanied by the text: "DID YOU GO OUT LAST NIGHT?" "MAYBE…" (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Lauren as a meme.

Such mobilisations of Lauren's apparently failed attempts to perform femininity extended beyond online spaces and into print media. A piece in *heat* in January 2014 in which Lauren shared her New Years Eve 'party tips', was illustrated with an image of Lauren clad in a ball gown amidst a messy and disordered kitchen. This photographic composition clearly drew upon the apparent humour of Lauren's chaotic misappropriation of hegemonic signifiers of domestic femininity, signalling the humorous and pathetic irony of such a failing non-woman espousing traditional female wisdom around entertaining within the home. The apparent perversity of which was emphasised by the selective disembedding of lines from the interview into speech bubbles, transforming them into sexual and bodily innuendoes such as 'Fill my pies' and 'I can

eat a whole Brie in ten minutes' (Crothers, 2014). Here Lauren's transgender identity enables a comedic mode of address which would have been unattainable in the same manner with a normatively-gendered female celebrity.

On Twitter, Kellie Maloney has been similarly constructed as simultaneously a figure of admiration and political progressiveness, and widely ridiculed for the apparent incapacity of her female self-presentation. Posts from users remarking upon the purported similarities between Kellie's physical appearance and that of the fictional character E.T. in a scene from the film in which the eponymous extra-terrestrial is dressed up in female clothing, including a synthetic blonde wig, have circulated frequently, as have memes likening Kellie's appearance to that of transgender character Les/Lesley Marshall from the ITV sitcom *Benidorm* (ITV, 2007-), played for grotesque and comedic effect by the male actor Tim Healy.

Nadia, Lauren and Kellie have thus all circulated within the symbolic economy as semiotic short-hand for 'bad' femininity, offering a complex and ambivalent amalgamation of subjectifying and de-subjectifying discourses. Whilst, as I explored in Chapter Two, these representations have worked to resituate transgender identities within the bounds of the British social body and under the discursive banner of human ontology, these very same figures have *also* circulated within popular culture as a visualisation of a domain of abjection which must be repudiated in the formation of a coherent subjectivity. As Butler (1993) has theorised, identification with a stable and coherent gendered subject position necessarily involves an (often subconscious) *dis*-identification with forms of life which are demarcated 'other' to hegemonic configurations of normative personhood. She states:

> The exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside of the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the unlivable is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject" (ibid: xiii)

These figures circulate in part as spectres of deficient femininity, cautionary tales of the consequences attendant to not performing the norms of feminine self-presentation 'appropriately'. Such a cultural position is evidenced by the manner in which the disciplining of

non-trans female celebrities whose physical appearances are perceived to have exceeded the boundaries of the 'acceptable' and the 'normative' is frequently enacted on social media platforms by the likening of these celebrities' facial appearances to Lauren Harries' or Kellie Maloney's facial simulacrums. On Twitter in 2015, for example, the much maligned *X Factor* contestant Chloe Jasmine was been repeatedly stated to look like Lauren, whilst the speculated facial cosmetic surgery of film actress Renee Zelwegger was ridiculed by comparisons with Kellie's facial appearance.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to explore some of the key tropes which have structured the representations of transgender people within the inter-textual spaces of reality television celebrity. Almost all of these representations have articulated what we might call the wrong body paradigm: a conception of transgender subjectivity as an authentic gendered core, trapped within an initially mismatched corporeality. I have argued that this discourse has attained such prolific cultural recognisability, in part, through its resonances with broader ideals of self-realisation through bodily alteration which characterise large portions of the contemporary media and commercial landscapes. The reality TV celebrities I have analysed here literalise how far the wrong body discourse has been sculpted and produced by this broader context, in which the power of corporeal transformation to bring forth one's authentic self has come to possess vast cultural currency.

In constructing the maintenance of a suitably feminine appearance as the route to authenticity, happiness and ontological security, the wrong body discourse, as it is produced through the scripts of body culture media, has worked to mitigate the potential for trans visibility within the popular domain to disrupt common-sense understandings of personhood as contingent upon identification as discreetly male or female. The consolidation of the wrong body tropes emphasises the elasticity of normative epistemologies of sex and gender, re-inscribing a man/woman binary logic as the sole means of making sense of gender and the self, whilst simultaneously enabling a limited spectrum of, seemingly progressive, transgender visibility. In this framework, transgender people become legible as women-in-the-making, negated subjects situated within never-fully-realised journeys to occupy a normative pole of gender, a

characterisation which resonates profoundly with the subject positions offered all women in much of the media and commercial domains.

Chapter Five:

Emotion, self-acceptance and the 'happy queer' in British reality TV

So far in this thesis, I have explored how the ability for certain LGBT people to become celebrities through participation in reality television has been constructed within popular discourses as emblematic of a newfound era of acceptance and inclusion for sexual minorities in twenty-first century Britain. At the same time, as I argued in Chapter Two, this process of apparent inclusion via pop-cultural visibility has entailed the commodification of a kind of queer suffering, which reconciles the visibility of LGBT people with the conventions of reality TV, and reality TV celebrity, as a domain of emotional display and the revelation of 'authentic', personal truths. In Chapters Three and Four I argued that the discursive tropes of reality television celebrity - emotionality, authenticity, self-revelation and bodily work - have worked to consolidate a series of normative scripts of lesbian, gay and transgender identity, in which asserting a queer identity is coded as coterminous with simply 'being yourself.' All of these representational tropes and processes work, in their own ways, to reify heteronormativity as the taken-for-granted mode of social and sexual organisation, and to re-centre heterosexuality's claim to capture a universality of human identity, in relation to which non-heterosexual subjectivities emerge as the apparently accepted and validated, yet nonetheless marked and minority, counterpoints.

In this final chapter, I bring the lines of interrogation I have made thus far in the thesis into more direct dialogue with one another. I explore how the contemporary cultural zeitgeist of authenticity, of which reality TV is paradigmatic, has to come operate as a regime of governmentality in the context of LGBT subjectivities. I argue that the pervasive valorisation of being true to one's 'real' self which traverses the texts and inter-texts of reality television celebrity, has delineated social acceptance and validation for LGBT people as contingent upon the taking up of a hegemonic gay/lesbian or transgender subject position which is emotionally and therapeutically defined.

Historically, non-heteronormative lives have figured within popular representations as tragic, wretched and/or pathological figures (Dyer, 2001; Phillips, 2006; Ahmed, 2010). In contrast, reality television has worked to make legible an alternative subject position in which queerness is

positioned as no longer inherently antithetical to happiness, emotional wellbeing and emotional stability. This emergent vision of queer identity - which I am terming the 'happy queer' - proffers a non-heterosexual person who has learned, through processes of self-reflexivity and attention to the emotional contours of the self, to embrace or 'get over' the social and cultural marginality pertaining to their non-normative sex/gender identity. This is a queer person who turns away from the social as the location of transformation of, or resistance to, the oppressive dynamics of heteronormativity. Instead, the circulation of the happy queer through British reality TV mandates the cultivation of a particular relationship with the *self*, defined through a rubric of self-acceptance, self-love and pride, as the conduit to both ontological security and social integration for the contemporary LGBT person. The visibility of this trope of LGBT personhood spans a range of popular cultural texts beyond just reality TV, as discussed in academic work by Heather Love (2007), David Halperin (2012) and Suzanna Walters (2014). Yet, detailed analyses of the ways in which the happy queer archetype is produced and circulated within specific, localised media contexts, and the socio-political implications of these representations, remain relatively scarce. In this chapter I therefore interrogate how the figure of the happy queer has been discursively and semiotically produced through the optic of reality television celebrity, particularly through the reality televisual tropes of authenticity, therapy and self-realisation.

Queerness, emotion and homonormativity.

Cultural ideals of what constitutes a 'normal' or 'acceptable' sexuality or gender identity are tightly bound to questions of emotion. Until the very end of the twentieth century, being 'happy' meant being heterosexual and cisgender. This is not to say that cisgendered-heterosexuality functioned as an automatic guarantor of happiness, but that these kinds of normative sexual and gender identities were some of the central, though often tacit and unspoken, conditions upon which happiness was positioned as contingent within the popular imaginary (Ahmed, 2010). Sara Ahmed (2004) has conceptualised this discursive intertwining of identity and emotion as produced through an 'affective economy' in which particular emotional states become 'stuck' to certain formations of sexuality/gender within cultural texts. This, in turn, shapes the ways in which notions of sexual and gendered normativity and difference come to be made sense of on a socio-cultural level, *through* images and discourses of emotion. As such, as discussed in Chapter Two, modern history is replete with cultural representations in which non-heteronormative

people have figured as spectres of wretchedness, misery and abjection. Queer identities have historically been tied to emotional registers of 'regret, shame, despair, resentment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, defeatism, bitterness and loneliness' (Love, 2007a: 4).

In a UK context, the political transformations of the late 1990s and early 2000s which legislatively re-positioned (some) sexual minority identities as recognised and legitimate political citizens, and the consolidation of gay people as a consumer demographic through the idea of the 'pink pound', also worked to reconfigure the historical relationship between queer sexualities and (negative) emotionality. As Love (2004b: 52-54) noted in relation to gay identity:

> With the arrival of this new set of opportunities, certain traditional narratives of gay existence are starting to look a bit dated [...] tragic love, life in the shadows, and harrowing loneliness have been tossed out to make room for lighter and airier versions of gay life [...] being happy signifies participation in the coming era of gay possibility.

As this quote exemplifies, in the twenty-first century, certain distinct formations of queerness have become invested with a moral impetus to secure social inclusion via the transformation of the shame and sadness historically tied to non-heterosexual life, into happiness, contentment and pride. The happy queer has been conceptualised as a generational 'break' with older models of queer identity as expressed through suffering and shame, emblematising a twenty-first century socio-political context in which LGBT people are increasingly called upon to perform their subjectivities through consumption, domesticity and 'productive' social engagement (Halperin, 2012).

Reflecting upon the role of media representations within this process, Love (2004b: 54) has identified a 'typical' script of gay subjectivity which had come to circulate within the mainstream media in which, for the modern gay man, 'accepting his homosexuality seems to have opened the doors to authentic happiness.' Love's analysis particularly concerns gay male identity, and it is certainly the case that the contemporary incitement to socio-political inclusion through emotional work for sexual minority subjects has disproportionately addressed white, economically-privileged gay men, and often excluded queer identities which intersect with less normative vectors of subjectivity. That said, as I explore in this chapter, in British reality TV, lesbians and transgender identities have also been produced through these inclusion-through-happiness

discourses in much the same way as gay men. At the same time, however, this model of queer happiness is positioned as more *difficult* to attain for lesbian and transgender subjects, the reasons for, and implications of this, I interrogate later in this chapter.

Discussing the incitement to happiness on the part of the contemporary queer subject, Halperin (2012: 219) has stated:

> It's no longer fashionable to claim you are oppressed. Our society requires its neoliberal subjects to butch up, to maintain a cheerful stoicism in the face of socially arranged suffering. It teaches us not to blame society for our woes, but to find deep, personal meaning in out pain, and moral uplift in accepting it.

In this passage, Halperin centralises how far the demand to queer happiness is shot through which ideologies of neoliberal individualism. In so doing, he points to the extent to which the happy queer functions as a particularly visible iteration of a broader cultural and political context which has become known as 'homonormativity'. A hugely influential term across a range of academic disciplines, homonormativity is most widely credited to Lisa Duggan, who employed the term in 2002 to describe an emergent strand of American gay politics and activism which, 'does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (2002: 179). Duggan sought to critique the dominant approach of mainstream gay rights advocacy, which centralised the inclusion of gays and lesbians within the hegemonic institutions of American polity, such as marriage and the military, as the ultimate barometer of gay/straight equality. This politics thus celebrated a narrow vision of gay life modeled on existing, heteronormative forms of kinship, consumption and socio-political engagement, solidifying the hierarchies of power inherent to these structures, and diminishing the potential for queer and feminist voices to conceptualise more egalitarian modes of social organisation not predicated upon a heterosexist logic.

Since Duggan's initial use, the concept of homonormativity has been expanded by other scholars to encompass a spectrum of different processes through which queer people have become incited to demonstrate their 'suitability' for integration within the social body across numerous different national contexts. Broadly, homonormativity has been conceptualised along four interconnected strands: the expansion of hegemonic forms of kinship (marriage, monogamy and the nuclear

family) to encompass non-heterosexual couples, the consolidation of gays and lesbians as a consumer demographic through the notion of the 'pink pound' (Sender, 2004), the reconciliation of some queer subjectivities with particular modes of national affiliation (Puar, 2007), and the construction of LGBT people as potentially exemplary labourers within the neoliberal-capitalist labour market (Irving, 2008; Leimbach, 2011).

Media representations, including celebrities and reality TV, have been discussed as central bearers of homonormative discourses within popular culture (e.g. Leimbach, 2011; LeMaster, 2015). As analysed in Chapter Two, British reality TV has been particularly implicated in discursively positioning LGBT people as purportedly 'accepted' members of the British national polity. In its articulation of the happy queer, however, UK reality TV has also been involved in the production and circulation of what could be termed the emotional and existential facets of the homonormative subject, a particular strain of homonormative subjectivity which, I would argue, is relatively underexplored in existing academic work.

At its epistemological basis, homonormativity, as Susan Stryker (2008: 115) has argued:

> Aligns gay interests with dominant constructions of knowledge and power that disqualify the very modes of knowing threatening to disrupt the smooth functioning of normative space and that displace modes of embodiment calling into question that basis of authority from which normative voices speak.

Styker argues that 'acceptable' queer identities, as perceived within the heteronormaitve imaginary, are those which solidify, rather than call into question, the primacy of established structures of knowledge and power. This framework for thinking about homonormativity expands the concept from gay identities and onto other queer populations, such as transgender people. As I explored in the previous chapter, normative epistemologies of transgender identity have worked to mitigate the transgressive potential of trans visibility to unsettle and de-essentialise the male/female gender binary, by 'fixing' trans subjectivities within this dualism through a rhetoric of ontology and authentic self-actualisation. Cael Keegan (2013) has proposed the term 'transnormative' to conceptualise the ways in which, in popular narratives, the mobilisation of the transgender person from one pole of the gender binary to the other is often coupled with an affective transformation, which is positioned as prerequisite to the successful

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integration of the trans individual within society. This 'emerging transnormative subject position' is a 'moving' body [...] a body that journeys from negative to redemptive affect, from psychosis to mental health, from self-hatred to a celebration of individual liberty' (Keegan, 2013).

Whilst Keegan's analysis centres upon fiction texts, reality television has also been a key space for the playing out of these processes of queer affective transformation. The valorisation of self-contentment and emotional awareness which Keegan evokes as central to the transnormative subject position are in many ways products of a contemporary cultural landscape which Frank Furedi (2004) has termed 'therapy culture', and of which reality TV is paradigmatic. According to Furedi, in therapy culture, the boundaries between private and public domains have become 'eroded' and the display of once-private feelings and emotions have become an integral facet of modern life (ibid: 40). Furedi points to reality television programming as core textual fabrics upon which the circulation and articulation of the 'therapeutic ethos' takes place, foregrounding the ways in which 'reality television encourages the contestants to continually expose their emotions to the viewing public. Contestants who emote deeply and reveal intimate details of their personal troubles are customarily applauded for being 'brave, 'honest' and 'strong'' (ibid: 67).

As explored in previous chapters, reality TV has repeatedly valorised the discovery and actualisation of the authentic self in a way that converges strikingly with normative paradigms of gay and transgender subjectivity, structured upon the making public of an essential and intuited sexuality or gender identity. The therapeutically attuned, happy queer, as represented in reality TV, is a prime example of the manner in which normative sexual subject positions are produced through a matrix of broader values, discourses and ideals circulating within the public domain. As a key agent of therapy culture, reality television is inextricably implicated in the 'making' of this hegemonic queer figure. Indeed, narrative trajectories in which gay or transgender cast members participate in a reality programme in order to achieve a sense of self-acceptance and self-contentment with their non-normative sex/gendered identity have been commonplace throughout the twenty-first century. A normative narrative of LGBT identity has emerged, in which learning to love one's 'authentic' queer self has become consolidated as the route to affective harmony and emotional stability, a means of overcoming oppression and marginalisation in a way that leaves the social basis of this marginalisation opaque and un-critiqued. It is to a detailed interrogation of some of these narratives that I now turn.

Happiness, comedy and gay masculinity

British reality television has seen no shortage of happy queers. In particular, the jovial and effeminate gay man has been a consistent feature of multiple reality subgenres, and some of the most popular celebrities emerging from British reality programming, such as Brian Dowling, Christopher Biggins and Rylan Clarke, have fitted this mould of playful, jolly and comedic gay masculinity. This archetype of gay identity predates the emergence of reality TV. What Andy Medhurst (2007: 8) has termed the 'effeminate queen' has been a 'vital component of English popular comedy' for over a century, dating back to pantomime, musical hall and seaside entertainment of the late ninetieth and early twentieth centuries, coming to stand as 'a key feature of the gallery of sexual stereotypes' which have comprised British comedy culture. On television, Larry Grayson, Frankie Howard, Kenneth Williams, John Inman, Julian Clarey, Graham Norton, and others, have embodied this cultural tradition of camp, gay performance. In 2001, the apparent suitability of *Big Brother* winner Brian Dowling for a media career following his tenure on the show was rationalised in press discourses through recourse to the continuities between Brian's on-screen persona, and an existing typology of 'camp' gay television personalities. Discussing Brian and Helen Adams, the Welsh hairdresser who came in second place, an article published in the *Mail on Sunday* stated, 'Not since Kenneth Williams minced through the Carry On films with his old mate Babs Windsor have a gay man and a dizzy blonde been so much taken to the nation's heart' (White, 2001: 4). Indeed, in his analysis of Brian in *Big Brother* 2001, Christopher Pullen (2004: 221-222) suggested that:

> Through his portfolio of theatrical antics, pantomime cross-dressing and child-like behaviour, Brian present[ed] himself as a comic, if somewhat absurd, entertaining character for the audience's consumption [...] actively referencing and building on many years of readily celebrated gay performance seen on UK television.

Whether or not Brian's playful theatricality was a self-conscious and tactical mobilisation of an established repertoire of gay performance (as Pullen appears to suggest) is impossible to gauge from textual analysis alone. However, what is clear is that continuity with the comedy queen archetype in gay participants' behaviour and self-presentation has operated as an index of acceptability for gay male identities within British reality television programming since the form's earliest years. Press commentary on Brian praised how he had 'Endeared himself to the

nation with his quirky humour and his natural onscreen presence' (Todd and Hilton, 2001: 3), 'Had the nation in stitches with his witty one-liners' (*The Mirror*, 2001: 4), 'Winning millions of fans with his down-to-earth attitude and outrageous sense of fun' (Donnelley and Sayid, 2001: 12). Crucially, within this commentary, Brian's celebrity status, and the social acceptance of his gay sexuality which this was perceived to represent (see Chapter Two), was causally linked to his camp and comedic demeanour.

As a millennial iteration of a history of British 'comedy queens,' Brian's success in *Big Brother* 2001 worked to circulate an idealised model of camp, humorous and childlike gay masculinity which was subsequently embodied by numerous gay male reality participants. In *Big Brother* 2004, for example, during a performance task early in the series, the camp and flamboyant Marco dressed in drag and performed a musical number from the Disney film *The Little Mermaid*. By 2014, the gay comedy queen had become such a recognisable archetype within British reality TV that it had begun to descend into cliché. For instance, Mark Byron of *Big Brother* 2014 recapitulated this vision of gay subjectivity almost completely: frequently breaking out into song, playing childlike games with other housemates, making ditzy one-liners (for example referring to the British Conservative political party as the "Conservatory Party") - many of which were circulated through digital media as memes (Figure 19) - and maintaining that he was psychic and could read tea leaves to predict other participants' futures.

By 2014, however, comments by other housemates, and viewer comments reproduced within the show, suggested that this model of comedic gay identity had become such an expected mode of self-presentation for gay participants that had begun to signify inauthenticity and desire to play up to the cameras by performing a long-established, viewer-friendly envisioning of gay male identity. As even Mark's onscreen romantic partner, Christopher, speculated in the diary room, 'Mark to me is a cartoon character, I don't know if he's real at times,' and later, '[Mark has this] silly side of him where he's reading tea leaves, and does all kinds of silly things all day [...] and coming out with stupid wise-cracks. It's funny but is it real?' Moreover, during a sequence in which the housemates watched a panel of viewers talking about them, one of the viewers suggested that Mark had, 'Watched all the old housemates in the past and picked up all the popular housemates' personalities and tried to merge it all into one... I think he's the least real housemate in there.'

Figure 20: Internet memes of Mark's comedic lines.

Whilst Mark's narrative in *Big Brother* 2014 may have marked the beginning of the demise of the comedy queen archetype in British reality TV, it emphasises how the happy queer is the product of a complex and multi-layered history, spanning several decades of shifting LGBT visibility, and how the comedy queen's transition into the representational spaces of reality television celebrity has been far from seamless or unproblematic. A key difference between the comedy queens of reality programming, and his prior incarnations (for example in television comedy shows) concerns authenticity. As Medhurst (2007) has explored, whilst excessively effeminate, comedy queens of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, such as Frankie Howerd and Larry Grayson, could never be explicitly identified as homosexual. Rather, Howerd's sexuality was carried through signifiers in which his homosexuality was rendered readable but inexplicit: a high pitched vocal tone, mincing gait, and sexual innuendo- laden dialogue. Medhurst (ibid: 89-85) states:

The queen's queerness had to be deduced from the intersection of other signs that were representationally permissible [...] His queerness was a glaringly obvious shameful

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ecret, and his style and delivery dug comic gold from the complexities of that paradox. That secret became the unmentionable but ever-present mainspring of how he spoke [....] The conspiracy we joined with him was that he knew he was queer, we knew too, he knew we knew, we knew he couldn't say, and he knew that although he couldn't say he couldn't help revealing it in every second that he never spoke about it. To laugh at Howerd was to laugh at the gap between what is known and what can be said, at the ever-present unavoidability of that which must be kept hidden.

If the comedic value of the queen was traditionally located in the unspoken 'gap' between the obviousness yet unspeakability of his homosexual identity, the integration of this archetype of queerness into the therapeutic media culture of the twenty-first century, would require a closing of this 'gap'; a bringing into synthesis of inner desire and outer self-representation, in line with the ethical mandates of authenticity and 'being yourself' which have structured contemporary paradigms of gay subjectivity.

The celebrity narrative of Christopher Biggins, the winner of the show *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* in 2007, is illuminative of the manner in which the closeted yet extravagant queen of British comedy past, has been reconciled with the out-and-proud gay of modern social life. Now a presenter and all-round television personality, in 2007 Biggins was known primarily as a former children's television presenter (e.g. *On Safari* (ITV, 1982-1984), *Rentaghost* (BBC, 1976-1984) who had come to make a living performing as the 'Dame' character in Christmas pantomime's across Britain. From his initial mediation within the show, Biggins' narrative was constructed within the press as one of re-discovery: a comedy queen of time-gone-by who had come to find a new home in the contemporary discursive spaces of reality TV and celebrity culture. Critics praised his quick wit, kind heart and comedic nature, honed through a lifetime of performances in show business and pantomime, perfectly suited for mediation with a modern media landscape in which vibrant joviality had become the hallmark of out gay subjectivity. In an article entitled 'Dame Biggins is hero of the camp,' journalist Jon Wise (2007) described of Biggins:

He put the Camp in a pretty bland celebrity camp and kept everyone entertained with his infectious sense of fun [...] Snooty TV critics may bang on about D-list celebrities and the

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show's "tired" format, but Biggins gave it a dose of pantomime magic and a shine worthy of Aladdin's lamp [...] Biggins was the Fairy Godmother and turned what could have been a pumpkin of a show into a glittering carriage that he rode to victory - and a £1 million pay day. We'll be seeing a lot more of our new TV favourite.

This passage is replete with references which locate the entertainment value of Biggins' performances within his pantomime past. Pantomime is, however, not readily reconcilable with the impetus towards authenticity and emotional sincerity which characterises reality TV. As Millie Taylor (2007) has noted, pantomime is a highly reflexive theatrical form, one which draws much of its comedic value from the evocation of a 'sense of artificiality,' repeatedly exposing the obviously contrived, constructed and artificial style of the performance. This sensibility of artifice is embodied in the figure of the Dame, a character occupying a split subject position: a man dressed as a woman (though not in drag), playing a female character within the narrative (usually the hero's mother), yet who communicates directly with the audience, who are invited into a knowing complicity that this is *really* a man dressed as a woman, playing a woman, but who is not intended to 'pass' as female in any straightforward way.

In Biggins' narrative, the complex and performative connotations of his status as a pantomime dame were mitigated, through a representational frame in which his proclivity for camp theatricality was re-defined, not so much as a set of learned skills, but as the emanation of an essential and authentic nature. The surveillance aesthetic and back-to-basics jungle milieu of *I'm a Celebrity...* are central to the show's apparent promise to expose the 'real' selves of its celebrity cast-members, stripping away veneer of artificiality, to reveal the authentic personalities beneath their carefully crafted celebrity personas (see Holmes, 2006b). In this generic context, Biggins' camp theatricality was rehabilitated into contemporary scripts of subjectivity, which valorise the realisation and articulation of both the authentic gay and celebrity selves.

Various journalistic profiles narrated how Biggins' childhood years were characterised by a kind of ontological pull towards acting, show business, and the glamorous existence associated with it. In an interview published in *The Daily Mirror*, his elderly parents revealed how he performed his first drag act on holiday in Bognor Regis at age ten, describing how he 'craved a more glamorous existence and dreamed of being an actor' (quoted in Donnelley and Jackson, 2007).

The use of the word 'craved' implies an almost bodily and irrational hunger for performance, and the journalistic convention of using the words of family members works as ratifications of authenticity, pointing to the continuities between his on-screen behaviour and pre-mediation existence. Further, these interviews detailed how Biggins' past had been characterised by a highly troublesome relationship with his sexuality, including a brief and ill-fated heterosexual marriage. In an interview he stated, 'I suppose I was living a lie. It was just one of those things that you did, I think, in those days' (quoted in Donnelly and Jackson, 2007). This quote discursively ties a particular, closeted and 'inauthentic' relationship with one's sexuality to a specific, by-gone historical context. His re-celebrification through participating in *I'm a Celebrity...* was thus represented as performing a dual function, both a public closing of the gap between his authentic gay self and his external, theatrical persona, and his re-situation within a new era of British social life in which sexual openness has become a mandate for happiness and acceptance, both of the self and by society.

Therapy, self-acceptance and queer subjectivities

The homonormative impulse towards happiness, pride, and self-acceptance on the part of the contemporary queer subject has necessitated a closing of a kind of existential 'gap' between queer subjects' outward presentation and intuited senses of self, as exemplified in the re-celebrification narrative of Christopher Biggins in *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* in 2007. In other formats, such as *Big Brother*, British reality television has also proffered models and solutions for how this affectively-coded synthesis between inside and outside, congruent with the supposedly new era of LGBT acceptance, can be attained.

A number of queer *Big Brother* participants have evoked a fractured of deficient sense of self, born out of experiences of phobic bullying and abuse previously in their lives, as the reason why they wanted to partake in the show and potentially become celebrities through this. Writing in a general context, Laurie Ouellette and James Hay (2008: 2) have argued that reality TV 'circulates informal "guidelines for living" [...] dispersed and practical techniques for reflecting on, managing, and improving the multiple dimensions of our personal lives.' For these queer participants, the reality TV tropes of authenticity, self-realisation and the therapeutic talking

through of one's emotional life are positioned as the tools for validating denigrated queer subjectivities.

For example, Craig Coates, a gay male participant of *Big Brother* 2005, repeatedly discussed wanting to win the competition in order to attain a sense of 'acceptance' in relation to his gay identity. At one point in the series, Craig was involved in a conversation with Anthony, a heterosexual housemate, in which they discussed how far their desires to win the show were motivated by the monetary prize:

> **Craig:** For me though, do you know what would be different for me winning, it would be, this is going to sound pathetic, but I would think I would finally feel like, finally I've got some sort of acceptance, as opposed to money.
>
> **Anthony:** What do you mean acceptance?
>
> **Craig:** Just the way I speak and act and stuff. I think if people wanted me to win the show, people wouldn't hate me that much.

And later, in another conversation with Anthony and another heterosexual housemate, Makosi:

> **Craig:** I've gone through life being unaccepted for who I am. Makosi, at school I used to be bullied for how I spoke, can you imagine that?
>
> **Makosi:** So that's the reason you want to win, because you've been bullied in life?

At this point, Anthony interjects, saying to Craig, 'You want to win 'cause you want to win,' accusing him of a superficial desire for the pleasures of winning over any more profound reasons tied to his identity, to which Craig replies:

> **Craig:** If I won, for once in my life I would be accepted, for once in my life, Craig would be accepted for who he is.
>
> **Anthony:** How haven't you been accepted though Craig?
>
> **Craig:** You know me, how dare you sit there and say that? How *dare* you sit there and say that? [shouting] You know what I've been through in my life, yeah Anthony, how dare people sit there and say that I want to win this cause I want to fucking win […] [crying and shouting] I don't wanna win cause I wanna fucking win and you don't

fucking know me! […] You don't know what winning this would mean to me. You ain't gone through your life and had to justify yourself to every fucking person you've met, okay? You haven't had to meet every fucking person and the first question they've asked you is about your fucking sexuality, like it's a fucking disgrace, okay? […] You've been attacked? You've been humiliated? You don't realise what I've been through. Nobody in this house realises what I've been through, okay?

Historically, the cultural denigration of gay male identities has centred, in large part, upon gay men's perceived deficiency of 'healthy' masculinity (Connell, 1995: 143). Craig's foregrounding of being bullied about his 'voice,' a reference to his high-pitched and 'effeminate' vocal tone, evokes the ways in which his gay identity was apprehended by his social milieu as a failed or deficient subject position, which did not live up to the expected norms of heterosexual masculinity. In Chapter Two I argued that reality TV, and *Big Brother* in particular, have repeatedly mined the emotional costs of queer people's outsiderness to heteronormative subjectivity, as a means of delivering the format's promise of moments of 'authentic' emotional display. Congruent with this representational trope, in his volatile exclamation, Craig articulates a transmission of emotion: hatred and disgust from others are directed onto him, internalised and mutated into feelings of shame, self-hatred and disgrace, which come viscerally into public view in this sequence as he swears, shouts and cries, physically shaking and breaking down in tears.

Upon his entry to the show, Craig's gay identity was thus configured as a locus of cultural violence, which had 'left a mark on only on the human body but also on the mind and the spirit' (Gatlung, 1990: 294). Through its status as reality TV, a space of emotional and bodily display, *Big Brother* offered Craig a platform upon which to make manifest, through verbal and emotional performance, his experiences of being bullied because of his sexuality. Moreover, in his assertions of his desire for 'acceptance', participation on the show became configured as a route to healing and validating queer subjectivities through the very articulation of these apparently authentic selves which had hitherto been the site of violence. Ambivalently, however, in so doing, the 'acceptance' which Craig craves attains a complex, and problematic, dual meaning. Not only does he seek *public* acceptance, but the quest for public acceptance, in this case via participating in *Big Brother* and becoming a media celebrity, becomes the means of achieving the more intangible sense of *self*-acceptance. The para-social relationships forged

between Craig and the viewing public who, for a time, voted for him to remain on the show, are endowed with the capacity to heal and rehabilitate wounded queer subjectivities. It is highly significant that the domain of this para-social healing wa/s reality TV: a form of media where 'being yourself' is a mandatory condition of entry. Here, Craig could, at least potentially, attain vast public popularity not only in spite of, but precisely *for* expressing his authentic gay self. In this dialectic, British reality TV's popular, inter-textual legacy as a space of progressive visibility for sexual minority identities (see Chapter Two) fuses with broader conceptions of the 'ideal' reality TV participant as someone motivated primarily by a desire to express their authentic self, over the attainment of celebrity status as monetary gain (Holmes, 2004a; Biressi and Nunn, 2005). For participants such as Craig, narratives of queer self-healing have intersected with reality television's dual claim to function as a space of both societal and self-transformation.

Indeed, the most profound transformation in Craig's narrative was represented to have taken place at the level of his sense of self. Whilst, as I explored in Chapter Two, the inclusion of LGBT people in reality programming has been accredited in popular discourses with the power to effect societal acceptance of non-heterosexual people, the narratives of queer acceptance on display within the programmes are ultimately tales of *self*-discovery and *self*-acceptance. Craig's narrative appears to critique heteronormativity through the mediation of his emotionally visceral recounting of the ways in which it has made him suffer both physically and emotionally. Yet, the means of overcoming the violence caused by the heterosexist social norms which legitimated Craig's denigration by others on the grounds of his apparently deficient masculinity, are located firmly within the emotional fabric of the self.

In *Big Brother*, the show's proffering of personal solutions of social marginalisation is enabled by reality television's perceived status as a therapeutic domain. With a generic heritage in soap opera, *Big Brother* in particular is very much a dialogue-driven format. Verbal discussions of feelings and emotions, both between participants and the omniscient Big Brother in the diary room, and between participants in the communal spaces of the house, form the bulk of the programme texts, positing verbal articulation and exchange as the route to overcoming problems and attaining affective harmony and ontological security. The programme's diary room sequences are archetypal examples of the kind of therapeutic, confessional talk which traverses reality TV. Foucault (1998 [1972]), in his work on confession, argued that confession takes place

within a power relationship in which the ability to confess is enabled by an authority figure to which the confession is told. In traditional religious or medical confessionals (the focus of Foucault's text), this authority was a priest or doctor, who not only hears the confession, but confirms, discursively, its ability to heal or transform. In the *televised* confession, as Mimi White (2003) has noted, this authority becomes the medium of television itself. Reality TV in particular is popularly perceived to function as a therapeutic apparatus through its emphasis on emotionality and self-disclosure (Andrejevic 2004; Dubrofsky, 2007; Woodstock 2014). Yet, as Rachel Dubrofsky (2007: 267) has argued, in reality programming, therapy is less about changing the self in any fundamental way, than about but 'embracing' the self that one already, intrinsically, has; learning to 'admit that one's "true" or "authentic" self is good.' In this framework, what is transformed through therapy is one's *relationship with* the self, a transformation in which the intervention of television itself is construed as fundamental.

Returning to the example of Craig and *Big Brother*, immersed within the therapeutic spaces of reality TV, Craig was shown throughout the course of his mediation to reflect on his experiences of suffering. Sitting in the on-screen therapist's chair of the diary room, he stated:

> I've had personal issues in my life which I've always run away from and, you know, I've opened a salon, which almost acted as a buffer; I've created buffers in my life to sort of keep between me and who I really am, and have never accepted who I am, you know, in myself, and by coming on a show like this, being forced into this environment, I sort of have almost had to embrace who I am myself. And it's given me the confidence that now, when I leave here, I can go out and face the world and will be able to stand up and be proud of who I am and what I am, you know, rather than having to hide behind things all the time.

Further, during his eviction interview with Davina McCall:

> **Davina**: What was more important to you, winning or being accepted?
> **Craig:** I think, my wish from the show was to learn a lot about myself, and to accept myself.
> [...] **Davina**: What have you learnt about yourself from that time in the house?

Craig: So much, like, you just gotta be confident. You can't be really insecure; you've got to be confident about yourself. I always thought the worst of myself. I thought every week, people probably know, I'm up for nomination, I'm going this week, it's me, it's me. And I realised, you know, by being yourself you can accept who you are, and be a better person from that.

[Audience clap]

In these statements, Craig evokes a trajectory of personal development purportedly enabled by the reality television experience. Whilst he beings, as shown in the previous exchanges, by identifying his fraught relationship with his self-identity as stemming from abuse from others, in these later exchanges, he locates the ability to resolve this problematic state of subjectivity within his own, personal sense of self: learning to 'stand up and be proud of who I am.' This renders unchallenged and uncritiqued the heteronormative social structures which caused this suffering in the first place. As I argued in Chapter Two, during *Big Brother*'s eviction sequences, the onscreen audience are positioned to 'stand in' for the wider British public, and their applause in the sequence described above operates as an index of social validation, drawing a discursive thread between the kinds of therapeutic self-work which Craig articulates and societal acceptance for LGBT subjects. 'Acceptable' queerness is here construed through a particular relationship with the self, which does not challenge or critique prevailing structures of heteronormativity.

This therapeutic recasting of social and political inequalities as personal and individual problems, points to some of the ways in which *Big Brother*'s treatment of LGBT identities converges with broader critiques of reality television as 'emblematic' of the permeation of neoliberal rationalities into the spaces of everyday life and culture (Woodstock, 2014: 784). Several scholars have explored how reality programming produces subject positions which are resilient, self-reliant, enterprising and 'empowered', and which can withstand the 'changing, uncertain, economic and political landscape[s]' naturalised through neoliberalism (Woodstock, 2014, 783-785; see also Couldry, 2008; Ouellette & Hay, 2008). Central to this 'resilient' neoliberal subject position is the valorisation of discovering with and being true to the 'authentic' self. Stephanie Genz (2015: 548) has argued that ideals of authenticity have become 'a boundary strategy between self-hood and neoliberal capitalism.' The concept of the authentic self has, in

part, enabled the expansion of neoliberalism from an economic rationality into an ethos which structures how individuals come to understand 'who they are.' The imperative to connect with and articulate the authentic self, particularly through practices of confession and therapy, has become central to the neoliberal project of selfhood, conceptualizing individuals as, 'entrepreneurial actors defined by their capacity for autonomy and self-care' (ibid). Popular cultural discourses which position the attainment of authenticity as the solution to all manner of personal and political problems therefore reconcile human identity with the dismantling of collective, state provisions, and the concomitant demands of individualism and self-sufficiency integral to neoliberalism. Genz (ibid) maintains that the neoliberal imperative to authentic self-realisation plays out differently in the context of different forms of identity. Distilled through the specific optic of sexuality, in Craig's narrative, his development what Eva Ilouz (2007) has called 'emotional literacy' – the ability to read, engage with and understand one's emotions and sense of self – is construed as a mechanism for overcoming *socially* ingrained homophobia.

As I explored in Chapter Three, *Big Brother* has been positioned as an 'ideal' space for gay participants to express their authentic selves. Reality TV is configured as a televisual domain in which the authentic self will inevitably emerge beneath the gaze of the reality TV cameras. This configuration has engendered a re-codification the historical relationship between queer identities and practices of surveillance. The image on an eye which has been the iconic symbol of the *Big Brother* franchise since its inception, clearly suggests that the very nature of the programme is about *being watched*, significantly by human eyes which those being watched cannot themselves see. The title of *Big Brother* is appropriated from George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), in which 'Big Brother' is a symbol for the oppressive mass surveillance of a totalitarian government. However, as Mark Andrejevic (2004) argued in his early work on the form, part of the cultural work of reality television has been to re-signify surveillance within the popular imaginary as a benevolent and enabling, rather than a punitive or policing, force. In reality TV, 'surveillance provides a certain guarantee of authenticity [...] this authenticity becomes a process of self-expression, self-realization, and self-validation' (ibid: 108).

Andrejevic's (2004) conceptualisation of the 'kinder, gentler gaze of *Big Brother*' as proffered by reality TV, has particular significance for non-heterosexual subjectivities. Historically, surveillance has been understood as inherently anti-queer, a mechanism for drawing and reinforcing the boundaries between socially-approved and 'deviant' sexual practices and behaviours. As John Greyson (1993: 85) wrote in the 1990s, practises of surveillance have been traditionally mobilised by state apparatuses in order to pathologies and criminalise LGBT people. 'Surveillance,' he states, 'strives to produce a picture of lesbians and gay men as pathological, deviant, dangerous and diseased' (ibid: 391). This association between surveillance and the cultural, political and legal condemnation of gay sexualities is particularly pronounced in a UK context. The Sexual Offences Act of 1967, which is commonly referred to as having 'legalised' homosexuality in Britain, specifically de-criminalised sex between men carried out 'in private,' thus supporting 'the intensification of the policing of a broad range of public sex acts' (Smith, 1994: 63).[38] As such, for much of modern British history, homosexuality was rendered acceptable to the extent that it expressly did not become visible in the public sphere. For example, Anna Marie Smith (ibid: 64) has argued that Thatcherite politics in the 1980s, such as the introduction of Section 28 of the Local Government Act which outlawed the 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities, constructed the "good homosexual" - one who was deserving of 'inclusion within the "normal" social order' - as 'self-limiting, closeted, desexualized, and invisible.' In this context, for much of the twentieth century, becoming publicly visible as other than heterosexual was configured as becoming subject to the disciplinary gaze of juridical and criminalising authorities. Accounts of queer life in Britain before the 1990s, in both fictional and non-fiction writing, have frequently emphasised a fear of being watched, particularly in relation to police surveillance and raids of bars, cottages[39] and other public and semi-public spaces in which queer sex and intimacy were carried out, as a defining and consistent feature of British queer history (e.g. Hollinghurst, 1989; David, 1997).

The inter-textual narratives of many gay reality TV participants, such as Craig and those I analysed in Chapter Two, have discursively enmeshed the changing meanings of both surveillance and gay identity in Britain in the twenty-first century in a two-way productive

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[38] This remained statutory until the Sexual Offences Act 2003.
[39] Public lavatories where men would gather for anonymous sex.

process. Reality television is a cultural form in which the very meanings of public and private have undergone transformation: where all manner of behaviours formerly deemed permissible only in 'private' have been staged for public consumption. So too, in this same period, the public visibility of (certain kinds of) LGBT identity historically denigrated to only 'private' articulation, have become increasingly normalised within popular culture. In this context, rather than a policing or exclusionary force, surveillance is constructed as a benevolent mechanism, with the power to validate queer subjectivities on both a societal and a personal level.

Constructing the 'happy' transgender subject

Whilst my analysis so far in this chapter has primarily focused upon gay male reality TV participants, the narratives of transgender participants in British reality television have also been repeatedly framed in relation to the archetype of the happy queer. As I explored in Chapter Two, Nadia Almada's articulations of the emotional turmoil of transgender life in *Big Brother* 2004 were endowed in popular discourses with the capacity to effect a climate of tolerance and understanding for transgender issues in British society. In one particularly moving sequence, Nadia was asked by Big Brother in the diary room, 'What is it that makes you most want to stay?' to which she replied:

> Being normal for once [...] I don't have to use my past in conversation, I don't have to explain myself to anyone or being paranoid that someone knows me [starting to break down]. In a very selfish way, I feel that I've been accepted. I feel that people... just the whole acceptance thing. It's quite hard to carry on your life thinking that people will be pointing their fingers at you because of your past [...] I didn't ask to be born like that. It's just an amazing feeling for me, in a very selfish way, it's very rewarding to know that I have been accepted.

Nadia evokes an economy of affective circulation, where, in the movement of affect between bodies, relationships of normativity and difference are produced. She describes a causal chain of affective conversion; her paranoia and unhappiness has been caused by the hostile and scrutinising gazes of others - 'people pointing their fingers at you' - which had work to designate Nadia's transgender embodiment as beyond the parameters of the 'normal'. As an affective

domain, *Big Brother* had become a repository for these feelings. Recognition by the media consuming public (who had repeatedly saved Nadia from eviction from the show) was configured as a means of affective alchemy, transforming her negative feelings into happiness and pride. In the case of Nadia, acceptance also refers to acceptance by the other housemates who, unaware of her transgender identity, had accepted her as a cisgender woman. Nadia thus locates 'acceptance' - the intangible sensations of belonging, cohesion and recognition as being a valued part of a group or collective - as produced within interpersonal relationships, both embodied and para-social.

However, much like Craig's narrative, in Nadia's narrative, notions of social acceptance become increasingly difficult to disentangle from more personal discourses of *self*-acceptance. At one point, alone in the diary room, she stated:

> There was a time, when I was in transition, and that was a really dark stage for me, because it was very hard in the sense that I couldn't stand myself, I couldn't look at myself, I felt, you know, it wasn't right.

The affects Nadia seeks to articulate here are so elusive and intangible they become explicable only through the metaphor of darkness. In this quotation, she appears to position these dark affects as produced within a closed circuit of personal pathology, reverberating between her interior, intuited femaleness, and her dissonant male-coded morphology, encapsulated in the tacit evocation of being unable to look at her reflection in the mirror. This inability to 'look' at herself evokes her failure in relation to the neoliberal mandates to emotional literacy and self-reflexivity (Giddens, 1991; Ilouz, 2007), where engaging with and working through one's emotional life is construed as the most effective means overcoming problems, both personal and societal. The mirror, or more precisely, the ability to feel good on the inside by apprehending one's external physicality, is a fitting symbol for the manner in which the normative ideal of happy queerness is produced in the therapeutic domain of reality television. In the discursive spaces of therapy culture, it is the relationship with the self which is valorised over all others (Furedi, 2004), and the public and inter-personal acceptance Nadia was able to attain during her time on the show was configured largely as a conduit through which she was able to cultivate an affectively harmonious relationship to the self. In press interviews following her win, Nadia again mobilised a mediated inflection on the mirror metaphor. Discussing her reaction to the press reproduction

of images of her pre-transition life, she stated: 'I saw all the pictures in the newspapers and I did feel quite comfortable, whereas before I wouldn't even tolerate my mum calling me by the name Jorge' (quoted in Gould, 2004: 98). She was cited as claiming in another interview, 'I can look at pictures from my past and I don't have to cringe anymore. Before I went into the house, if I'd seen old photos of me splashed across the papers I'd have hated it. Now I'm strong enough to accept it' (quoted in Cave, 2004a: 7).

Figure 21: Nadia in *heat* (21-27 August 2004, pp.4-5)

Indeed, as interrogated in Chapter Four, in a visual media culture it is the external queer body which has become a site for the evidencing of the state of the internal queer psyche. In an interview and photoshoot in *heat* magazine following her *Big Brother* win, Nadia's physicality was constructed as a beacon of affective positivity, centering in particular upon her loud and cackling laugh. The feature, entitled 'You've Got to Laugh!', the title of which was printed in huge, bold text across a double page spread, was accompanied by three overlapping images of Nadia, shot from the left, the right, and straight on. The photographic depiction of every angle of the front of Nadia's body connoted a wholeness of self, a confidence in reveling in and displaying her physicality. This proud exposure of her physical body, the contours of which were outlined in a tight, low-cut, red dress, stood as a symbol of her internal happiness, anchored by the exaggerated performances codes of her head thrown back, mouth wide as if laughing, and her hands loose about her in carefree gesticulation (Figure 21). The opening text of the article read:

Heat has only just entered the building where our photoshoot is taking place and   already we can hear that familiar sound. Nadia's cackle is ricocheting off the walls and everyone who hears it - from the courier who passes us on the stairs, to the receptionist who greets us as we walk in - is laughing along with her. Yes, it's that infectious (Cave, 2004a: 7).

Much like the passages of Nadia's speech I cited above, here an economy of affect is conjured up, in which affect circulates through and between different bodies. Yet, whilst the circulation of (negative) affect had worked previously to abject Nadia from a human community based upon gendered normativity, here it becomes a force for binding people together in a communal whole formed through the enveloping powers of positive affectivity, over and above any formal criteria of personhood or identity. Bringing the various textual nodes of Nadia's representation together, her celebrity texts posits working upon the self to become a 'happy' subject as the most effective means of forging social inclusion for sexual minority citizens.

Significantly, not only was Nadia represented to have overcome her suffering through the therapeutic tools provided by the reality televisual domain, but she had channeled this process of leaning to 'accept' herself into a lucrative form of emotional of immaterial labour, both during her time on the show and in her post-*Big Brother* celebrity, reaping both celebrity status and monetary gain. The hyperbolic signifiers of glamour and wealth featured in the *heat* photoshoot referenced above – diamond jewellery and flutes of champagne – discursively and semiotically conjoined her material and symbolic capital to a particular affective disposition and relationship with the self. Here, the apparently democratic architecture of reality television celebrity attained a regulatory function in relation to sexual minority identities. Prosperity and success for LGBT people in the apparently emergent age of acceptance, diversity and equality in twenty-first century Britain is positioned as contingent upon a happy and accepting relationship with the self, which does not contest dominant, heterosexist or cisnormative understandings of self and subjectivity. Rather, queer people are called upon to define their queerness in relation to these norms, by learning to embrace, love and be true to their non-normative identies, which remain coded as beyond the norm.

Disciplining the unhappy queer

So far in this chapter I have explored how British reality television has positioned the development of a positive relationship with the self for LGBT people as the conduit to a positive relationship with society at large. As part of this process, queer participants who are seen to be refuting the homonormative mandate to self-love in the service of social integration, or who are perceived to be too fixated with the negative affects of queer marginalisation, have been constructed as examples of 'bad' queer subjectivity, and widely criticised in both the shows themselves and in extra-textual commentary.

A clear example here is Kitten Pinder, a contestant in *Big Brother* 2004. A self-styled radical feminist, anti-capitalist, anarchist lesbian, Kitten appeared to enter the show to advance an explicitly political, if somewhat incoherent, agenda. She repeatedly broke the rules of the show: refusing to wear her microphone, sleeping in the daytime, climbing on the roof of the house, and attempting to get the other housemates to band together with her to refuse to nominate. On Day Four, she explicated this behaviour in the diary room by asserting that Big Brother was 'patriarchal' and 'sexist', inventing an alternative fantasy authority figure: 'Big Sister', who she claimed only to obey.

Kitten's conception of Big Brother as an emblem of capitalist patriarchy was clearly at odds with the show's hegemonic construction of the round-the-clock surveillance of the *Big Brother* cameras as a positive and benevolent force (discussed above). In particular, Kitten appeared to reject the format's interpellation for contestants to exhibit their suitability for celebrity status through the performance of particular kinds of selfhood. In refusing to wear the microphone which made her speech audible to viewers, and spending the majority of each day lying in bed, she actively refused to *perform*. Even on her entrance to the house Kitten refused to pose for the obligatory press photographers, and instead marched down the red carpet (a clear signifier of celebrification) to seek out her girlfriend from the on-screen crowd, as host Davina McCall proclaimed, 'I don't understand why she wants to be in *Big Brother*.' Ostracised by the other housemates, and unpopular with viewers, Kitten was the first participant of the 2004 series to be evicted from the show.

Of course, Kitten's 'resistant' behaviour to the dominant scripts of celebrification and self-exposure which structure the show were, at the same time, highly congruent with the promise of unpredictability embedded in the unscripted action and non-professional performers of reality TV. Indeed, for the first week of the 2004 series, the majority of sequences broadcast in the nightly highlights show concerned Kitten. As I noted in Chapter Two, Misha Kavka (2007) has argued that the 'core unpredictability' of reality television can bear a transgressive potential, working to 'queer the pitch' of the heteronormative assumptions which run through the shows. In this way, Kitten could be perceived as having, through her disruptive antics, made legible an alternative conception of the relationship between sexuality, gender and surveillance, one which ran counter to the show's dominant emphasis upon the benevolent powers of mediation as a path to authenticity, self-love and celebrity, and the format's neoliberal investment in performance and inter-personal competition.

However, I would argue that as a celebrity (albeit a fairly ephemeral one), the circulation of Kitten's image beyond the parameters of the televisual text worked to 'fix' her mediation within a specific frame of interpretation. Kitten's celebrity text emphasised how British reality television, in its inclusion of sexual minority people, has implicitly drawn out something of a hierarchy of 'acceptable' queerness: not all queer identities are equally valued within the textual worlds of reality television celebrity. Gay men and transgender women have appeared far more 'suitable' for mediation due to the readiness with which these identities can be produced through the established conventions of reality TV celebrity. Other forms of non-heteronormative life, such as transgender men, lesbians, and those who evade such categories altogether (see discussion of Kemal in Chapter Three and Sam in Chapter Four), have occupied a far more precarious and troublesome position in relation to the economy of reality television fame. In the marketplace of reality television celebrity, lesbianism has not been readily commodifable in the manner of certain camp gay male identities which, as I noted above, have a long history in British popular culture; a mould into which many gay male participants have almost seamlessly slotted. Further, as I argued in Chapter 4, transgender female reality TV participants have been able to secure celebrity through the reconciliation of their trans subjectivities with normative ideals of female bodily work and consumption. When lesbian identities do circulate through an affirmative rhetoric, it is as a signifier of apparent 'resistance', as was the case with Alex Parks of *Fame Academy* or Lucy Spraggan of *The X Factor* (discussed in Chapter Three). At the same time, the

construction of these lesbian participants as 'resistant' figures reaffirmed the apparently 'democratic', audience-produced nature of reality TV fame. Format specificities between reality shows are significant here. Ideas around tension and conflict between viewers and the music industry embodied in the shows by panels of judges is central to reality pop programmes' claims to democracy, in a way that does not translate straightforwardly to game-docs such as *Big Brother*.

Returning to Kitten, her textual construction as an 'unacceptable' queer mobilised the well-worn stereotype of the lesbian feminist as manish, or certainly tomboyish, in appearance, angry and politically confrontational. Barbara Creed (1995: 95-96) has noted how, in popular representations, the lesbian tomboy often figures as a liminal subject; her ambiguously gendered physicality and active sexuality are positioned as symptomatic of an incomplete journey into a 'proper' female identity. In a similar way, much press commentary worked to demarcate Kitten's politically-motivated anger as a kind of juvenile, teenage angst. For example, upon her eviction, television critic Ian Hyland (2004), writing in the *Daily Mirror*, proclaimed, 'So long Kitten. *Big Brother*'s Rebel Without Claws. I'd like to say you livened up the house with your anarchy, but you didn't. You simply wasted a week.' Hyland moulds the connotations of Kitten's name (a kitten as a not-yet-fully-grown cat), with an evocation of the teenage delinquent character played by James Dean in the film *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), to ridicule Kitten's political awareness as innocuous, child-like attention-seeking. The press' infantilisation of Kitten became literalised in an irreverent advice column in *The Independent*, where a (probably fictional) reader asked, 'My 14-year-old daughter is now so PC [politically correct] it's like living with Kitten from *Big Brother*. She's even started to look a bit like her. I hardly dare open my mouth. What can I do?' Answers to which included, 'If she is anything like Kitten at all you should be worried. Just pray that she soon gets bored when nobody applauds her pointless contradictions of rules and attention-seeking acts,' and 'If your daughter is seriously turning into the finger-pointing, roof-climbing, psychotic, lesbian, Jarvis Cocker-lookalike, then I'm afraid there's nothing left to be done, you're going to have to start thinking about disowning, or adoption' (2004). Here, Kitten's apparent refusal to 'play' the *Big Brother* game is turned on its head, and she is accused of one of the cardinal sins of reality televisual participation: attention seeking. Her seeming rejection of the impetus to self-exposure in order to reap the rewards of celebrity status is reconfigured as a

desperate ploy to become the locus of press and public attention by appearing to do the exact opposite.

This rhetoric worked to contain the potential meanings of Kitten's onscreen behaviour within the normative scripts of LGBT identity constructed within and in relation to the programme, in which a 'successful' telos of queer life is configured as the shedding of negative affects, embracing one's marginal subjectivity, and crafting an upbeat, out-and-proud persona. This logic, which positions an affective transition on the part of the queer subject as a conduit to social integration, also structured the representations of the transgender participant Kellie Maloney in *Celebrity Big Brother* 2014. As I explored in previous chapters, Kellie utilised her appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother* as a kind of public announcement of the start of her gender transition process, and the mediation of her entry onto the show on the launch night implicitly drew upon notions of the affective dimensions of this transformation. Entering to a soundtrack of the chorus of the song 'You've Got the Love' by Florence and the Machine (which consists of repetitions of the line 'You've got the love"), shots of Kellie walking along the raised platform were juxtaposed with shots of the on-screen crowd cheering. This emotive dialogue extended into online spaces such as Twitter, where the hashtag #CBBKellie (which was promoted within the text of the show itself), carried various well-wishing comments from users, including other reality TV alumni such as Channelle Hayes from *Big Brother* 2007, and Charlie King from *The Only Way is Essex*.

'Ooh, the audience love Kellie' (@channel5_tv)

'Kellie Maloney! Don't know anything about boxing but this is brave!!!!! Go on Kellie love!!' (@channellejhayes)

'Great response for #CBBKellie - great addition to the house #breakingbarriers' (@CharlieKing85)

'AWESOME reaction to Kellie from the crowd. Potential winner?' (@YahooCelebrityUK)

'Good luck to #CBBKellie - takes some guts going in there after such a journey in life! Nice to see cheers and not boos!' (@Nicksy)

'seems like there is a lot of love for #CBBKellie ... favourite to win for some'

(@flintbedrock)

This narrative swiftly changed, however, as Kellie become almost exclusively framed in sequences which emphasised misery and anger, where she was perceived by other housemates to be failing to embrace the mediated space as a platform for self-discovery and self-actualisation. As her housemate White Dee exhorted Kellie during one of her many breakdowns: 'Be Kellie!' (quoted in Chapter Four), or as housemate James stated in the diary room:

> Everyone has sympathy for what she's going through, but like I said, in life everyone has their own issues, there's a lot of people going through much, much worse than what she's going through and she uses that as an excuse, which frustrates me. She keeps saying she's going to walk [leave the show]. Well if you're going to walk,   walk. It's very easy. So don't talk about it, don't go for the sympathy vote, and don't   walk around all day miserable, trying to bring everyone else's mood down. Or   maybe   you're just looking for sympathy?

In a kind of mirroring of her own feelings, Kellie was evicted to load boos from the onscreen crowd, making palpable the cultural function of celebrity and public popularity in this context as an index of 'acceptable' modalities of queer subjectivity. Her inability to love herself appeared to have rendered her unworthy of mediation within the spaces of *Celebrity Big Brother*.

Regulation and queer utopias

As my analysis thus far in this chapter has argued, since its earliest years, British reality television has celebrated the figure of the happy queer. Yet, this is not to imply that these programmes have suggested that LGBT people have not, and do not continue to, face phobia and prejudice in their day-to-day lives, even throughout a decade and a half of increasing visibility and cultural acceptance for (some forms of) sexual diversity in the UK. Reality television has certainly not offered simply an uncritical celebration of the apparent strides in LGBT equality across the twenty-first century, even as programmes and extra-textual discourses have often claim a transformative and/or pedagogical role in bringing LGBT issues and lives into public consciousness (see Chapter Two).

Rather, I would argue that, in the context of LGBT equality, reality TV texts have most often circulated as semi-imaginary vision of how British society *could* or *should* look if sexual minorities had attained full social, cultural and political acceptance from the heteronormaitve majority. Central to this representational framework is reality TV's complex negotiations between artifice and the real. Whilst many commentators have misread reality TV as claiming to offer unexpurgated representations of 'real life', as Misha Kavka (2012) has noted, reality shows in fact make certain, specific *claims to* reality, which inflect the self-conscious artificiality of much of the broadcast text. In *Big Brother*, for example, the artificially constructed, insular setting of the *Big Brother* house is configured as space which is deliberately contrived to facilitate emotionally and subjectively 'real' performances from participants. This self-conscious blending of realism and artifice inherent to reality TV opens up a discursive space not only for celebrating the advances in LGBT rights, but for the exhibition of an often subtle awareness of continuing marginalization, and for simultaneously constructing an imagined vision of a world of integration and equality yet to come.

Writing on the second series of *Big Brother* (in 2001), Michael Jackson, the former chief executive of Channel 4, laid out his conception of *Big Brother* as a kind of televisual crystallisation of the Blairite vision of a multicultural 'New Britannia' which was *not yet achieved* in the 'real' world. He stated:

> The [*Big Brother*] house represents a melting pot for a broader, more understanding and inclusive society. White, black, Asian, gay and heterosexual contestants entered the house. We have watched them, we have got to know them and we liked them or disliked them for who they are, not what they are […] programmes likes *Big Brother* provide an optimistic glimpse of the ease of presence between a group of people with different ethnicity, sexuality, religion, class and education (2001).

Here, the microcosmic world of the *Big Brother* house is subtly counter-posed with the realities of British society as it currently stood. The contrived community of the house, created specifically for the purpose of producing a television show, is '*more* understanding and inclusive [my emphasis]' than non-mediated life, it is an '*optimistic glimpse*' of a world in which gay,

straight, black, white, Asian, middle-class, working class, and so on, cohabit harmoniously side-by-side.

Thus, whilst making claims to emotional and subjective truth, Jackson acknowledges that the insular world represented in the show is, in part, a fantasy; a utopian projection of a mythic, multicultural Britain which remains on the horizon of social reality. I would argue that *Big Brother*, and other forms of reality TV (such as structured reality, as I address below), can therefore be conceptualised as, perhaps unlikely, sites for the representation of what queer theorists have called 'queer utopias.' Queer utopias are cultural spaces 'in the present that do not necessarily allow for complete emancipation or even happiness, but are suggestive of the potentiality for the future' (Jones, 2013: 3), offering 'a glimpse of what might be' for 'minoritarian people, who are marginalized because of their racial, ethnic, class, sex, gender, sexuality, and/or ability status' (ibid: 11). Far from claiming to represent the world as it is, reality TV mediates real people within a televisual spectacle predicated upon contrivance and artificiality, offering a semi-constructed imagining of a more inclusive social context for non-heterosexual people to live their lives. The very fact that the space is constructed, managed and mediated is positioned to *enable* sexual minorities to express their authentic selves, divorced from the 'real' realities of British social life.

Of course, between 2001 and 2014 the civic status and cultural visibility of LGBT people in British society expanded exponentially. Yet, even in the second decade of the twenty-first century, reality shows such as *Big Brother* have held onto this construction as a kind of 'safe space' for the articulation of non-normative identities and desires. This conceptualisation comes to the fore in the case of Rylan Clarke, a gay male housemate of *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2013. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Rylan was known for having been a contestant on the reality pop show *The X Factor* in late 2012, during which he had become something of a national hate figure. Within the heteronormative space of the reality pop franchise, Rylan's queer body became the site upon which various tensions around, talent, audience power, acceptability and the very purpose of the TV talent show were played out. As Rylan stated on *Celebrity Big Brother*, 'I was famous overnight, but I was hated overnight.' He had been subjected to homophobic death threats directed towards his Twitter account by members of the public

(Robertson, 2013), and claimed to live in constant fear of experiencing violence when out in public.

In contrast, the sealed territory of the *Celebrity Big Brother* house was articulated as a 'safe' space in which he could 'be himself', sheltered from the hostility he had suffered from both the public and press. He exclaimed, 'this is the safest I've ever felt in my life, around these people, where I can say what I feel, be how I want to be, and be the real me, because I feel safe in here.' However, early in the series, during a live eviction broadcast, when the host (now Brian Dowling) said Rylan's name, the crowd of spectators assembled outside the house began to boo loudly, prompting Rylan to take shelter in the (camera-less) toilet, where, in tears, he was heard (from behind the closed toilet door) asking, 'What have I fucking done wrong? […] People [treat me] like I'm a fucking murderer…' This incident was represented to have deeply affected Rylan. 'I'm frightened of those boos outside' he told a fellow housemate a week later, 'I've got to get outside out of my head.' Later in the series when asked by another housemate what he would 'miss the most' about being in *Celebrity Big Brother* house, he replied, 'The safety […] Not worrying about anything, like, knowing I could say whatever I want, do whatever I want, look however I want, and not think someone's gonna shout out [mouths swear word] at me, that's what I'm gonna miss.' In this context, rather than disavowing the on-going cultural and physical violence faced by those outside the heterosexual norm in British society, Rylan's narrative implied that participation in reality television harbours a fantasmatic appeal for sexual minorities precisely *because of* the 'real realities' of stigmatisation, danger and violence faced by many LGBT people in the outside world. Indeed, the promise of this kind of queer liberation mobilized by reality television is perhaps only temporary, as the spectre of the outside world looms over those who enter its sheltered walls.

Moreover, particularly since the 2007 *Celebrity Big Brother* race row,[40] *Big Brother*/*Celebrity Big Brother* have articulated a stringently politically correct subject position, where any expressions of prejudice or phobia pertaining to particular facets of identity (sexuality, gender, race, religion), or potentially 'offensive' language or behaviour are immediately censured and condemned by the progamme's textual authority figure, Big Brother. For instance, at one point in

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[40] The *Celebrity Big Brother* race row occurred in the 2007 series, where Jade Goody (alongside the former popstar Jo O'Meara and the model Danielle Lloyd) were accused of racist bullying against the Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty. See Gies (2009) and Holmes (2009) for analyses of the *Celebrity Big Brother* racism controversy.

the 2014 *Celebrity Big Brother* series, the boxer Audley Harrison stated during a face-to-face nomination session that he felt 'a little uncomfortable living with' Kellie Maloney, and when pressed to explain this by Big Brother, described his discomfort that Kellie would socialise in the house bathroom with the other female housemates, mobilising a well-worn stereotype of transgender people as sexual predators (Richardson, 2010). Later, when called to the diary room, he was told by the disembodied voice of Big Brother:

> Before you entered the *Big Brother* house, the rules regarding unacceptable language and behaviour were explained to you. These rules include housemates behaving in a way that could cause serious offence to either their fellow housemates or to members of the viewing public, including, but not limited to, serious offence based on the grounds of disability, age, race, sexual orientation, and gender. Big Brother would like to talk to you about your reasons for nominating Kellie this evening, where you described feeling 'uncomfortable' with her.

After being reprimanded by Big Brother, Audley returned to the communal spaces of the house where the incident provoked a further debate around issues of transphobia between Kellie and Audley. Kellie told him:

> It's like me saying that I don't want to get into the bath because you're black [...] I can't help my gender issue, I can't help what I'm going through [...] If I'd gone in there and said that I didn't want to get in the bath because Leslie's homosexual or you're black, there would have been a complete war. All I've asked for is tolerance and acceptance [...] To be nominated because I'm transsexual I think is very wrong.

Several scholars have argued that through its focus upon interpersonal relations and the emotional contours of everyday life, reality TV can function as a mediated space for the working through of ethical questions around the treatment of others (Hill, 2004; Couldry, 2008b; Gies, 2009). As Liev Gies (2009: paragraph 20) has argued, 'By sparking debate about the ethical treatment of particiapnts, often framed in terms of dignity, equality and respect, reality television raises human rights questions without necessarily using an explicitly worded rights vocabulary or jargon.' As part of its discursive constitution of sexual minorities as recognisable human subjects (see Chapter Two), reality TV has repeatedly maintained that LGBT people deserve freedom and

protection from prejudice, phobia and discrimination based solely upon their non-normative sexual/gender identities.

In the context of *Big Brother/Celebrity Big Brother* and Channel 4, this is part of the channel's public service mandate to speak to a 'diverse' viewership through its programming. That said, reality TV shows across the spectrum of British broadcasters have adopted this protective, regulatory approach to LGBT visibility (particularly post-2007 and the *Celebrity Big Brother* racism controversy). For example, in 2007, Brian Dowling appeared on the ITV reality show *Hell's Kitchen* (ITV, 2004-2009) alongside a cast of other celebrities, which included the controversial British comedian Jim Davidson. Whilst Davidson was well-known for the right-wing tone of his comedy, he was removed from the show by producers after, in a conversation with Brian, he referred to gay men with the homophobic colloquialism 'shirt-lifters'. Davidson's removal following this remark solidified the show's construction of reality TV as a space of idealised multiculturalism and sexual plurality, in which expression of prejudice or bigotry have no place, and thus must be forcefully repudiated by television's institutional bodies (in this case ITV) if and when they occur.

It is important to emphasise, however, that this repudiation of prejudice has not been distributed equally to all LGBT identities across the first and second decades of the twenty-first century. For example, whilst homophobia was clearly demarcated beyond the pale in the mid to late 2000s, in *Big Brother* 2006, cisgender participant Nikki Graeme referred to transgender Sam Brodie as a 'he-she', a 'ladyboy' and a 'man-beast', without censure from *Big Brother*. This reflects the time-lag in cultural awareness of transgender issues in the UK in comparison to, for example, gay rights, and the extent to which notions of what precisely constitutes homophobia or transphobia are culturally and discursively constructed in highly contested, unstable and uneven fashion.

Out-and-proud queers and role model rhetoric

Narratives of emotional and existential transformation have been the central frame of queer visibility in British reality TV since the millennium. As I argued in Chapter Three, contemporary popular culture's investment in the affective and existential rewards of 'finding' and 'being' one's authentic self, has worked to shape and consolidate normative notions of coming out as the realisation of an inner 'truth' of personhood. In the narratives of gay reality TV participants, this

discursive process has been visibly literalised. Yet, whilst reality programming remain key spaces of queer representation, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, this existential 'journey' trope has become far less pervasive, in the case of gay participants at least. This diminishing of the paradigmatic coming out teleology in British reality TV is consonant with a broader shift in queer media visibility in the 2010s, where coming out has substantially receded as defining narrative of gay existence. As Walters (2014: 63) has claimed in an American context, in our interactions with media representations, contemporary consumers, 'are largely presented with a world of already-out gays whose coming out is either in the past or fairly inconsequential.' According to this new narrative, gay people do not need to come out as such. In a social terrain and political context of purported acceptance and equality, there is no longer stigma to being gay, and thus no need to hide one's sexuality by remaining in the closet, or labouring its emergence in lengthy processes of coming out.

It is certainly true that reality televisual representations of LGBT identity in the 2010s are the product of a very different social and political landscape from those broadcast a decade prior. As the sociologist Mark McCormack (2012) has argued, in the 2010s, overt homophobia has all but disappeared from mainstream public discourses in the UK, where being explicitly anti-gay is largely considered a backward and anachronistic, minority viewpoint. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, via media representations and legislative reform, certain, select visions of LGBT identity have become discursively reconstituted as relatively normalised features of British social life. In this context, an emergent archetype of contemporary gay identity has come to circulate within popular representations: the young gay person who maintains a totally unproblematic relationship with their own sexuality. Whilst their gay identity renders them different to their heterosexual friends and family, it does not divide them from this social and familial network. They are firmly embedded within a community who love and accept them, where the fact of their being gay is really no big deal.

As such, in popular culture, what we might call a 'post-gay' sensibility has come to circulate, in which gay people's fundamental difference to the heterosexual majority extends only to their sexual attraction to members of the same sex. In this framework, sexual orientation is construed as a defining facet of the self, a deep and ontological essence of being, yet it is at the same time stripped of any meaningful social or political significance. For a number of different reasons,

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reality television has become a prime space for the representation of this new archetype of emotionally unencumbered queerness. In the 2010s, gay reality TV stars have become exemplars of contemporary out-ness, unencumbered by shame, sadness or misery, and happily proclaiming their gay identities within the public sphere. Lucy Spraggan's apparent agency to 'resist' the impetus of manufacture during her time on *The X Factor*, for example, was positioned as emanating from her confident and unapologetic embracing of her non-normative sexuality, at the same time that her need to state this oppositionality emphasises the extent to which her sexuality remained outside the norm. She claimed, 'I've always been out [as gay], I was never really 'in'' (McGarry, 2012). Mark Byron of *Big Brother* 2014 is also paradigmatic in this regard. Whilst the gay participants of a decade before were beset by ontological insecurity and unease concerning their gay identities, Mark's major concerns centred only upon the surface and superficial level of his physical appearance. He stated:

> My biggest insecurity's obviously about me hair, me eyebrows, me teeth, me tan and me outfit, and also staying slim as well. All those things are huge to me. Before coming in though, the major thing was like debating whether to come in or not was because I thought, how am I gonna keep up with all these things? But I have faced them head on and I feel better for it.

The notion of 'facing feelings head on' clearly echoes Craig and Nadia's narratives analysed above. Yet, here the trope of transformation is dis-attached from any sense of deep and ontological turmoil, and situated in bodily adornment.

However, as I have argued, reality television offers a far more nuanced perspective upon contemporary gay life than simply suggesting that day-to-day experiences of gay people are now totally free from prejudice and feelings of marginalization. Whilst other 'post' identity contexts (e.g. post-feminism, post-race) have been discussed as being based upon the 'belief that our society has reached a moment in which we are living out our lives on a level playing field' (Vavrus, 2010: 222), the 'post-gay' rhetoric acknowledges that gay people do continue to suffer various kinds of marginalisation predicated upon their non-normative sexualities, even at a moment of apparent equality and acceptance for sexual minorities. Yet, as articulated in reality

TV, post-gay discourses maintain that gay people must take it upon themselves to acquire the psychological tools and emotional and mental disposition to 'deal' with these experiences.

Alongside more traditional forms of reality TV, such as *Big Brother*, structured reality shows, such as *The Only Way is Essex*, have also come to stand as prime representational spaces for this new archetype of self-loving, ever-out queerness. One of the recurring cast-members of *The Only Way is Essex* is Harry Derbidge. Sixteen-years-old and openly gay, Harry embodies a highly recognisable typology of flamboyant and effeminate male homosexuality which, as noted previously, has a lengthy history in British popular culture. Harry is represented as firmly embedded as a valued member of the show's cast, which, descending generically from soap opera, comprises a purportedly real-life group of extended families, friends and acquaintances.

Figures 22-25: Harry enters his birthday party in *The Only Way is Essex* (2011).

During an episode in Series Two, the whole cast gathered for a fancy-dress party to celebrate Harry's birthday. Much like the show as a whole, the birthday party scenes were framed as an exaggerated celebration of a camp sensibility: ironic and over-the-top, revelling in 'tackiness' and gaudy excess (Woods, 2012). Emerging from a bright pink limousine, Harry entered the party dressed as the pop star Lady Gaga (a self-styled gay icon), wearing a blue leotard, long blonde wig, and lipstick, sitting on a chaise lounge, carried by four muscular, topless men, to a

soundtrack of Lady Gaga's song 'Boys, Boys, Boys'. As he was carried into the venue, shots of Harry smiling and laughing were intercut with shots of his assembled relatives and friends lining the way, clapping and cheering. Appropriating a soap opera aesthetic, the use of mid-shots for this cross-cutting evoked an atmosphere of closeness and intimacy, whilst the relatively fast editing (in comparison to the shows usual style) attributed this sequence a sense of dynamism, symbolically immersing Harry within the cast collective via the scene's technological assemblage (Figures 22-25).

Further, in their extra-textual circulation, numerous other cast-members have articulated their love for Harry and their admiration for his 'bravery' in being open and confident about his gay sexuality. For example, in the (ghost-written) autobiography of Harry's onscreen 'best friend' Sam Faiers, Harry is described as follows:

> Harry is Amy [Childs, another cast-member]'s cousin, but I have known him since he was six, when he would come to family meals, and even then it was obvious he was gay - Amy was always putting shoes and makeup on him and doing him up like a doll [...] He confronted and dealt with the fact that he was gay really well. I think his family - especially his mum Karen, who is lovely - gave him loads of support. He was openly gay through school, and his attitude was: 'This is who I am, I can't help being this way, deal with it.' And I think that because he was so brave and not worried about what other people thought, he didn't get any hassle. What you see is what you get with Harry' (Faiers, 2012: 6).

Clearly there is much to critique in this passage's essentialisation of an affinity between gay male identity and feminine-coded consumption practises. What is most significant for my argument in this chapter, however, is how, much like other queer reality participants analysed in this thesis, such as Biggins and Kemal, Harry's proclivity for camp theatricality is configured as the ultimate ratification of an authentic and essential gay identity. Harry is constructed as an idealised model of contemporary gay subjectivity, someone who has unapologetically embraced his minority identity as integral to his sense of self. His unproblematic relationship with his own sexuality is positioned as the reason Harry doesn't 'get any hassle'. Harry is represented to have channelled his awareness of his sexual minority status into a joyful and proud persona, who, as

his birthday party entrance make clear, proudly wears his sexual non-normativity on his sleeve. This is in turn suggested to have enabled his harmonious embedding within his social milieu.

However, whilst, on an aesthetic level, structured reality is very different from earlier incarnations of reality programming such as *Big* Brother, in the context of my argument here, structured reality's similar erasure of easy distinctions between fact and fiction, reality and contrivance, again renders a reading of the shows as a straightforward celebration of the new-found integration of LGBT people within British society problematic. Described by one of its creators as a 'living soap' (Faragher, 2011), *The Only Way is Essex* engages in a tone of camp reflexivity, and a deliberately awkward and ironic mode of address, which revels in the comedic value in the bringing together of semi-scripted action sequences, and the apparent emotional authenticity of the 'real life' characters (Woods, 2012).

The show's construction of a social milieu in which, as a young gay person, Harry is warmly integrated and accepted, is openly acknowledged as semi-fantastical within the text itself, and in interviews Harry has acknowledged that this idealised portrait of gay life does not correspond to the lived reality of many gay and lesbian people in the non-mediated world. Structured reality's blurring of fact and fiction thus positions Harry in a complex manner: an authentic and 'real' person, who is in part situated on a mediated plane of fantasy and futurity. Moreover, in his extra-textual representations, Harry has been shown to have embraced a perceived obligation as an out-and-proud gay person in the media, to stand as a role model for young gay people whose situations may be less fortuitous than his own.

For example, in 2013, a series of videos were uploaded to the YouTube channel of the influential British gay rights lobbying group Stonewall, in which Harry was interviewed about being a 'young gay person in the limelight.' When asked to name his own gay role models, he answered, 'Any gay guy who is on telly, and is proud, and showing the world that they are gay, on telly representing themselves.' Later, when asked if he had experienced any homophobia, he stated:

> When I was at school I used to get the odd, 'oh, you're gay, you're gay'. Nothing serious, I just got, 'you're gay,' but it wasn't nice, it used to put me down a bit. I think when you get that kind of abuse it's horrible, but the more you hear it you get stronger and stronger,

and it helps a lot in life. So being gay has made me really strong, and I take a lot of things in life, which is good.

In this statement, Harry articulates a particular relationship to the self. He foregrounds the unashamed expression of one's authentic gay sexuality as reaping a variety of existential rewards. He is able to cope with experiences of prejudice and phobia because he is comfortable and confident in who he is on an ontological level. The cultivation of a deeply personal and internal harmony is evoked as the most effective means overcoming prejudice and phobia encountered in social and public contexts. In the interview, Harry is called upon to directly address 'other young gay people, who may want to come out, but perhaps don't feel confident to do so yet.' Harry is constructed as a paragon of happy and empowered queerness, positioned in explicit contradistinction to the hypothetical others he is encouraged to reach out to.

The inter-textual construction of Harry as a role model of young gay people offers a particularly literal and intensified rendition of the broader role of celebrity in demarcating socially legitimised forms of marginal identity. Writing in the context of Dutch-Moroccan celebrities, Joke Hermes and Jaap Kooijman (2016: 494) have argued that the discursive construction of role models can function not only as a tool of aspiration, but as 'a form of discipline by example,' in which the role model figure comes to embody the kinds of minority identity deemed 'acceptable' for integration within the status quo. As Walters has noted in relation to the American media, the proliferating popular representations of jovial and confident young gay people, compete with a starkly contrasting discursive register, in which gay youth a posited as 'inherently in crisis, always on the brink of abuse or self-annihilation […] the suicidal (or harassed or bullied or murdered) gay teen as a public figure of pathos (2012: 254-255). In the UK, a widely publicised report by the charity Metro in 2014 claimed that 52 percent of LGBT people aged 16 to 24 had self-harmed, whilst 44 percent had admitted to considering suicide (METRO Youth Chances, 2014). The gay celebrity role model thus addresses, and works to reconcile, each of these representational frames, offering a means of transforming the latter: the crisis-ridden, anguished or suicidal gay, into the former: the happy and content, out-and-proud gay subject.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the crucial role of collective, public acceptance in the reality television narratives I have interrogated above, they are ultimately tales of *self*-discovery and *self*-acceptance. Alongside reality television's apparent ability to signify a public acceptance of queer people, as they are voted to progress in, and often win, their respective competitions, the ability for queers to discover 'who you are' and, most profoundly, to learn to accept and love this authentic vision of selfhood, enabled by the therapeutic conventions of reality TV, are positioned as the most effective means of overcoming external forces of oppression and denigration.

As the examples above demonstrate, reality television has stood as a mediated site at which the emotional outcomes of queer peoples' marginalisation within heteronormative society have been articulated. However, reality TV is not simply a repository for the bad feelings, but a productive space in which negative affectivity is worked through, cognised, and transformed into happiness and pride. In undergoing this process, LGBT people become potent symbols for the existential rewards of 'knowing' and 'accepting' one's authentic self. If the exclusionary practises of heteronormative social structures are critiqued within these narratives as forms of cultural violence, the effects of systemic homophobia are reduced to a state of feeling, which must be overcome through highly individualised practices of working upon the emotional fabric of the self. The queer person's relationship to the society which has abjected them is subsumed into the seemingly more important relationship which the queer person has with their own self. In this discursive process, emotional suffering is constructed as an unavoidable facet of modern queer life, part-and-parcel of what it means to be an LGBT person in twenty-first century Britain. The means for resolution of this suffering is located firmly within the psyche of the individual queer, and self-acceptance is construed as a means of ameliorating feelings of oppression and marginalisation, the social origin of which remains uncritiqued and unchallenged.

Reality television is thus a clear example of the ways in which ideals of sexual normativity and difference are produced within a neoliberal conjuncture in which social and political problems are frequently recast as individual pathologies. The state of one's emotions becomes both the cause of ill feeling and, at the same time, the means through which these feelings can be resolved (Freudi, 2004; Woodstock, 2014). In reality television, LGBT people have become exemplars of

this cultural mandate. For LGBT people, participation in reality TV has been configured as an existential teleology from shame and isolation to happiness and pride. Becoming emotionally aware, thinking and talking through feelings and emotions have been recurrently positioned as the routes of affective harmony and ontological stabilisation. Self-acceptance thus becomes a moral imperative for the contemporary queer subject, and reality television celebrities have stood as embodiments of 'successful' sexual minority citizenship: LGBT people who have embraced their minority statuses and proudly express their non-normativity within the public sphere.

In this way, homophobia, as it is embedded into the structural fabric of day-to-day life is taken into account, transposed from a structural and political regime of cultural violence, into personal neuroses, which must be negotiated in highly personal processes of therapeutic self-actualisation. Somewhat paradoxically, whilst realty television in some ways acknowledges that participants' emotionally difficult experiences of growing up queer are attributable to a social *cause*, the potential resolution of this emotional unrest through social or political transformation is unarticulated within the parameters of these narratives. As such, my conclusion here converges in some ways with critiques of reality TV as de-politicising, whilst I would nonetheless maintain that reality TV remains deeply political in relation to the cultural politics of self and identity. The social structures which the narratives I have interrogated here appear to critique are reified and perpetuated, their effects construed as symptomatic not of the ways in which subjectivity is shaped through the grids of heterosexist power, but of an individualised relationship to the self. In this way, British reality programming has done potent cultural work in shaping and circulating normative ideals of what it means to be LGBT in twenty-first century Britain, constructing as normative, acceptable or desirable the queer person who is able to go forth into a productive social role, themselves transformed, within a homophobic and transphobic sociality which remains unchanged.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to investigate and interrogate the discourses which have structured the representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities in British reality television programming between the years 2000 and 2014. This project speaks to the media's broader role as one of the central, if not *the* central, frames through which individuals come to understand and make sense of their identities, those of others, and the world which they inhabit. Media do not simply 'reflect' or 'distort' a social field which already exists, *a priori*, outside the parameters of media texts, but are involved, to quote Stuart Hall (1992: 23), in 'the active labour of making things mean.' This is not to suggest that social life is reducible to discourses and representations, but to assert the crucial position of the media in producing and circulating discursive frameworks through which individuals come to make sense of their social reality. As one of the most consistent and wide-reaching representational spaces of LGBT visibility in the twenty-first century, I have argued that reality television and reality TV celebrity have been instrumental in sculpting and delineating a series of normative epistemologies of what it means to occupy a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender subject position in the contemporary moment. As such, this thesis has sat firmly at the intersection of media studies and gender/sexuality/queer studies, and has brought together post-structuralist conceptions sexuality, gender and subjectivity as enabled, forged and articulated in and through 'institutional, material and discursive lines' (Probyn, 1993: 4), with media and cultural studies theories around the role and power of media in 'shaping' the meanings of social life (Couldry, 2000).

This thesis has therefore contributed both to scholarly understandings of the role of reality television and celebrity culture in the formation of self and collective identity in the twenty-first century; and to scholarly understandings of the ways in which epistemologies of sexual normativity and difference take shape in and through popular culture. In particular, unlike most previous academic work on LGBT visibility in reality TV, this thesis has sought to take seriously reality TV *as a form*, and has interrogated the roles of the specific tropes, conventions and norms of reality television and reality TV celebrity itself in enabling and delimiting the ways in which LGBT identities have become legible through the inter-textual spaces of reality television fame.

Acceptance, humanity and commodification

The overarching discourse which I have identified in relation to queer identities in UK reality TV has been the notion of acceptance. In the texts that I have analysed, discourses of acceptance have operated along a dual axis, encompassing both the apparent ability for reality TV to effect social acceptance of sexual diversity in twenty-first century Britain, as well as the *self-* acceptance purportedly enabled by the involvement of LGBT people in reality TV.

In terms of social acceptance, the generic tropes of reality programming – emotionality, authenticity and confession – have worked to represent LGBT participants through a framework of transcendental humanity. In reality TV, the ability for sexual minority participants to articulate themselves through a lexicon of emotion and authenticity has worked, on a semiotic and discursive level at least, to augment the parameters of 'human' subjectivity, and reposition some, select models of LGBT life as recognised and 'acceptable' human subjects. As such, the findings of this thesis point towards the inextricable position of reality TV in a broader set of social, cultural and political processes which have discursively re-located LGBT people as apparently validated, legitimated and recognised subjects within the British national polity in the twenty-first century, which culminated in the passing into law of same-sex marriage rights in 2013 (with the first gay marriages taking place in 2014). As the British sociologist Mark McCormack (2012: xxi) has stated, 'Gay rights are now seen as human rights, and the visibility of gay and lesbian identities in wider culture is high: lesbians and gay men are now commonplace on television shows, and they are well-represented in the broader media.' In this statement, McCormack appears to draw together the trajectory of LGBT rights reform which has traversed the first and extended into the second decades of the twenty-first century, with the increasing visibility of sexual minority identities in popular culture. As not only one of the most prolific spaces of LGBT representation in the British media, but as a domain of representation which has explicitly foregrounded the notion of humanity in relation to LGBT subjectivities, this thesis has contended that reality TV has been instrumental in this process of recognising (some) sexual minority identities under the banner of human subjectivity.

Indeed, as I have explored within this thesis, the discourses of acceptance which have repeatedly structured the visibility of LGBT reality TV celebrities have often been articulated in explicitly nationalised terms. In these representations, the expanding contours of belonging within the

twenty-first century British national imaginary have been fused with the shifting definitions of public and private – what kinds of behaviour and identity are deemed 'suitable' for public articulation – played out across reality TV as a cultural form. Sexual minority reality TV celebrities have therefore been lightning rods for a range of broader social, cultural and political concerns around the transforming parameters of the public and the private, national belonging, and sexual normativity and difference, which have traversed the first and into the second decades of the twenty-first century.

At the same time, this thesis has argued against *reducing* sexual minority representations in reality TV to simply a visible platform upon which political, discursive and ideological processes generated in other, separate domains of British social and political life are publicly played out. The visibility of LGBT people in the inter-textual spaces of reality television celebrity is, foremost and primarily, shaped by the commercial imperatives and generic, aesthetic and technological tropes of these media forms themselves. Writing in an American context, Katherine Sender (2014) has argued that mainstream media texts, such as reality TV, offer queer identities a highly limited frame of visibility, in which sexual minority identities are neatly packed into a heteronormatively-palatable commodity which does not challenge or transgress established, heterosexist modes for making sense of self and subjectivity. In a similar way, this thesis has interrogated how far the ability for LGBT people to attain recognition and 'acceptance' through reality TV has been contingent upon their ability to 'fit' within the established commercial demands and epistemological claims bound to the representational spaces of reality TV celebrity.

In particular, I have argued that queer identities are highly reconcilable with the mandate that reality TV celebrities maintain a status of ordinary-extraordinariness through their mediations. As I have explored, reality celebrities are expected to remain true to an essential 'truth' of their selfhood which, at the same time, must be suitably telegenic, entertaining and stimulating for consumers. This thesis has argued that what have become common-sense ideals of LGBT subjectivity – the notion of being gay or transgender as the expression of an ontological, authentic self – converges almost seamlessly with the reality televisual mandate to authenticity and 'being yourself.' Simultaneously, in not being heterosexual, queer reality stars offer a mode of subjectivity which diverges from the default subject position offered to viewers of mass-media

texts which, in its claim to universality is inherently coded as heterosexual and cisgender. LGBT reality TV celebrities have in many ways circulated as exemplary reality TV stars, offering performances of selfhood which are at once different and the same, ordinary and extraordinary in relation to paradigms of heteronormative, cisgendered subjectivity addressed by default to viewers of mainstream, mass-appeal media texts (Halberstam, 2005; Sender, 2014).

As such, LGBT reality TV participants have become visible through a highly complex, ambivalent and contradictory representational frame. Whilst these representations *have* discursively expanded the parameters of the human to encompass some non-heterosexual subjectivities, at the same time they have also reproduced the normativity of heterosexuality. In couching queer identities in markers of both sameness *and* difference, reality TV has been a core agent for the reification of ambivalent *normalised non-normativity* of LGBT life in twenty-first century Britain, whereby (some) sexual minority identities have become constituted as recognisable features of contemporary cultural life, at the same time that these identities remain distinctly outside the heterosexual norm. For all its claims to engendering the social and self-acceptance of LGBT people, this thesis has shown that British reality TV has ultimately done little to fundamentally challenge the taken-for-granted normativity of heterosexuality as the structuring principle of social and cultural life.

LGBT identity and format differentials

Whilst the stated focus of this thesis has been representations of LGBT identities in British reality television, a core finding of my research is that these different categories of queer subjectivity (the 'L,' the 'G,'the 'B' and the 'T') have been visible in a highly uneven and unequal manner. Broadly, in relation the LGBT taxonomy, British reality TV has represented mostly gay men, a series of highly visible transgender women, one transgender man, and the occasional lesbian. Bisexuality has occupied a particularly complex position: in *Big Brother* several participants across the years (almost all of them female) have claimed to identify as bisexual (by stating this in their introductory VTs, for example), but discussions of bisexuality itself or explicit reflections and representations of bisexual life have been almost non-existent. This is congruent with broader scholarly arguments around 'bisexual erasure' in contemporary cultural life, where the increasing visibility of homosexuality has produced a binary of

heterosexual and homosexual as the normative means of understanding human sexuality, with little room for flexibility or fluidity between these terms (Yoshino, 2000).

Two example exceptions to reality TV's bisexual erasure include a scene in *Big Brother* 2001 where two female housemates (Amma and Elizabeth) discussed their experiences of kissing other women, and an extended sequence in the 2005 series where, after a night of alcohol, two female housemates (Makosi and Orlaith) were shown passionately kissing in the hot tub, after which Makosi had sex (also in the hot tub) with the series' eventual winner, Anthony (a heterosexual man), later claiming to be pregnant with his child. Both of these examples, I would argue, align with a wider trend of 'queer chic' in early to mid-2000s British popular culture, where images of female-female intimacy attained widespread commercial appeal (particularly in advertising), which has been discussed as a mass-market iteration of the heterosexist fetishisation of 'lesbian' sexuality (Gill, 2007) .

Overall, however, a central conclusion of this thesis is that gay men and transgender women have been the most recurrently visible formations of queer identity in British reality TV because these identities are the most readily reconcilable and commodifiable in relation to the established tropes and conventions of reality TV celebrity, and in relation to (hetero)normative frameworks of knowledge more broadly. As such, reality television celebrity has offered both an enabling and delimiting framework for LGBT visibility, proffering an index of 'acceptable' queer identities, in which some modes of queerness – particular kinds of gay male and transgender female identity most prominently – have become discursively consolidated as more 'appropriate' or 'suitable' for mainstream media visibility than other modalities of non-heterosexual life.

Format differentials have been crucial to this process of selective legitimation of LGBT subjectivities. Largely due to its public service heritage and explicit mission to offer visibility to a diverse range of identities traditionally peripheral to the public sphere, *Big Brother* has provided the most varied representations of queer identities. At the same time, as I have explored throughout this thesis, the narratives through which these different queer participants have been represented have worked to privilege the experiences of those whose identities speak most clearly to the generic conventions of the form, and the wider epistemological frameworks to which these norms are bound. This has been particularly evident in relation to the concept of authenticity, where queer participants who have articulated their selfhoods in line with the

broader neoliberal mandate to 'authentic' self-realisation and self-expression have received the most favourable representations in both the shows themselves and extra-textual commentary, and have thus attained the most long-lasting celebrity status.

Reality pop formats, like *Pop Idol, Fame Academy* and *The X Factor* have been less diverse in their representations of LGBT people. This, I have argued, pertains to these format's commercial strategy and epistemic claim to speak to a prime-time, 'family' audience, which is normatively construed as heterosexual. The more rigid heteronormativity of these texts (in comparison to *Big Brother*, for example) have meant that non-heterosexual identities have largely extended to camp, 'entertaining' spectacles of gay masculinity and gay participants who are represented as heterosexual within the shows themselves. The reality pop formats have provided a limited representational space to lesbian identities, where the apparent lack of conventional 'fit' between these contestants and the traditional reliance of the popular music industry on the apparent heterosexual availability of female performers, has been mobilised as discursive carriers of the claims to democracy, interactivity and audience agency integral to reality pop formats.

The most limited reality sub-type of all is the structured reality show, as epitomised by *The Only Way is Essex*. These shows have represented the camp, effeminate gay man as a normalised feature of female-coded friendships and leisure cultures, whilst the narrative structuring of these shows around heterosexual relationships has meant that gay-identifying participants who do not align with the stereotypical camp mould have had to leave shows in order to publicly come out.

Reality TV and the production of normative narratives of LGBT life

Another core conclusion of this thesis is that inter-textual spaces of British reality television celebrity have been *productive* representational spaces, in the sense that the media circulation of LGBT reality stars has worked to produce and delineate a series of normative ideals of contemporary queer life and identity. Crucially, these discourses have been shaped by discursive, aesthetic and technological tropes and conventions of reality TV celebrity. Most prolifically, UK reality TV has reproduced the idea of gay sexuality as the essential core of gay and lesbian people's 'authentic' selves, and has worked to reify the 'wrong body discourse' – the notion of an ontological gendered core located within a mismatched corporeality - as the normative understanding of transgender subjectivity in the twenty-first century. Both of these

epistemologies of contemporary gay and transgender life speak clearly to reality television celebrity's investment in the concept of the authentic self.

In this way, the representations of queer sexuality I have interrogated within this thesis are not only important in and of themselves as particularly visible incarnations of LGBT identity. They are also important artefacts of gay and transgender historiography, because they *literalise* the extent to which a broader twenty-first century zeitgeist of authenticity, as this relates to selfhood, celebrity and the body and which is epitomised by reality TV and the celebrities it produces, have functioned as some of the central 'conditions of possibility' (Hennessey, 2000), which have enabled these normative discourses of gay and transgender life as the making tangible of an authentic inner self to take hold within the popular cultural imaginary.

As part of its production of norms of non-heterosexual subjectivity, reality TV celebrity, and the rubric of authenticity to which it is bound, have also circulated as an index of 'acceptable' queerness. As I stated above, queer participants who have troubled the scripts of authenticity upon which reality celebrity is forged have been designated as 'bad' or 'inappropriate' (non)subjects, undeserving of celebrity status. This representational trend has taken a historical relationship between queer life and culture and various anti-essentialist modes of self, such as drag and camp (which have been written about at length by queer studies scholars, e.g. Newton, 1972; Meyer, 1994; Butler, 1999 [1990]), and refracted this relationship through the morally-inflected lens of authentic self-expression which permeates reality TV. In this way, reality TV has worked to divorce contemporary queer life from cultural history of anti-essentialist performance by valorising 'good' queer subjects as those whose identities cohere with the form's mandate to authentic self-representation.

Through my analysis of these kinds of discursive processes, this thesis has also made an important contribution to scholarly understandings of the ways in which non-heterosexual subject positions are produced through the ideologies of neoliberalism. In its transformation from political-economic rationality to one which structures individuals' very senses of self, neoliberal culture has exhibited an intense investment in the concept of authenticity. The neoliberal valorisation of authenticity, self-realisation and emotional literacy has worked recast social and political problems as individualised pathologies which individuals must navigate through personal processes of emotional work and self-definition. In many of its representations of

LGBT people, UK reality TV has fused ideals of self and social acceptance, proffering a particular relationship with the self, defined by authenticity, self-realisation and pride, as a conduit to social acceptance, in a way that does not fundamentally challenge the defaultness of heteronormativity. According to reality TV, contemporary queer subjects must take it upon themselves to 'deal' with their marginalisation in a way that is highly individualised, an ideology which leaves opaque and uncritiqued the fundamental normativity of heterosexuality as the structuring principal of sexuality, selfhood and social life.

Perhaps strikingly, it is important to note how little the discourses I have interrogated in this thesis changed between 2000 and 2014. This fourteen year period saw seismic changes in the cultural visibility and civic status of LGBT people in British society, yet reality TV appears to have been somehow 'ahead' of these changes, rather than simply responding to them. This is particularly so of *Big Brother* on Channel Four which, under its public service remit, sought to offer a vision of a sexually diverse and pluralistic Britain on the horizon of social reality, rather than 'reflect' the reality as it was perceived to be. Moreover, the epistemologies of queer life which reality worked to consolidate, such as the gay authenticity discourse and the transgender wrong body trope, became ever-more consecrated as the normative understandings of gay and transgender subjectivity between 2000 and 2014. Reality TV, as a media domain in which the ideals of authenticity and self-revelation have always possessed high currency, has, since its earliest years, functioned as a central frame for enabling the rise to normativity of these discourses. What did change, as discussed in Chapter Five, was the increasing visibility of queer participants who have no issues with their sexualities, particularly young queers who have come of age in an era in which certain kinds of LGBT visibility are highly normalised (though certainly not *normative*) features of popular culture. Additionally, in consonance with the augmenting public awareness of LGBT issues across politics, activism, culture and media since 2000, today it is hard to image the press vilifying a queer reality participants as viciously as they did figures like Kitten Pinder in 2004 or Sam Brodie in 2006. That said, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, queer reality stars, particularly transgender stars, continue to circulate through discourses of aberrant femininity and deprecating humour. Whilst the semantics may be gentler, the discourses in which they are framed have altered little.

Limits of the thesis

Having outlined the various findings, scholarly contributions and conceptual implications of this thesis, I must now acknowledge that there are also potentially important questions around the relationships between LGBT identities and reality television which this thesis has not been able to answer. This is primarily due to my text-based methodology. Centrally here is the issue of audiences; how far the visibility of sexual minorities in reality TV has, or has not, changed (or reaffirmed) the ways in which actual media consumers think about sexual normativity and difference. In addition, this thesis cannot shed any definitive light upon how LGBT-identifying people themselves might relate to the representations of queer subjectivity circulated through reality TV, and how these consumers might use these representations in forging their own sense of self as outside the heterosexual norm. Indeed, in celebrity studies, and media and cultural studies more broadly, the question of how queer people respond and make use of media representations of openly and explicitly queer figures has been a largely neglected area of analysis. Whilst there is a long tradition in queer studies of culture in analysing queer reading practises and the appropriation and re-using of cultural texts by queer consumers, this work was mostly a product of cultural periods of relative invisibility for queer identities in mainstream media, and so engaged with queer readings/uses of texts and figures which are, on the surface, heterosexual. Most influential in this tradition is Alexander Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993), as well as smaller studies like Richard Dyer's (1986) study of gay fandom of Judy Garland. The investment of this work in queer media consumption, and how queer people use media to construct and articulate their identities, has only very recently begun to travel into the contemporary moment, where LGBT identities are widely visible across the media. An emerging body of research, mostly drawing upon online discussions and responses, has begun to assess the uses and responses of queer consumer to explicitly queer representations in mainstream media (e.g. Gray, 2009), including queer celebrities (e.g. Brennan, 2016). This thesis contributes to this emerging scholarship in pointing to this as an important area for future study.

Continuities and changes since 2014

During the writing-up stage of this thesis in mid-2016, I began to be struck by feelings, perhaps common amongst PhD students, of a kind of researcher's fatigue. Having spent the best part of three years watching and analysing hours upon hours of reality TV, and reading vast numbers of

newspaper, magazine and online articles and features about LGBT reality stars from across the twenty-first century, I couldn't help but wonder (in the famous words of Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*) if any of this really mattered. Did other people read these texts in the same way that I have? Do they really possess the cultural importance which I think they do? Of course, the answers to these kinds of questions are subjective, but around the middle of 2016, a number things occurred which felt, to me at least, to validate the importance of this research and the discourses which I have identified, analysed and interrogated within this thesis.

Firstly, I stumbled across an article on the *Huffington Post* online news site entitled 'How 'Big Brother' Brought Queer Culture to the Nation's Living Rooms' (Welsh, 2016), published as part of the site's 'Loud & Proud' series, which sought to 'celebrat[e] how LGBT culture has influence and, in turn, been embraced by all fields of entertainment.' In the article, the journalist Daniel Welsh detailed a history of iconic, queer *Big Brother* contestants, from Brian Dowling to 2001, through Nadia Almada in 2004, Kemal Shahin in 2005, and culminating in an interview with Luke Anderson, the transgender male winner of the show in 2012, arguing that these representations have been crucial to the ways in which mainstream audiences have come to understand sexual minority identities in twenty-first century Britain. In addition, I also observed that many of the discourses which I had been engaging with in this thesis in relation to UK reality TV had begun to very visibly migrate to a North American context, particularly through the emergent circulation of transgender reality TV celebrities like Caitlyn Jenner and Jazz Jennings and their respective shows *I Am Cait* (E!, 2015-) and *I Am Jazz* (TLC, 2015-). Much like the figures I have analysed here, Jennings and Jenner have both been framed in discourses of acceptance, which have been tied explicitly to their status as reality television stars. To quote two journalistic commentaries of Jazz Jennings: 'What an important icon Jazz Jennings is for teenage girls, as a teenager who has become famous by being herself' (Blanchard, 2016), and:

> *I Am Jazz* plays less like advocacy and more like the approachable, if stagey, family-reality hybrids cable has made a staple. Reality shows like these [...] introduce the [...] audience to virtual neighbors many of them don't have in real life (Villarreal, 2015).

In this commentary, the emphasis upon emotionality, authenticity, intimacy and domesticity which characterises reality television, where these transgender people become famous for simply 'being themselves,' are endowed with a subjectifying function, purportedly enabling cisgender

audiences to experience transgender identity though a framework of transcendental humanity rather than as a signifier of otherness. This discourse echoes my arguments in relation to UK reality programming in Chapter Two. At the same time, the celebrity images of Jenner and Jennings' are structured by narratives which centralise the challenges and difficulties (as well as the freedoms and joys) of living outside the norm. In consonance with the conclusions I have made in this thesis, here, queer reality TV celebrities again occupy a complex representational frame, ordinary but extraordinary, same but different.

Moreover, one of my central arguments in Chapter Four of this thesis - that the 'wrong body' discourse of transgender life has become consolidated as the normative understanding of trans identity because it makes sense in relation to a broader media culture which privileges working on the body as the route to authenticity – has been played out almost completely in the circulation of Caitlyn Jenner. A photo-shoot in *Vanity Fair* magazine, through which she 'introduced' her female identity to the public, mobilised a self-referential aesthetic which positioned both the corporeal construction of the transgender body, and its textual mediation, as a means of revealing the authentic self (see Lovelock, 2016 for further discussion of this). *I Am Cait* has extended this representational frame, employing sequences of Jenner constructing her female corporeality: picking out outfits and having her hair styled and make-up applied as a recurrent motif.

This said, I do not wish to collapse the differences in national context between these newer, US representations and the British reality TV celebrities I have analysed in this thesis. Over the course of producing this thesis, when I have presented my research at conferences and research seminars, other delegates and audience members have often discussed in the Q&A, or approached me afterwards, to share, examples of LGBT reality stars from their own national contexts (Germany, Greece, Spain and Australia, amongst others), cases against which my UK-centred analysis bore both continuities and divergences. As such, I would conclude that the representational tropes I have interrogated in this thesis do have transnational relevance (not least because many reality TV formats circulate globally), at the same time that they are also inextricably shaped by and bound their specific national contexts of production and distribution.

In a UK context, many of the discourses which I have identified and analysed in this thesis have continued to structure the visibility of LGBT identities in reality television. As I finished writing

this thesis in July 2016, almost each new series of a reality show seemed to bring forth more case studies which cohered with the arguments I have made here, and at times diverged from them in intriguing ways.

For example, in his introductory VT broadcast on the opening night of *Big Brother* 2015, a young gay male participant, Aaron Frew, articulated his desire to appear on the show as a means of revealing his authentic gay self to his family, in a way that echoed the inter-textual commentary upon Brian Dowling's *Big Brother* appearance over a decade prior, in 2001 (discussed in Chapter Three). The VT began with Aaron seemingly self-consciously playing up to the popular stereotype of reality TV participants as fame-hungry attention-seekers, stating that he liked to walk down the street 'like it's a catwalk,' and describing himself as a 'seflie king.' He then undercut the fame-seeking connotations of these remarks by drawing upon the notion that reality TV visibility can harbour a more profound significance for non-heterosexual subjects. He claimed, 'I applied to *Big Brother* this year because I recently just came out to my mum, and I want to show my mum what I'm all about. I just want to make my mum proud.'[41] Again, as a domain of apparently authentic self-expression, reality TV was construed as an 'ideal' space for the mediation of gay subjectivities.

Simultaneously, since 2001 the increasing normalisation of (some forms of) gay identity in British culture has meant that the archetype of out-and-proud, emotionally-unencumbered queerness which I discussed in Chapter Five appears to be ever-more on the ascent. In *Big Brother* 2016 there were four gay male cast-members, none of whom were represented to have any emotional or existential issues with their sexualities. Two of these gay participants, Ryan and Huwie, openly engaged in a romantic relationship, holding hands, kissing and cuddling on camera which, unlike the *Big Brother* 2014 gay romance (discussed in Chapter Two), was not represented to induce any kind of anxiety or distress. Moreover, at one point in the 2016 series, as part of a reward for successfully completing task, one of the gay participants' boyfriend entered the house and made a marriage proposal to his housemate partner, Andy. The positive and excited reactions of the other housemates to the proposal cemented this articulation of gay love as valid and legitimate, behaving in arguably the same way they would in response to a heterosexual union. At the same time, this act which seemingly emblematises the acceptance and

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[41] In a controversial turn of events he was ejected from the house for sexually harassing a heterosexual male housemate whilst drunk.

equality of gay sexualities in contemporary British life became a catalyst for discussion and debate around sexual politics within the programme. Following Andy's proposal, Ryan and Huwie pretended that they too had gotten engaged. When this second proposal emerged as a prank, various conversations took place between the housemates around the appropriateness of the 'joke' considering the contentious political history of same-sex marriage. Talking with another housemate, Andy said:

> When I think about the people who have fought for generation to do what they've just done, you have to mean it. Be sincere. You don't just say it. They should not joke and not make a mockery of what people have fought for generations for.

Later, in the diary room, he added, 'My ring represents all of the people who've wanted to wear this ring before, and all of the people who want to wear it now, and they weren't or are not allowed, and that's why two boys playing a prank matters.' This direct linking of the interpersonal dynamics and relationships played out in reality TV to history of 'real life' political struggle for LGBT people - a situation which continues in many parts of the world today - exemplifies the continuing role of reality TV in providing a forum for the discussion, debate and playing out of issues of sexual politics, marginalisation, normativity and difference in the contemporary moment.

Figure 26: Sean Miley Moore auditions for *The X Factor* 2015

In addition, reality TV since 2014 has seen representations of queer life which mark a development of some the trends which endured between 2000 and 2014. In 2015, *The X Factor* featured a contestant called Sean Miley Moore, who marked the first time in the UK that a form of gender-queer self-presentation on a male-identified reality pop contestant had not been demarcated as a 'joke' or 'entertainment-value' figure (as discussed in Chapter Three). At his first audition, Sean wore a transparent mesh top, displaying his male-coded body, with an extravagant fur coat, PVC pencil skirt, high-heeled boots and a handbag. On his head he wore a masculine baseball cap below which dangled large hoop earrings, with his lips painted a dark red (Figure 26). This gender-ambiguous style of dressing carried on through his time on the show, which extended to the live finals. Whilst the show worked to 'fix' Sean's gender as the essential truth of his identity by placing him in the 'Boys' category,[42] following his first audition his genderqueer aesthetic was implicitly drawn upon by the judges as a signifier of his commercial viability, defined through authenticity, originality and 'fearlessness'. The judges' comments included praise for Sean as, 'Fearless, sharp, sassy' (Cheryl), being 'one hundred percent you' (Nick Grimshaw), having 'So much individuality' (Rita Ora), concluding with a comment from Simon Cowell that, 'I always wanted to find on this show an artist you can't compare with anybody else, who's got originality.' Rather than an absence of commerciality, in this case, his queerness was positioned as the location of Sean's authenticity, marking a hitherto unseen convergence between male(ish) genderqueer identity and reality pop's treatment of lesbian contestants, such as Alex Parks and Lucy Spraggan, whose musical integrity was perceived to reside in their sexualities (see Chapter Three). Despite his positive reception by the judges, Sean's presence on *The X Factor* did not open up a space for this kind of queer self-representation within popular music, however. He was eliminated in Week Two of the live shows, failing to garner enough viewer votes to remain in the competition, and did not attain any form of pop career after the show.

Alongside developments in LGBT representation in long-established formats like *The X Factor*, more emergent British reality shows, which post-date the timeframe of this thesis, have begun to offer different kinds of visibility for sexual minority identities. In 2015, the MTV programme *Geordie Shore* introduced its first non-heterosexual cast-member, a young gay man named

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[42] In *The X Factor* contestants are divided into four categories: Boys, Girls, Over 25s and Groups. Each category is mentored by a particular judge.

Nathan who, for the first time on British reality TV, was shown having sex with another man onscreen. In the same year, the show *Ex on the Beach* (also an MTV production), featured a bisexual female cast-member, Laura Summers, who openly discussed being born intersex, and her personal and medical process of being re-gendered as a woman. The fact that both of these programmes are made by and broadcast on MTV is significant. As a broadcaster which specifically targets a youth consumer demographic, through these kinds of representations, MTV reality texts have come to speak to, and themselves reproduce, a youth subject position for which particular kinds of queer visibility have become a highly normalised facet of popular culture. In June 2016, the network launched a pop-up channel called MTV Pride to coincide with the 2016 Pride events in London - 'The UK's very first pop channel inspired by, but not limited to, the LGBT+ community' – broadcasting 'pride' themed music videos, coming out stories and interviews from LGBT celebrities.[43]   As these examples, and other besides, demonstrate, the increasing embedding of queer identities within reality programming, and the framing of these identities through the reality TV conventions of authenticity, humanisation and emotional self-expression, suggest that the relationship between reality TV and queer subjectivities remains pronounced, and will continue to develop in dynamic, troubling and exciting directions.

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[43] http://www.mtv.co.uk/pride/news/mtv-pride-tv-snapchat-takeover

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