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MTV's Jersey Shore: An Educator on Interpersonal Relationships, Gender Roles and Embracing Manhood

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MTV's *Jersey Shore*: An Educator on Interpersonal Relationships, Gender Roles and Embracing Manhood

May 2012
Major: Communication Minor: English
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Spring 2012
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Abstract

Throughout the history of research in the media much has been said about the connection to social learning through television. With the rise of popular genre reality television, my findings proved a lack of previous research on reality television. By using Gerbners' cultivation theory and my own textual analysis of MTV's *Jersey Shore* season five, the following research provides direct messages from the show about gender norms, heteronormative relationships and women in the male gaze. This paper presents the audience with connecting past research on social learning through media to the messages that are being conveyed to our younger generations through reality television.

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Intro

It is easy to overlook the possible influences that can come from messages that television shows are sending. One can assume that society as a whole is capable of determining the difference between right and wrong. Just because one watches a certain program does not necessarily mean we would believe them as true or carry on the behavioral elements into our own lives. But with current growing genre of television that claims them as "reality"; it blurs the line for the audience between what is "real" and what is fiction. Past research provided proves that television can affect the audience in some way or another after a long span of watching. Reality television is no different. Contemporary reality television constructs a negative outlook on commitment and intimacy in relationships for younger viewers.

Literature Research

Evidence suggests that television is a "powerful transmitter of culture that teaches viewers about the norms, behaviors, and values required for effective participation in the larger, adult community" (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1987). It is our society's box of learning. We learn from our friends, loved ones, family and we learn from our television sets. Today, 8-18 year-olds devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes (7:38) to using entertainment media across a typical day (more than 53 hours a week). And because they spend so much of that time 'media multitasking' (using more than one medium at a time), they actually manage to pack a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes (10:45) worth of media content into those 7½ hours. By the age of 70 they will have spent 7 to 10 years of their lives watching TV (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2012). Arguments about the negative effects of new media have recurred throughout history (Buckingham, 1993, Lusted, 1985, Person, 1984). Such contemporary concerns can date back centuries ago; as far back as the 18th and 19th centuries when ancient Greek philosopher Plato, who proposed to ban the dramatic poets from his ideal republic on the grounds of their negative influence on impressionable young minds. (Swan, Meskill, DeMaio 1998). The Payne Fund Studies in the 1920s introduced the effect of mass media and its considerable influences on our behaviors. Campaigns against so called "horror"

comics in the 1950s and the anxieties about film and juvenile delinquency in the late 1920s. In each of these cases, adolescents are imagined to be vulnerable and impressionable, whose minds are more easily molded by the negative messages that have been seen to bombard and manipulate them. The genre of reality television began in the 1940s with Allen Funt's hidden camera *Candid Camera* show debuting in 1948 that portrayed people in unscripted situations. We can relate past television affects to current popular reality television. Reality TV has "targeted" young people by allowing them to explore the messages about sexual intimacy and commitment on one program, MTV's *Jersey Shore*.

Cultivation Theory

Most of what we know (or what we think we know) we never personally experiences ourselves. We live in a world where we listen to others experiences, collect them, and add them to our own knowledge of life. The magic of life is that we are able to unlock what is unknown to us by listening to stories, poetry, friends, science and the media. Stories are knowledge. But how these stories are being passed down is different from the past. It was once seen as a more personal and community based. Families sat around their radio sets to listen together and discuss stories or issues. Today these stories are mainly coming from our television sets. The media finds out what the viewers are watching the most and then make a run for their money. If there is the assumption that television messages have commonality and consistency to them, we then can possibly conclude that exposure to these messages over time are going to eventually mean something to the viewer. The rate of television viewing is drastically increasing; one can possibly assume that viewers could eventually pick up a thing or two about life over time.

This conceptualization of the role of TV in our lives is George Gerbners' *Cultivation Theory*. Cultivation analysis is the study of televisions independent contribution to viewers' conceptions of social reality. This theory argues that watching TV over time will be associated with holding a specific and distinct reality. Researchers conceive television as kind of a 'cultural river' in which everyone to some degree is carried along. And if cultivation resembles water, its substance is stories. This fluid and

smooth flow makes it much easier for the viewers to understand the message as well. Gerbner argues people who watch a large amount of television tended to think of the world as an intimidating and unforgiving place. Its persuasiveness presents mainstream culture simply and coherently, while requiring little process and learning (Gerbner, 1987). Heavy television watching is associated with the acceptance of the world of television drama to be factual heightened perceptions of environmental danger, and increased tendency to justify violence (Elliot, Slater, 409). In addition to violence, a variety of issues on beauty and sex are also cultivated through high television exposure. Gerbner once said, "You know who tells the stories of a culture really governs human behavior…it used to be the parent, the school, the church, the community. Now it's a handful of global conglomerates that have nothing to tell, but a great deal to sell". One could then possibly argue that media presents a portrayal of distorted reality. And television, due to its pervasiveness and organization of its messages, leaves the audience with a "commonality of outlooks and values (Gerbner, 1987)". We are an individualistic society united by the mass media and what they choose to present to us (mainstreaming). With mass media portraying a certain set of ideal values, morals and lessons to live by, it becomes easier for a younger person to find the television more comprehensive than their own guardians.

Television: The Easy Replacement of the Parent(s)

Television not only proves to be an easier way to obtain knowledge, but an embarrassment-free way for adolescents to receive sex education as well. All states either mandate or recommend some type of sex education for students, but few provide balanced information on safer sex and abstinence (Britton, deMauro, & Gambrell, 1992) In addition the information about which adolescents are most curious involves the interpersonal aspects of sexuality (Gilbert & Bailis, 1980). Parents often consider themselves resources for sexual information (E.J Roberts, Kline, & Gangon, 1978). Adolescents rated parents as their chief source of information about pregnancy and contraception (Louis Harris & Associates, 1986). Unfortunately, the scope and quality of parent to child discussions about sex is often limited, shallow, and infrequent. As adolescents slowly discover their own particular sexual interests, they learn the sexual

scripts provided to them by their social environment (Gangon & Simon, 1973). These scripts include pervious experiences, fantasies and expectations, stories from friends (Brooks Gunn & Furstenburg, 1989), and media portrayals (E.J. Roberts, 1982). The task of integrating ones sexual feelings moral values with these sexual scripts is the main struggles of adolescent's sexuality (Kimmel & Weiner, 1985).

This process becomes difficult because of society's contradictory messages about sex and adolescents often do not have someone they can talk with regarding their questions. Parents may want to be the ones to teach their children about sex, but realize they often compete with mass media's sexual curriculum (Louis Harris & Associates, 1987; E.J Roberts). With the mass growth of reality television, this makes it easy to learn from "real life" characters and their intimate situations. The coined genre of "reality" television blurs the line between fiction and reality. Often it becomes difficult to determine the difference (Hawkins, Robert, 1977). While the media is continuing to produce shows that are more popular and bring the most income, it is fair to say networks are not focusing on the importance of the messages for which our curious younger generations are searching. If we accept these media images as 'real', we are more likely to learn from the media and to behave according to the models they present.

Social Learning: Television as a Sex Educator

Homans' social exchange theory claims most human behavior is constrained by social structures and that the key to understanding society is in analyzing these structures (Homan, 1959, 1974). Socialization is defined as "the process of interaction through which an individual acquires the norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and language characteristics of his or her group" (Gecas, 1992, p.1863). One form of socialization is through observation via television and the media. Homans' theory suggests the following order of the steps in socialization process: attention to the observed event (via television) leads to learning, which leads to evaluations of the realism and functionality of the observed event, concluding to internalization of the functionality evaluations by the observer to his/her real world, which leads to assimilation (Homan).

During adolescence, interest in intimate interpersonal relationships and sexual

feelings become intensified. According to Erickson (1986), adolescence is a period of development during which there is an increasing social need to find ones role in life as a sexual, productive, responsible adult with a set of consistent set of attitudes and values. Physiological changes coupled with perceptions of what is normative in ones peer group can lead to early initiation of sexual activity (Brooks-Gunn & Furstenberg, 1989). Televisions "realistic" portrayal of consistent and often explicit messages can be a powerful sex educator, particularly for viewers with limited experience and countervailing information (E.J. Roberts, 1982). This becomes a convenient educator because adolescents have limited opportunities to observe intimate interpersonal behavior in real life than rely on mass media for their models for sexual learning (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Television provides adolescents with a large amount of realistic as well as unrealistic information about interpersonal relationships.

Learning about romance and sexual behavior from television allows adolescents to avoid the embarrassment of direct questioning. Television, which is in 98% of American households and turned on approximately 7 hours a day (Murray, 1993) has become the common source of socialization for American children. While Trugilo (1990) found that some adolescents do differentiate between sexual events portrayed in fictional television programs from those occurring in real life, a distinct separation between real life and televised sexual behavior, however, may not be true for all adolescent viewers. For instance, adolescents who used television as a source for sexual information and perceived televisions portrayals as realistic were more likely to incorporate televisions sexual messages into their real-life sexual schemata than were adolescents more skeptical of televisions portrayals of interpersonal relationships (Truglio, 1990). In the world of television, sex occurs more often between uncommitted than married couples; safer sexual practices are rarely considered; and potential negative consequences of intercourse occur infrequently (Greenberg 1993, Lowry & Towles, 1989). Realizing that the majority of adolescents viewing occur during prime time (A.C. Nielsen, 1993) that feature programs designed for an adult experience, Greenberg (1993) estimates that young viewers are exposed to approximately 1,400 sexual acts per year, excluding daytime soap opera viewing.

The problem with television being used as a way for fast and covenant learning is that it is a constructed reality built together with a compromised idealized and distorted images of sexual behavior and interpersonal relationships. Although most adolescents are skeptics when judging the realism of sexual portrayals on television, sizable minorities believes that television provides a realistic picture of sexually transmitted diseases (45%), pregnancy and the consequences of sex (41%), and people making love (21%, Louis Harris & Associates, 1989). On average, adolescents know that television is a "window" into a world, but not necessarily into the real world.

What is Reality Television?

Reality TV is a catchall category that includes a wide range of entertainment programs about real people. Reality TV could be seen as located in broad territories between information and entertainment & documentary and drama. The genre has become the success story of television in the 1990s and 2000s. There are reality TV programs about everything and anything; from healthcare, hairdressing, people and pets. There are reality TV formats all over the world.

It is commonly assumed that audiences cannot tell the difference between entertainment and information, or fiction and reality in popular factual television. With such concern regarding audiences and reality TV, it is necessary to explore the development and messages of this genre. Audience responses to reality TV can provide negative and invaluable information and messages from the reality genre and could also lead to a negative outlook of contemporary society. According to Larry Namer, the co-founder of E! Entertainment and Reality Central, there is a large base of reality TV fans: 'to them reality TV is television. It's not a fad'. The genre of television is not only growing at a rapid rate, but made easier to catch up on episodes that viewers have missed by using their computers. It's always available. Sirlinksalot contains a site for the reality television genre with selected news items and websites devoted to US reality series and selected reality series around the world. In the USA alone, Sirlinksalot lists a total of 130 reality TV series (during November 2003): 17 reality TV series for ABC, 15 for CBS, 22 for NBC, 25 for FOX, and 20 for MTV, as well as 31 series for other cable channels such as WB Network, UPN, and HBO.)

A False Sense of Community/Entering the World of Reality

One of the reasons the reality genre has been so powerful in the television market is that it appeals to younger adults in particular. For example, reality game shows and talent shows in the USA are especially popular with 'young viewers who have watched reality shows is far bigger numbers than anything else on television and are the consumers most coveted by advertisers (Smith, L. 21)" Nick Clarke argues in his book *The Shadow of a Nation* that the popularity of reality TV has led to dangerous blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction. As a result reality TV has had a negative effect on modern society. As one critic commented: 'In essence, this may as well be network crack: reality TV is fast, cheap and totally addictive…the shows are weapons of mass distraction…causing us to become dumber, fatter, and more disengaged from society and ourselves' (35).

Cavender argues that reality TV promotes the notion of a community; ultimately they serve to undermine and erode it. This body of work contains a definition of community that emphasizes a commitment to a set of shared values, a sense of belonging to and identification with a group or a place (Young, 1990). And despite these reality game shows or dating shows that focus on the team bonding, ultimately there is only one winner. In such a competitive situation it is no surprise that the contestants frequently act in decidedly 'non-communal' ways (Gray Cavendar, 164). With further development it is shown that sexual content could cause further behavioral habits as well. Another theory that is to be said on Reality television is the theory that it is being viewed for voyeurism. Calvert. C in 2004 conducted a study using content analysis claiming "Accounts of the rising popularity of reality television cite voyeurisms as an important reason for its success among viewers. Several studies suggest that television viewers themselves perceive reality programs to be both exhibitionistic and voyeuristic (Hill, 2005), and acknowledge that they are drawn to this voyeuristic component of reality programs. Rather than emphasizing sexual deviance, recent accounts of contemporary culture conceptualize voyeurism as a common (and not solely sexual) pleasure derived from access to private details" (Metzl, 2004). Accordingly, partly because of electronic media, curious peeking into the private lives of others has become a defining characteristic of

contemporary society (Calvert, 2004). In being this true, reality television is a perfect way for the viewer to peek into the private lives of everyday people who become "celebrities" and characters for living their day-to-day lives and being taped for viewing pleasure.

Reality TV represents, among other things, the triumph of the market, the notion that everyone as well as everything has its price and that people will do pretty much anything for money. Not the message or morals that are coming out of it and what this can due to affect the younger, influence viewers. Television has come to be seen as a primary cause of social and cultural disorder. It is routinely blamed, not merely for violence and delinquency, but also for decline of the family and of organized religion, and for the propagation of racism, militarism, consumerism, and just about any other objectionable ideology one might name.

One may argue that televisions that promote good morals are as equally influence from reality television. But reality programs differ from cinema and other forms of content due to the aura of realism and spontaneity they invoke (Calvert, 2004; Ruddock, 2008). And that is what the public is watching and what the demand, so more and more reality television is being aired. The voyeuristic appeal of reality programs differs from other genres because "viewer detection skills are exercised not on…celebrities…but on 'real' people 'just like viewers'' (Andrejevic, 2006, p. 401). Studies show that teenagers' exposure to sexually oriented television may have a negative impact on their sexual developments (Hudson, Wartella, & Donnersteing, 1998). But a question remains largely unanswered as to whether such findings also apply to the genre of romantically themed reality television.

Doubts/Disruptions

Obtaining knowledge through Social learning theory can be seen inaccurate in some opinions. Such criticism of reality TV fails to take into account the variety of formats within the reality genre. There are some such a lifestyle formats like *Changing Rooms*, that contain stories of do-it-yourself makeovers as well as ideas on interior

design; or *Survivor* that show ordinary people in emotionally and physically challenging situations. Numerous critics have also argued that such debates of negative impacts from reality television are often used to displace attention from even more complex underlying causes, which we may be trying to avoid (Connell, 1984). For example, we can blame television for the decline of the family, but it is clearly ignoring the more complex reasons as to why the institution may be changing and may be in need of a change.

The problem here is not that the positive effects of television (its contribution to adolescents learning about the world, the diverse joys it has to offer them) are almost entirely ignored. However, these arguments do oversimplify the nature of children's relationships with television, they also represent a way of avoiding genuine social problems. In using television as a scapegoat we are failing to acknowledge the real complexity and difficulty of the issued at stake. But as this literature review has demonstrated, cultivated analysis cannot be ignored. Further evidence must be conducted on how new media forms (reality television in this case) impact the social learning towards our younger generations and blurs their ideas on commitment and intimacy in relationships.

Methodology

With the premise that all television is educational (Palmer, Smith, & Strawser, 1993), the goal of this paper is to discuss the lessons and messages that are being conveyed by popular reality television show *Jersey Shore*. I will be conducting a textual analysis of season five of *Jersey Shore*. I aim to answer the question from observing this particular reality show on how has reality television not only changed what is shown on the screen, but also change the attitudes and beliefs on our younger generations? By reverting back to past research conducted on television watching, and by using my own research on studying the messages *Jersey Shore*, I will present to you that contemporary reality television constructs a negative outlook on commitment and intimacy in relationships for younger viewers.

In order to investigate exactly how reality television distorts the viewer's image on commitment and intimacy in relationships, one must understand what the social context of the shows is entailing. From what we have seen from past research on reality

television and the effects of television on its viewers, it is clear that there needs to be further evidence and research done on more modern day reality television shows. Whether you love these television shows or despise them, there is no doubt that our younger (and some older) generations are glued in front of our television sets ready to watch reality disaster take place.

I felt that textual analysis would be the best choice of methodology because it will enable this study by helping my reader fully understand what consistent messages are being sent out from two popular seasons that brought together so many young viewers. It will help me answer the question "why" these shows are being watched and what is so appealing about them through a social learning aspect.

Limitations

There are limitations and weaknesses to the approach of textual analysis. Although I am physically watching the text itself, I am only watching one season. I am not able to have the feeling of "knowing" the cast members of this particular show as other avid watchers may feel. This case study just happens to be one particular show, while I cannot generalize that this is true for all reality TV programs, this is just one start of looking at one phenomenon that is popular.

One other weakness to this approach would be that this study only involves me (one person of a particular sex, age and upbringing) conducting this research on my own and not with other people of different backgrounds. Textual analysis approach appeared to be the best method due to the fact that I am studying the consistent and direct messages that are being directed at the audience. If I did another methodology such as interview, it would leave a large group of remaining viewers out due to the wide variety of viewers these shows bring in. Also, depending on one's sex, age, race and background, their outcomes of their view on the particular show and situations would differ drastically. I would have to do a questionnaire on a mass amount of people or one particular group that would be too little.

The main limitation to my research was the lack of research that has been done on the current and growing popular genre of reality television and other current shows. My

exploration for continued background on reality television and research was clouded with irrelevance and informal information such as blogs and gossip websites. This left me with little information to begin with, which is why I believe a textual analysis, suited this type of research the best. I am able to rely on the direct messages.

Music Television Network (MTV) and Its Transition

USA Today quoted, “The planets biggest TV network has a lock on the coveted demographic…The way this age group looks, talks, acts and consumes is molded by the clothes, music and attitudes aired on MTV’s programming and youth-slanted commercials” (Gundersend, 2001, p. 1). MTV (Music Television) is the oldest and most influential American cable network specializing in music related programming. It was launched on August 1, 1981. Ultimately, MTV proved to be immensely important to the careers of numerous artists, including Madonna, Michael Jackson, Prince, Peter Gabriel, and U2. But MTV had to compete with the growing networks around them and realized just music entertainment was not enough. Andrew Goodwin identifies three phases in the history of MTV from the change from “music television” into an actual television station. The real ascendance of the network began in 1983 with phase two, the so-called "second launch" when MTV became available in Manhattan and Los Angeles. Phase three began in 1986, following Viacom's purchase of MTV from Warner Amex and the departure of Robert Pittman as President and CEO. Pittman had been largely responsible for leading MTV down the programming path of flow and narrowcasting. By 1986, however, MTV's ratings were in decline as a result of a too narrow musical palette. Other developing shows and channels with more to offer than music and television were distracting the audience around MTV. MTV took notice quickly and needed to reel back its viewers.

Throughout its so-called third phase, MTV has diversified its musical offerings, most notably into rap, dance music, and heavy metal. To some extent these genres have been segregated into their own program slots (*Yo! MTV Raps, Club MTV,* and *Headbangers' Ball,* respectively). At the same time, the move toward discrete programs has increasingly become a move away from music video. MTV has now evolved into

more like a full service network offering news, sports, sitcoms, documentaries, cartoons, game shows, and other traditional TV fare. Often these programs are also musical in some sense *(Beavis and Butt-Head*), but sometimes they are not (*Sixteen and Pregnant, Jersey Shore*). MTV had now created a major presence in the cable TV industry and in fact in the overall American cultural landscape and is still a force in popular culture. According to Viacom, MTV "the world's most widely distributed television network, reached more than 395 million subscribers in 166 countries and territories" (2003, p.1) The target audience of MTV is 12 to 34 year olds who comprise 33% of the United states population (91 million; Cable television Advertising Bureau, 2005). MTV is attracting a broader level of ages, not just teens. *Jersey Shore* is one show that can be seen linking all of these age ranges together.

Jersey Shore: Season 5

Do Something Crazy!

According to an article by entertainment weekly (OCT 21, 2011) the season 4 finale ratings of *Jersey Shore* was down for the first time. This could be due to the fact that the season started chaotic, but by the last few weeks the shore cast seemed "bored". Unlike past MTV show(s) *The Real World*, instead of the housemates being rotated seasonally, *Jersey Shore* roommates remained consistent. Even though *Jersey Shore* characters never seem to stop the drama from coming, it was still the same characters involved in the same old drama. In season 4 the housemates rebelled against Mike's attempts to "stir up drama," and became content with simply having a pleasant time. By the end of the season four, JWoww, Snooki, Ronnie and Sam all in relationships, the usual shore mayhem seemed lacking. This gives the network a heads up that the audience wants more immoral behavior from the cast and crew, and less moral. If presenting young adults with characters that are highly promiscuous, involved in unstable relationships, and are visiting the "smush" room on a nightly basis is making more money and lowering the moral status of young adults, the network took this information they discovered and went with it.

In the 10 p.m. hour, the series premier of season five of *Jersey Shore* rose above everything else on television in the audience most desired by advertisers, viewers

between the ages of 18 and 49. The total audience for *Jersey Shore* was 8.446 million, the biggest for any series episode in the history of MTV (Jan 7 2011, NY Times). To some, reading a scholarly review on a show such as this can seem unimportant. But it is clear that this show plays an important role of observing where our contemporary culture is coming from. In being one of the most popular televisions shows in MTV's history, this shows that their needs to be more focus and study on the media that is being consumed daily. *Jersey Shore* has one of the youngest median ages of any show on television, at just over 22.4 years old.

The opening clip appears on the screen and the characters are individually shot, introducing them with their real names, nicknames, and a tag line. The tag lines appear as followed: Pauly D (nothing), Snooki "I'm going to Jersey shore, bitch", Mike 'The Sitch' "Alright, we got a situation", Sammy 'Sweetheart' "I'm the sweetest bitch you'll ever meet", Ronnie (laughing), Jenny 'Jwoww' "After I have sex with a guy I will rip their heads off", Vinny (nothing), and most recent cast member, Deanna "You like the boobs?" The girls say something sexual, while most of the boys other than Mike just sit their glaring into the camera. Season five begins with a recap of the previous season while the crew was in Italy. The main drama from the previous season was between Snooki and Mike. Snooki became involved with a friend Jionni, eventually turning into a relationship. In between her transition with Jionni into friendship-relationship, Snooki was sexually involved with Mike. Jionni is still out of the loop about this incident. Mike, being named "the situation", is the character that is attempting to grab the spotlight and start the drama. The drama between Snooki and Mike appears to be the new season cliffhanger, pulling in the audience for a continued season of deceit, sex, the subculture of "Guido's" all fueled by alcohol to create the most exciting season yet.

"Guido" Mentality: Coining the subculture

Guido was a slang term used dated back to the 1970s for lower class or working class urban Italian American. It was used as a demeaning term for Italian Americans in who conducted themselves in a thuggish and overtly macho manner. This term caused controversy in 2009 when MTV began to use the term for their promotions of the *Jersey*

Shore. It spurred objections from Italian-American organizations such as Unico National, NIAF, the Order Sons of Italy in America and the internet watchdog organization Italian Aware. Although MTV removed the term from some promotions, it remains closely associated with the show, and some of the cast members use it regularly to describe themselves. The female characters referenced the term as well calling them "guidette's." Most people on the east coast easily recognize the term as a slur against Italian-American men. Due to advocate groups for American Italian-anti defamation working against MTV, the term "Guido's" in the commercials turned into "roommates". This was not the last that audiences heard this word. The cast of *Jersey Shore* brought back the derogatory name and changed its meaning into a new subculture of tanning, a celebration of ignorance, boozing, pampering, and promiscuity.

Heteronormativity at the Shore

The media constructs femininity, masculinity, and gender relations. In this study of gender and media is extraordinarily heterogeneous. It shows strictly male and females intimately involved, and that there is one job of the opposite sex that is to fulfill each other's sexually needs. The *Jersey Shore* contains a hyperactive amount of promiscuity and sexuality. The males (and occasionally females) of the Jersey Shore crew can be found scoping the boardwalk or their local clubs in search for females to bring home solely to please men. The male cast members of the *Jersey Shore* are sending the message that the main use of a woman is her sexuality and she has to look up to their physical expectations as well. For example, Vinny meets Deanna at a club, but she physically is not up to his expectations. "I know Deanna's a sure thing, but she's probably like a 5 or 6. During the weekend you're looking for like a 7 or 8." Deanna is now in the male gaze. He finds a prettier girl and moves on. In the Girl Scout research, they found that girls who watched reality TV regularly are more focused on the value of physical appearance. 72 percent say they spend a lot of time on their appearance (vs. 42% of non-viewers), more than a third thing that a girls value is based on how she looks, and they would rather be recognized for their outer beauty than inner beauty (28% vs. 18% of non-viewers). The female characters at the shore that were not up to the male characters standards are

referred to as “grenades”. According to Urban dictionary, a “grenade” is the solitary ugly girl always found with a group of "hotties". If the grenade doesn't get any action, then neither does anyone else. This tells girls also to choose which friends she surrounds herself with by bashing other girls upon their appearance; then they can have a chance with a male romantically and physically. Not only does she have to be physically attractive, but also she has to have other pretty friends surrounding her to make her look appealing. This shows that sex is the number one priority for a male, and the female is constantly in the male gaze.

The messages of gender roles are evident. According to safeyouth.org, “studies show that as many as 96% of American teenagers say that they have been emotionally and/or psychologically abused by a dating partner”. Vinny, Pauly D, Ronnie and "The Situation" employ an impressively wide range of slanders and insults to defame and demean the very same women they shamelessly pursue every day. What these characters promote is the exact opposite idea of a healthy relationship, but rather one that relies on looks, a type of “over sexualized” (DTF=Down To Fuck) female, and one that will not stay for too long. One example of the male characters using this phrase in context is the following: Pauly D meets Chantal in Episode two. Chantal is described as “…the definition of DTF right now it’s not even funny”. Chantal comes home, sleeps with Pauly D, and his thoughts on the sexual encounter are as follow, “Smush was good, but now it’s time to call Chantal a cab. She’s gotta leave!” This is a major part of the male cast member’s sexual encounters, getting the girls out as fast as they can. “I don’t know if this girl wants to hang around but I definitely don’t want her to hand around. I wana get her in, get her out, call her a cab. They know the deal”. He calls her a cab, and sends Chantal on her way. He had received what he wanted out of Chantal, which is solely sex. Other than looking for a girl with a personality, they are only put here for the male gaze; solely allowed to be looked upon as sexualized beings. The females are usually under the influence of alcohol as well.

From observing the behavioral patterns between the females and males from season 5, it appeared that the males were involved in most of the pampering. In Episode 2 Vinny, Pauly D, and Mike go together for a boy’s day to get manicures and pedicures while the girls stay home. Their actions do not go un-judged. Sammy observes Mike and

his friend Unit who appears in season five frequently, changing together in the bedroom. “I feel like Mike has gay tendencies (Sammy, Ep. 1). The camera slows down and stays with Mike and Unit changing together, the music switches to a more sensual tune. This scene is insinuating a homosexual relationship between Unit and Mike. But when Pauly D and Vinny are shown having “bro time” claiming that they are together and not going to “break up any time soon (Vinny, Ep. 7)” it is portrayed as a solid, healthy, loving friendship. “Vinny’s my dude, were like the meatballs, but not the meatballs” (Pauly D, Ep. 7). This contrast of male characters with two of the same type of friendships (Mike and Unit, Pauly D and Vinny) but portrayed differently to the audience. Mike is turned into the male jester of the crew who is confused about his sexuality. The music and mocking tone of Sammy makes it seem that if Mike is a homosexual, he is on the ‘wrong side of the fence. The house strictly consists of hypersexual, heteronormative relationships. The message the show is sending to the audience about male culture becomes mixed. They are saying an ideal man is someone who focuses on themselves and their physical appearance that is the main importance for a male. But a male must keep a distance when another male is involved. This in the end comes down to the message of heteronormativity. This promotes gossip to be a normal everyday occurrence, and no one character should be treated equally even though their actions are the same. Regular viewers of reality TV accept and expect a higher level of drama, aggression, and bullying in their own lives. A study conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute (2011) found that 78 percent of regular viewers agreed that "gossiping is a normal part of a relationship between girls," compared with 54 percent of non-viewers. Sixty-eight percent agreed that "it's in girls' nature to be catty and competitive with one another," while only 50 percent of non-viewers thought so.

Embrace Your Manhood

Another message being sent about the objectification of females is the concept of sharing them with other males and using this as a way to “embrace their manhood”. In Episode one the audience immediately sees the sex-crazed males in action. Vinny and Pauly D encounter an old female friend of housemate Deanna’s. She is referred to by the

name of Ryder. Pauly D and Ryder begin making out. But, Ryder is Vinny's "Sloppy Seconds"; meaning Vinny has already had sexual relations with Ryder. Ryder is now in bed with Pauly and he "doesn't know what to do with her" and goes on to make a pun on Ryder. "Whether you're the first man in, or they last man in, ride-her!" Vinny continues the Ryder jokes further to the camera in the back room, using her sexuality as a source of humor, "Everybody ride her. Just like a bus route…if she fucks Ronnie, it's like Guido bingo!" The males find humor, pleasure and a good time out of sharing a female's sexuality. Mike, who initially was with the "Bosnian" girl, passes her onto Pauly D. "I'm happy to pass the torch" (Ep. 3). Not only are these females used for quick and easy sex, but they can be interchangeable between friends as well. The girls are expected to meet the male's demands on the show by being easy, good to look at, a little crazy but a little reserved and disposable.

Sexual acts by the males of the shore can be seen as a 'badge of honor' for other male friends. In episode three, Pauly D dedicated his sexual act with "tattoo girl" in honor of Vinny leaving the house due to personal issues. Tattoo girls description is as followed, "I can just tell this girl is DTF. You can smell it, see it, taste it, She DTF...She's ready to go that's what's up. No work involved." After labeling the tattoo girl from the club as a sex object, he lets the audience know that this sexual encounter does have some sort of meaning. It's not just sex, but it is in honor of his "bro" Vinny for leaving the house due to anxiety issues. "I'm going to smush this tattoo chic in Vinny's bed in honor of Vinny leaving the house" (Ep. 3) Sex went from showing dominance over females, to now a way for the male housemates to bond.

The females that appear on the show are also portrayed as 'items' that are for 'sale'. Mike is the male character that treats most of his female encounters like a game and he is the master chess player. "I'm like a shopper at the store right now. I see something I like, okay, right there come with me." Mike is referring to the 'store' being the club and the items for 'sale' being the females. The females and their bodies become an item that can be bought. Mike approached the brunette 'item at the store' and uses the pickup line of: "What are you doing tomorrow? What do you like, French toast" insinuating she will be going home with him tonight. She does (Ep. 2).

Substance, Relationships and Deceit

Cast members Ronnie, Sammy and Jwoww are the only three roommates in a stable relationship in season five. Despite Ronnie and Sammy's past they appear better than ever. While conducting my textual analysis of *Jersey Shore*, I saw very little of these happy healthy couples. Ronnie Sammi and Jwoww's presence lacked throughout the taping. They only time they focused on the couples was when they were involved in Mikes drama or when Jwoww attempted to make Roger jealous at Karma night club by dressing scandalously. After getting into an argument with Roger, she goes to a store and purchases a revealing outfit for the night at Karma to get a rise out of Roger. "I'm dying inside cause I know Roger loves it but is concerned for tonight. He doesn't want to get in a fight with ever guy gawking." Roger ends up getting in a fight at Karma. This shows that a female can take control of a male by using her body as her tool. By promoting a fight between Roger and another male at the club due to her 'scandalous' appearance she got what she wanted; attention and jealousy from Roger. Jwoww took the jealous as a romantic jester.

Other than that small incident with Roger and Jwoww, the two couples remained unfocused throughout the season. However, the network kept the spotlight on the couple that appeared to be getting the most attention, Snooki and Jionni. Their relationship consisted of alcohol abuse, deceit and a lack of commitment. Alcohol is the leading killer of young people in America major factor in the three-main causes of death for people between ages 15-24. Also linked with over half of all violent crimes, domestic violence, rape and child abuse. People who start drinking by the age of 15 are four times more likely to become addicted than those who wait until 21. Despite their denials, leading brewers have run commercials on MTV during time periods when half or more of the audience was below the legal drinking age (Killbourne, 2000). Young women are drinking more heavily than ever before and suffering terrible consequences. Females have less gastric dehydrogenase, and enzyme that digest alcohol in the stomach, than males so alcohol passes more quickly into the blood stream. Young women who drink heavily are more likely than their non-drinking counterparts to be the victims of rape and sexual assault and to have unwanted pregnancies (Killbourne, 2000). The Jersey Shore

cast does not show this part of their drinking and sexual encounters. Those who become alcoholics are far more stigmatized than their male counterparts.

Snooki's drinking habits are seen as humorous to her roommates, but concerning for current boyfriend Jionni. The audience watches Jionni babysitting Snooki and reminding her to keep her act together. Before she goes to Karma, Jionni reminds Snooki to tame herself, "Could you not drink so much please? I don't want you falling over." Snooki in response "he just needs to respect who I am". Jionni, in being in a committed and serious relationship with Snooki wants to protect her and is looking out for her. Snooki is stubborn. This shows a relationship with a lack of communication. Jionni is worried and is letting her know this. Snooki is ignoring his concerns. She is telling the audience to ignore any good advice that is being sent to you by your loves ones. If you choose to party, black out, and fall down in clubs and feel that this is "who I am", ignore the others. The first word people think of when they hear the paraphrase "alcoholic women" is "promiscuous". The alcoholic woman, acting in the same way as the alcoholic man, is despised. Heavy drinking is seen by the culture as something that makes both men and women more masculine. Therefore, it is considered somewhat desirable for men but repellent for women (Killbourne, Forget the Rules, Enjoy the Wine). The camera shows Snooki flashing her underwear periodically at Karma. Jionni is embarrassed of his girlfriend and tells her to get home. She can barely speak due to intoxication. But as she said earlier, this is who she is. This is normal behavior; those around you should accept your overt drinking problems (Ep. 1).

Avid watchers of *Jersey Shore* find it to no surprise to see Snooki waking up in clothes from the night before. In episode 5, Snooki wakes up with all her clothes on, and discovered she had wet the bed. "I need to throw away my drawers. I'll try to do it discreetly". (Ep. 7) Snooki goes to the doctor about her UTI. "My doctor said I can't drink a lot. But it's so hard so I just drank and drank and drank…I'm drunky pants". Snooki suggests to the audience that drinking is a good "pain reliever" as well. She takes tequila shots with Deanna because of her UTI and continues to talk about her UTI on television. "Drinking with a UTI is kind of like an andesitic, you don't feel it…my dad's like why do you keep getting UTIs, and I'm like I don't know? But it's from sex."

Arriving back at home after her personal drinking remedies, she relives herself at home and pees outside the house.

In episode six, we see Snooki finally taking a step back from her drinking habits and rearranging her thoughts. “I need a fucking therapist, and I need AA at this point”. This may be one of the only times we see Snooki thinking straight and realizing its time to take a turn for the better. She then gets drunk on the way to work with Deanna; they leave their work shift early that day to continue the boozing.

In episode 8, Snooki lets the audience know what the main usage a boyfriend is. “Obviously Jionnis sick or whatever but I want to get it in tonight. So why are you puking right now I want to have sex!” Jionni is extremely intoxicated after the club and is left to help himself. Snooki stands back and watches Jionni with disgust. “A boyfriends job is to come over, have sex, and you know make them feel good.” (Ep. 8). A “good boyfriend” from Snooki’s viewpoint is someone who keeps his or her girlfriend sexually fulfilled. Not someone who helps their partner when they are sick.

One cannot forget other outside monitoring that play a role in awareness with adolescence and partying. Although there has been no direct correlation between television and drinking, a recent study completed February 2012 suggests that media and marketing featuring alcohol use and branding may influence the drinking habits of young adults. “Alcohol use or brands are depicted in 80% to 95% of movies, and drinking is mostly portrayed positively,” writes Mike Stoolmiller, PhD, from the College of education at the University of Oregon in Eugene, and colleagues. They conducted of study of more than 6500 adolescents who reported high movie alcohol exposure (MAE) were more than twice as likely to start drinking and were significantly more likely to binge drink compared with the adolescents who had low MAE. Based on the modeling estimates, interventions that would reduce MAE by 25% across the study population would decrease by 8% drinking onset and decrease by 6% binge drinking. Completely cutting out MAE would decrease drinking onset by 28% and decrease bingeing by 20%. The investigators also found that 11% of the adolescents owned some type of alcohol-branded merchandise, 23% reported at least weekly parental alcohol use, and 29% said they had some access to (Brauser, Stoolmiller, University of Oregon. Feb, 2012). Although the study focused on the use of alcohol and branding in Hollywood movies, this

shows that entertainment media does have an impact on its viewers relating to what they are seeing the characters using on screen.

Conclusion/Findings

The messages are clear and concise. Partying was the number one priority to the characters. But what came along with their idea of partying was the message of the importance of physical appearance, heteronormative relationships, common occurrences of hyper sexuality, gender norms/roles, the "easy" party girl, and that being in a relationship is 'boring'. From my personal research it has become evident that there needs to be more focus on what popular television shows are being viewed by younger generations and what they could potentially be taking in from the messages. This paper is can be seen as a stepping stone for continued research on reality television and its messages that need to be further researched and recognized.

Jersey Shore: Dictionary

busted (adj.)—a very ugly female

fist pump (n., v.)—an enthusiastic punch into the air with one's hand, typically performed as a nonviolent dance move. Or the act of punching the air with one's hand in the same fashion. It tends to be done in groups, set to techno beats, and often reveals a sweat-stained T-shirt. Is often preceded by the act of "beating up the beat."

gorilla (n.)—an extremely muscular man.

grenade (n.)—"a bigger, ugly chick" who is friends with a hotter chick your friend and/or housemate is "creepin'" on.

GTL (n.)—the acronym for the guido way of life, which stands for gym, tanning, laundry. Best if combined with "fresh to death."

juice head (n.)—a man who does steroids or works out to the extent that it appears he does steroids.

landmine (n.)—"a thin, ugly chick"

pound (v.)—to have aggressive sexual intercourse. (*see also, smush*) Or **(v.)** to drink heavily. Or **(n.)** a unit of measure. Or **(n.)** a form of greeting in which two fists meet.

smush (v.)—to have sex with, ideally involving a guido and a guidette.

stage five clinger (n.)—a member of the opposite sex who becomes excessively attached incredibly early on in the relationship.

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