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Anth002

How to Accurately Represent American Dating TV Shows Viewers

As mentioned in my earlier paper, I am investigating the question of who constitutes the viewership of American reality dating TV shows, whether we can note any trends to the groups that these viewers belong to, and why individuals are drawn to/pushed away from the genre. In considering this, I examined some influences on my life and the way that I think that I think could present points of biases resulting in impact in my ability to answer these questions.

As I had mentioned earlier, I am a cis-gender, heterosexual man who comes from an upper middle-class, catholic family that put education in front of all other issues. These factors have greatly shaped the way in which I view media. My parents deemed most television that was not educational, athletically motivated, or morally aligned with the catholic church as not worth letting me view for a large portion of my life. As a result, the realm of reality TV shows was inaccessible due to this designation. Thus, when considering my construction of what media is and what it is useful for, a lot of my personal analysis is rooted in these same structures; do I deem this sort of media beneficial for myself in some way. I do note how subjective this question is, as well as how this likely has affected my indifference towards reality TV shows. For the most part, I have not found elements of these shows that lead me to believe that they would be beneficial for my life, whether that be to teach me something new (such as with educational or philosophical material) or to fulfill another passion of mine (such as with athletic events). Similarly, as a cis-gendered heterosexual man, the question of who constitutes the participants in the show is not a question that I have considered in the past since my sexual and gender identities have been represented in characters in such shows. Therefore, when discussing these types of shows with other people, it will be essential to consider sexuality and gender representation when understanding who may be drawn to these shows and why.

Also pertaining to representation, it will be important to consider the representation with respect to the language used to describe individuals. As we have seen throughout the course, proper anthropological research is reliant on representing individuals as they wish to be represented and in using unbiased language to reflect the participant's opinions on different subjects. As a result of my background and indifference towards the genre, my personal feelings will be important to control, as well to make sure that the way I convey individual's reasons for being drawn to the genre in an accurate manner. Answering the question accurately is also dependent on representation. Since the question tries to determine who constitutes the viewership of this genre, it is imperative to try to discuss the topic with people who represent as large a set of different identities as possible. Without proper representation, the question cannot be answered in a complete manner. Thus, it is importing to represent people's identities and opinions accurately as well as consider as many diverse opinions on the subject as possible.

When considering topics from the course, the most beneficial framework in understanding the questions of viewership would be language. From my preliminary observations, there seems to be a particular jargon to these shows. Certain words take on different meanings, as well as certain phrases being integral to understanding the

structure of the programs/episodes. In analyzing the language used by different viewers, the most useful methodology for answering questions of viewership that is presented in the course material would be the methods used by Captain Picard in the Darmok videos from *Star Trek*. In the episode, Captain Picard created a mutual flow of information between himself and Darmok to understand the Tamarian language. Picard focused on how phrases were used and in which situations they were utilized to understand what the phrases meant. Further, this illuminated the grammatical structure of the Tamarian language. This same methodology of understanding the context in which particular words are used, such as how "Fantasy Suite" and "B.I.P." as used in *The Bachelor,* would inform what the structure of the show is and allows us to focus on certain moments in the show. This in turn allows people to demonstrate their favorite components of the show. Thus, isolating these components we can find answers as to why individuals are drawn to the shows, helping us understand the question of viewership.

  In understanding this issue and in conducting my research, it will be imperative to discard of my prior existing ideas about reality TV and judgements. Instead of using my prior methods, I will employ a methodology of cultural relativism by revoking my judgments on what makes different forms of media important/watchable and consider other value methods. By stepping out of my own world view, I can instead enter the world views of the different individuals of whom I wish to speak with, observe their thoughts, and more deeply understand how they may think about the genre. To appropriately understand the issue, my investigation will be centered around asking why individuals are drawn to this sort of media: how they began watching, what their motivations are, what other kinds of media they consume, what are their favorite elements of the shows. Therefore, to properly appreciate and understand their perspective on the genres, akin to how Harding stepped into the "witnessing" role when she encountered Reverend Campbell and lived in the space between believing and rejecting his attempts, I will exist in this limbo state through cultural relativism. Through this methodology, I will use the tools to rebuke the influences of my prior experiences and judgments to truly understand an issue and individuals' perspectives.

  As mentioned above, cultural relativism provides help in understanding why individuals may be drawn to watching reality TV since in this context, cultural relativism lies on dispelling prior judgements about what makes certain types of TV "watchable. However, cultural relativism is also useful for this type of investigation as it shapes the types of questions that an anthropologist should ask to better understand the issue. By focusing less so on questions that perpetuate a particular world view, and more so on questions that tries to understand subjectivity and opinions on the matter, we can focus on individual reasoning that goes into the decision of viewership membership. Cultural relativism also has the consequence of garnering deeper trust between the investigator and the parties that they are meeting with. If the questions lack judgment and imply curiosity, the party who is sharing their experience may be more inclined to trust and open further to the anthropologist about their affiliations with reality TV. However, cultural relativism also presents some downsides. If the anthropologist were to take it to the extreme in this context a few issues could arise such as the portrayal of opinions on the importance of reality TV shows as universal truths. Thus, while cultural relativism will assist in asking question and fostering trust, it will be important to remember to maintain some level of objectivity with representation to ensure that opinions are not presented as absolute facts.