

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

### **PROVISIONAL TITLE:**

The interactive nature of reality television: an audience analysis

## **1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the relationship between interactive reality television and the viewers who participate in the different interactive activities. Reality television has emerged as a very prominent genre in South Africa in the last ten years, with many reality programmes enhancing the viewing experience by offering their audiences the option of active participation in the show itself. The aim is to explore the factors that motivate viewers to participate actively in a television show. The study also explores the importance of expected gratifications and the actual gratifications received when participating in different activities.

### **1.2 Background of the study**

The history of media audience research has seen many a transformation in media theory and research perspectives. The main shift in focus showed a move from the traditional research of the impact of the media on its audience to researching what audiences do with the media. According to Williams (2003:190), “the change in thinking about media audiences coincided with the technological advances that have enabled the media to cater for more specialised audiences”.

These technological advances also brought about a change in television genres. The last decade certainly belongs to the genre of reality television and its striking rate of popularity among television audiences. Defining reality television has proven to be problematic, since reality television often blurs the line between fact and fiction, even though it claims to represent reality (Cavendar & Fishman 1998:3).

As it is generally understood though, reality television has the following attributes:

- The recording of events in the lives of individuals or groups
- An attempt to simulate these real-life events by means of dramatised reconstruction
- Packaging this material into an attractive programme with entertainment value that can be marketed on the strengths of its 'reality' credentials (Kilborn 1994:421)

The interactive activities referred to in the context of this study include features such as accessing the Internet, voting via text messages or telephone, accessing the DSTV (digital satellite television) guide, sending text messages for broadcasting purposes and attending official appearances of the contestants of the show. Reality television and interactive media opened the door to audiences to participate actively and influence the outcome of these simulated real-life events, thereby giving the audience the power to 'write' the final chapter themselves.

Hellman (1999:112) claims that the audience is the 'new king' in the relationship between the media and its consumers. The change in the television environment has forced broadcasters to become audience oriented. Two main reasons are identified to substantiate this perspective.

The first is the financial basis of television programming. Advertising has become the main source of funding for broadcasters and audience ratings play a crucial role in justifying programme choices and encouraging advertising revenue. The second reason is audience fragmentation as a result of channel multiplication. The continuous multiplication of choices has created an unpredictable audience and a saturated television market (Hellman 1999:112).

The increase in programme supply has emphasised the role of consumer choice and made the broadcast industry acutely aware of viewer needs and demands. Hellman (1999:112) states that:

Although further technological leaps towards an interactive entertainment/information superhighway are imminent, already today a 'policy of supply' has given way to a 'policy of demand'.

Yet audience ratings only provide indirect evidence of viewer demands and preferences, but do not offer an explanation for viewer preferences.

This study focuses on viewers of the television programme *Project Fame* to supply answers to the questions of audience participation in reality television. *Project Fame* was a new concept launched in 2004 by M-Net (the broadcaster) and the production company Endemol. It is a mix between the two ever-popular interactive reality programmes in South Africa, namely *Big Brother* and *Idols*.

Sixteen young people lived and trained at a Fame Faculty where their lives were filmed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as they received professional music training and prepared themselves for a life of fame. Together with respected professionals from the music industry, audiences had the opportunity to vote for their favourite students and give them a chance at stardom (Project Fame 2004). By examining the interactive nature between audiences and reality television programmes, this study aims to provide valuable answers to the research questions.

### **1.3 Relevance of the topic**

As mentioned in the foregoing discussion, reality television has emerged as a strong competitor for traditional programming in the television arena. This is evident from the many reality shows being broadcast on national television such as *Survivor*, *The Amazing Race*, *The Apprentice*, *On Site* and *Pop Idols*. The fact that these shows are scheduled for prime time broadcast also supports the prominence and popularity of reality television shows. Not only is the genre very popular among its target audience, but low production costs also contribute to making reality television the genre of choice for production companies and broadcasters.

With advanced technology allowing viewers to interact with the text itself, the viewing experience is no longer confined to the television set. Extending the viewing experience to interactive participation has become an essential component of all television genres. However, combining the interactive component with the genre of reality television creates a dynamic relationship between the text and the audience, as viewer participation influences the outcome of the show.

#### **1.4 Relationship of the topic to the discipline of Communication**

The discipline of Communication is constantly evolving and remains a dynamic process. This is evident from the many Communication theories aiming at offering a better understanding of the different levels and ways of Communication. Communication research aims to identify patterns, trends and relationships in order to gain a better understanding of the communication process and the creation of meaning, and to predict future circumstances (Baxter & Babbie 2004:4). Mass communication remains one of the most powerful mediums in communicating messages to a large audience and due to the large audiences involved, it continues to be one of the most important fields of research within Communication. Interactive reality television is an exciting addition to the field of mass communication and challenges the traditional conventions of mass communication by allowing viewers enhanced input in, and interaction with, the message being communicated.

#### **1.5 Other research in the field**

A NEXUS search of the National Research Foundation's database confirms that no research has been or is currently being conducted on this specific topic. Furthermore, it shows that, to date, no research has been conducted on the subject of reality television in the South African context.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research study will use two communication theories as its premise namely the *uses and gratifications theory* and *reception theory*. The uses and gratifications theory introduced a new phase in mass media research by challenging the traditional focus from what the media do to the audience, to what audiences do with the media (Schröder 1999:39). It furthermore focuses on why audiences use media and the purposes for which it is used (Chandler 2004). The uses and gratifications theory states that viewers have their own preconceived needs and desires that they bring to the communication process. These needs and desires influence the meaning that viewers attach to a message as well as how they respond to the message, which is also influenced by social and cultural circumstances (Williams 2003:177).

Although there are several versions of the uses and gratifications theory, three basic assumptions form the core of this theory. Firstly, viewers are seen as active participants who use the media for their own individual purposes; secondly, viewers can identify these purposes and know how to express them. The third assumption acknowledges not only that variations do exist between the individuals' use of the media, but also that it is possible to identify basic patterns and habits in uses and gratifications (Williams 2003:177). The uses and gratifications theory also distinguishes between expected gratifications sought before media exposure and the actual gratifications obtained after media exposure (Bryant & Heath 2000:363).

Despite its valuable contribution towards audience research, the uses and gratifications theory is not without flaws. The main critique against this theory is that it does not recognise the influence of the context within which media use takes place (Reimer 1998:137). Thus, it focuses solely on the individual, ignoring the social and cultural context that also influences the individual's media choice and message interpretation (Grossberg, Wortella & Whitney 1998). Therefore, the uses and gratifications theory does not allow for the study of micro-processes such as the interpretation of messages.

The cultural studies approach to reception theory addresses this shortcoming of the uses and gratifications theory. Reception theory generally refers to the methodological shift from researching the author and the work to the text and its reader (Holub 1984:7). Recent reception studies have acknowledged the fact that although audiences are active, the media itself is not without effect. This means that the audience and the text do not exist in isolation but that the interdependent relationship as well as the social context influencing this relationship should be the focus of interpretation (Williams 2003:208).

Reception theory developed from the work of Stuart Hall, especially his formulation of the encoding-decoding model. Hall recognised the need to focus on the communication process as a whole, from the production of texts (encoding) to audience exposure to the text and meaning creation (decoding). Hall also pointed out that texts are open to numerous interpretations and that the encoded message could differ from the decoded message due to various factors influencing the encoding-decoding process (Hall 1980:130).

Based on Hall's encoding-decoding model, Morley expanded on reception theory by arguing that neither the text nor the audience could be isolated from the ideological, social and cultural impact that affects the communication process. The audience's meaning creation is therefore based on the way in which the message is structured and influenced by existing cultural codes of interpretation brought to the text (Morley 1992:92).

Reception theory is therefore interested in studying the way in which viewers interact with and interpret media messages, while the uses and gratifications theory examines the needs and gratifications that impact on media use. With these two approaches, it will be possible to investigate the relationship between viewers and the media message, while taking into account the social and cultural contexts of media use.

When viewers choose to participate interactively in the reality television show, it is a conscious choice that requires advanced activity beyond the mere viewing of the programming. The uses and gratifications theory therefore supports the assumption that audiences are active, that a specific need exists for viewers to participate interactively, that audiences choose a specific medium to meet this need and that interactive participation offers viewers some type or degree of gratification. Reception theory on the other hand acknowledges the social and cultural environment that may contribute to or generate these needs as well as influence the perception of the actual gratification received.

### **3 TYPE OF STUDY**

Research studies usually set out to achieve one of three possible objectives, namely exploring a new field of research, describing the characteristics of certain phenomena or explaining the causal-effect relationship between variables (Du Plooy 2001:49). The objective of this study is to explore the relationship between interactive reality television and its audience and to gain a better understanding of the different factors that impact on this relationship.

Exploratory research is usually conducted where little knowledge exists on a specific research topic or to generate new insights into phenomena (Du Plooy 2001:49).

As mentioned in section 1.5, no South African research has been conducted on the topic of interactive reality television or reality television as a genre in itself. There is very little literature on the subject and therefore it is evident that an exploratory study is most needed within this field of study and will most certainly provide very valuable insight into this unexplored research field of mass communication.

## **4 FORMULATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **4.1 Research problem**

The primary research problem is formulated as follows:

Why are viewers of the reality programme *Project Fame* actively participating in this programme?

### **4.2 Research sub-problems\***

The following sub-problems also form part of the study:

Which gratifications do viewers seek from participating actively in the reality programme *Project Fame*?

Which gratifications do viewers perceive to have obtained from participating actively in the reality programme *Project Fame*?

### **4.3 Research questions**

In order to obtain answers to the explorative objectives of the study, the following research questions are asked:

- What motivates viewers to participate actively in the reality programme *Project Fame*?
- Which gratifications do viewers expect to obtain when participating actively in *Project Fame*?
- Which perceived gratifications have been obtained by participating actively in *Project Fame*?
- How frequently do viewers vote for characters in *Project Fame*?

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\* Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the relationship between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained will not be measured by means of a Lickert scale. True to the tradition of qualitative research, open-ended questions will be asked to determine a possible relationship between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained. See section 6.4 for discussion.

- How often do viewers watch *Project Fame*?
- Which interactive opportunities do viewers utilise?
- Do viewers of *Project Fame* consult other sources besides the regular broadcast of the programme for more information about this reality show?
- How does watching *Project Fame* form part of the viewer's daily activities?
- Do viewers discuss *Project Fame* with friends/family?
- Do viewers form parasocial relationships with the contestants of *Project Fame*?
- Do social and cultural influences affect the interpretation of messages as communicated by the programme *Project Fame*?

#### **4.4 Research objectives**

This research study aims to explore why viewers choose to participate interactively in the reality television programme *Project Fame*. This study also focuses on the various gratifications expected and received through interactive participation in this television programme. In determining the frequency of viewer voting, it is possible to draw some conclusions about audiences and the perceived importance of participating in interactive reality television. Various interactive opportunities are offered to viewers, but this does not necessarily mean that all these activities are utilised. By indicating which interactive features the viewers prefer, it is possible to identify possible trends in interactive media use. Whether this programme becomes part of everyday life and whether audiences actively consult other media for more information on this programme might provide valuable insight into the relationship between audiences and interactive reality television programmes.

#### **4.5 Theoretical approach**

The following are the theoretical assumptions underlying this study:

- Certain factors such as cognitive, emotional, social, escapist and personal needs motivate viewers to participate interactively in the reality programme *Project Fame*.
- Viewers expect and receive gratifications when they participate interactively in the reality programme *Project Fame*.
- Voting frequency is an indicator of conscious audience participation.



- Viewers of *Project Fame* consult other media to obtain additional information about the programme.
- Watching and voting for *Project Fame* become part of the viewers' routine and habitual social activities.
- Social and cultural influences affect message interpretation and interactive participation.

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Methodological orientation**

This study predominantly uses qualitative research methods. Bryman (1988:60) identifies the following characteristics of qualitative research. Qualitative research is committed to examine events and actions from the perspective of the subjects being studied. It also operates from the premise that events and actions can be understood only within their specific context. The qualitative approach views processes as interactive, rather than static terms and adopts an 'open' research approach rather than a rigid structure, which allows the researcher to discover unexpected information that may not have been foreseen at the beginning of the study.

To increase the validity of this qualitative study, triangulation is applied to optimise the research findings. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods, theories, types of sampling and data collection within a research project (Du Plooy 2001:39). The assumption is that through the application of various research methods, theories etcetera, the respective shortcomings of each can be balanced out (Mouton 1996:156). Two theories, namely the uses and gratifications theory and reception theory are used in the context of this study. This study also applies two different research methods, namely a pre-group questionnaire and focus group interviews to gather data.

Since no prior research has been conducted on audiences and interactive television in South Africa, the qualitative method of focus group interviews is used to gather information on this topic. According to Du Plooy (2001:83), this kind of research is designed "to explore areas where limited or no prior information exists and/or to describe behaviours, themes, trends, attitudes, needs or relations that are applicable to the units analysed".

Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996:4) define focus group interviews as the discussion of a specific theme among a group of selected individuals. Since interaction between participants is a crucial element of focus group interviews, it is important to pay careful attention to the group composition and size (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson 2001:20).

The success of focus group interviews is closely related to the size of the group. Groups should not be too large to discourage participation but should be big enough to generate discussions. Bloor et al (2001:26) support a focus group size of six to eight participants while Morgan (1998:71b) identifies the ideal focus group size as six to ten members. For the purposes of this study, each focus group consists of five to six members.

The next factor to be considered is the number of focus group interviews conducted. Too many groups may waste time and money while too few groups may render insufficient data. According to Morgan (1998:78b) the tendency is to conduct three to five focus group interviews provided that the topic is not too complex and that the participants are moderately diverse. Four focus group interviews are conducted to obtain the necessary information for this study, excluding the pilot study.

A pre-group questionnaire is compiled and handed out to the participants before the focus group session. This open-ended questionnaire gives the respondents the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the various topics being addressed during the focus group. It will also provide the study with the necessary demographic data.

Open-ended questions as a research method allow for divergent and unpredictable responses (Black 1999:233). The participants are given the opportunity to answer the questions in any way they may want to. Du Plooy (2001:143) states that “since open-ended questions do not have structured or specified answers, they can elicit underlying ideas, feelings, sentiments and suggestions that researchers may not even have considered”.

## **5.2 Data collection method and techniques**

### **5.2.1 Population**

The population of a research study refers to all the possible units of analysis. Populations are divided into target or accessible populations with target populations referring to the population to which the findings are generalised to (Du Plooy 2001:101). Accessible populations on the other hand are the units in the target population to which the researcher has access (Du Plooy 2001:85). Due to the qualitative nature of this research study, the objective is not to generalise the findings to the target population, but rather to use the accessible population in order to do exploratory research.

### **5.2.2 Time dimension**

The time dimension of a research design can either be cross-sectional or longitudinal. Longitudinal designs are used when data is collected at different stages over time. Cross-sectional research is data collected at a single point in time (Du Plooy 2001:85). This research study applies a cross-sectional research design where data is gathered once off during a short period.

### **5.2.3 Sampling**

It is generally impossible to study every member of a population and therefore researchers only take a sample from the population for their studies (Wimmer & Dominick 2004:84). Sampling refers to the method applied to select units of analysis from a larger population. Morgan and Krueger (1998:56) point out that the research method applied in obtaining data determines the size and methods of sampling.

Sampling is divided into two types of sampling methods, namely probability and non-probability sampling. Probability samples are selected based on a mathematical system that calculates the chance of each unit being selected (Wimmer & Dominick 2004:86). Non-probability sampling does not follow mathematical guidelines and the researcher usually controls the choice of units (Du Plooy 2001:113).

In order to meet the objectives of this study, non-probability sampling is applied. Non-probability samples include convenience sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling and volunteer sampling (Baxter & Babbie 2004:134). A purposive non-probability sample is selected to obtain data. Purposive sampling “includes subjects or elements selected for specific characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who fail to meet these criteria” (Wimmer & Dominick 2004:88). Vaughn et al (1996:58) state that purposive sampling often proves to be most applicable to focus group interviews. The objective of purposive sampling is to focus on a participant’s ability to contribute to the study (Vaughn et al 1996:58).

The following criteria are required for participants to be included in the study: they are Communication students at the University of Johannesburg, they have access to DSTV (digital satellite television), they watched at least 60 minutes of *Project Fame* once a week and they participated interactively at least twice for the duration of the show.

As discussed in section 5.1, four focus group interviews are conducted for the purposes of this study with each group consisting of five to six participants.

#### ***5.2.4 Data collection and interpretation***

Before initiating the focus group interviews, all the participants are requested to complete a pre-group questionnaire. The pre-group questionnaire includes demographical information and allows the researcher to compare answers from the focus group interview with the pre-group questionnaire in order to identify possible discrepancies or to support the views expressed during the focus group interview.

The different focus group interviews are recorded on video and editing software is applied to assist in transcribing the data. Video footage allows for more detailed transcriptions since non-verbal communication can be included. Once the interviews have been transcribed, the data is analysed according to themes.

The unit of analysis for this study is thematic units. In applying thematic unitising multiple sentences or utterances can form a unit and therefore units may vary in length.

Since each unit relate to a specific theme, it is possible that the same theme may occur in different ways or utterances (Baxter & Babbie 2004:243). Each statement is therefore considered a unit and a statement could be one word or multiple sentences relating to a specific theme (Baxter & Babbie 2004:247).

One of the most prominent data analysing techniques within the qualitative paradigm is the constant comparative technique. This technique supports analysis according to themes. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2003:112), the process has the following steps: comparing and assigning units to categories, defining and refining the relevant categories, searching for relationships among categories, and finally integrating the data into a theoretical structure. The main goal in following this process is comparing units and identifying the similarities between the units within each category (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:112).

## **6 ANTICIPATED FINDINGS**

### **6.1 Anticipation of findings**

Based on the uses and gratifications theory as well as reception theory, this study aims to identify the different factors that motivate viewers to participate interactively in reality television. The theoretical foundation assumes that viewers who choose to participate actively in reality television do so because of an existing need that they are hoping to gratify. The study aims to identify these needs and determine whether the interactive component gratified the specific need based on the perception of the participants. Social and cultural influences are also investigated in order to determine whether these factors influence message interpretation and interactive participation.

### **6.2 Anticipated contribution of the study to the discipline of Communication**

As mentioned before, this study is explorative in nature and aims to identify certain patterns and trends within the interactive reality television genre. Due to the lack of research on the subject of reality television in South Africa, the objective is to gain a better understanding of an unknown research field and identify further research opportunities.

## **7 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

Chapter 2 discusses the genre of reality television. It looks at the history of reality television and the key moments in its development leading up to the format of the genre as it is known among audiences today. Another in-depth discussion focuses on the definition and characteristics that are central to understanding reality television. Since this study is an audience analysis, it is imperative to investigate the reality television audience and determine who is watching reality television. Finally, the chapter briefly comments on the future of reality television as a genre.

The topic of chapter 3 is interactive television and includes discussions about the definition of interactive television as well as the technology associated with interactive television. The chapter also looks at the relationship between television and the Internet, and how the Internet allows for media overflow, i.e. extending the text beyond the television screen. The next point of discussion is intertextuality and how the genre of reality television functions as a media event, resulting in different sources for the production of meaning.

Chapter 4 explains the concept of the reality programme *Project Fame* and provides background information about the contestants and the teachers of the show. It also gives a brief overview of the judges, known as the Board. The chapter concludes with the various interactive opportunities that the programme offered to its viewers.

This discussion would be incomplete without an in-depth look at the audience-centred theories applicable to the study. Chapter 5 focuses on different audience research traditions and defines the concept of 'active audiences'. It also discusses the origin and characteristics of the uses and gratifications theory and identifies categories of needs gratification. The next point of discussion is the critique that the uses and gratifications theory has received over the years. The cultural studies approach to reception theory is the second audience-centred theory applied to this study, and includes a discussion about the origin, characteristics and critique of the theory.

Chapter 6 deals with the methodological constructs of the study and offers a detailed account of the process of data collection. It includes the research design, the selection of participants, the conducting of focus group interviews as well as the method and categories of data analysis. Finally, the data analysis is presented in chapter 7. This chapter also evaluates the contribution of the audience-centred theories to the study and identifies further research opportunities.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **2 THE GENRE OF REALITY TELEVISION**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

When referring to reality television within an academic and a philosophical context, the term is synonymous with words such as controversy, ambiguity, inconclusiveness and perplexity. However, when referring to reality television within an audience-oriented context, the term is synonymous with words such as suspense, addictiveness, unpredictability and extraordinariness. The complex relationship between an almost indefinable genre and its diverse audience creates an enormous challenge for academia to gain insight into this phenomenon.

Many critics prefer to refrain from using the word ‘genre’ in the same context as reality television, due to the controversial nature associated with it. The perplexities of this phenomenon which combines generic genres such as game shows, talent shows and documentaries, make a sound theoretical framework describing the genre of reality television, almost impossible (Holmes & Jermyn 2004:6).

It seems that the attributes of reality television resist the confines of the traditional categorisation of programmes into a specific genre. However difficult it might be to place a theoretical definition behind the genre of reality television does not imply that broadcasters and audiences do not think of television in the context of genres (Holmes & Jermyn 2004:6).

Critics such as Corner (2002:255), Hill (2002:327) and Palmer (2002:298) classify reality television within the category of documentaries. Corner (2002:255) states that reality television has established itself as the “post documentary culture of television”, combining factuality with entertainment value.

The traditional documentary fulfils at least one of three functions to meet the criteria of the classic documentary (Corner 2002:259):

- Propagating and providing publicity for mainstream versions of nationalism
- Journalistic inquiry and exposition
- Radical interrogation and alternative perspective



Post-documentary culture has shown a shift in emphasis away from the traditional documentary values towards diversion, implying that due to extensive variation and diversion from the genre, post-documentaries do not conform to the generic attributes of documentary making. Secondly, post-documentaries combine factuality with performative, playful entertainment. Performance is seen not as an attempt to “feign natural behaviour” but as a legitimate opportunity to perform, thereby raising rhetorical questions about documentary credibility (Corner 2002:263). Thirdly, post-documentaries have shown a shift in the cognitive and affective investment required from audiences (Corner 2002:265).

Hill (2002:326) describes reality television as factual entertainment and further identifies three sub-genres of factual entertainment namely observation programmes, information programmes and programmes created for television. Observation programmes refer to documentaries about ordinary people in everyday places. Information programmes include documentaries based on true stories that aim to tell viewers something, e.g. about medical emergencies and pets.

The last sub-genre covers documentaries made for television that place real people in artificial situations and record what is happening. Documentaries that are made for television relate to Palmer’s observation (2002:298) that post-documentaries show a shift from public social issues to individual private concerns.

Even though a concise definition of genre remains illusive, reality television has established a universal understanding among viewers. Several reality programmes such as *Big Brother* and *Pop Idols* have become a global format adapted to each country’s own conventions. Not only do audiences receive reality television enthusiastically, but it also generates unprecedented debates surrounding cultural, social and moral issues. In order to comprehend the complex nature of reality television, it is necessary to determine its origins and the history behind the phenomenon that has taken the world by storm.

## 2.2 The history of reality television

True to the controversial nature of reality television such as the controversy over defining the genre and ethical and moral debates, the origins of reality television are also surrounded with controversy. Critics do however agree on two statements:

- Reality television originated in the United States of America and
- Reality television is not a ‘new’ concept (even though consensus cannot be reached on when exactly reality television made its debut).

Generally accepted, though, is the fact that the 1990s marked the revolution of reality television as it is known today. According to Rosenberg (2004) the 1973 series *An American Family* set the reality trend. Kilborn (1994:426) argues that the first reality show broadcast in the USA was *Unsolved Mysteries* in 1987.

Siegel (2003) observes that the forerunners of reality television including *Candid Camera*, *Real People* and *The Gong Show*, used to be labelled ‘actuality programming’. The term ‘reality television’ came to the fore when *The Washington Post* described the television news coverage of Anwar Sadat’s assassination as ‘reality television’.

However, the theory that *Candid Camera* served as the prototype for reality television arguably receives most support from critics such as Wong (2001:498) and Clissold (2004:33). When *Candid Camera* first aired in the 1940s, it proved to be one of the USA’s most popular television shows. This television programme introduced the camera as an unobtrusive observer, capturing unaware subjects and using these unexpected moments as entertainment, while simultaneously developing the concept of ‘real’ television (Clissold 2004:33).

*Candid Camera* made its debut during the Cold War, when military surveillance created social and political anxiety as well as an ideological climate that made audiences receptive to the concept of hidden-camera pranks. Within the context of military activity gathering up-to-date information and encouraging civilians to spend leisure time at home, *Candid Camera* proved to be the ideal catalyser for social anxiety by “making surveillance entertaining, less threatening and ideologically acceptable” (Clissold 2004:35).

The historical, psychological and ideological premises of *Candid Camera* not only introduced a new era in television entertainment, but also set the trend for reality television as it is known today. The elements central to *Candid Camera* that are also inseparable from current reality programmes are “hidden observation, recorded activities and public broadcast” (Clissold 2004:37).

The 1949 publication of George Orwell’s book, *1984*, once again placed surveillance techniques on the agenda by reinforcing the anxiety that Big Brother is always watching and that all individuals are exposed to hidden surveillance. Social behaviour was shaped by the practices of surveillance when the prevailing belief system enforced the idea that every citizen and every action is being watched and investigated. Furthermore, espionage and Cold War surveillance used the same technologies as the broadcast industry and true to its nature, the entertainment industry exploited the relationship between observation and amusement in producing *Candid Camera* (Clissold 2004:39).

It was only a matter of time before the practices of *Candid Camera* were brought to the spotlight. In reaction to criticism that the show is unethical and sadistic, Allen Funt, the creator of *Candid Camera*, decided to stage only situations where individuals are required to act heroically. This recipe successfully exploited Cold War surveillance while affirming American ideals (Clissold 2004:40).

Not only did *Candid Camera* become a reality-based programme, but it also reversed the power associated with surveillance and hidden cameras. The show guaranteed that no footage would be shown without consent from the person who was filmed. The policy still gave the surveiller the power to obtain footage, but the use of that footage depended on the subject. The ‘star’ was given the power to answer the surveiller by signing a legal document to grant permission for broadcasting (Clissold 2004:41).

The subjects usually agreed to release the footage to the producers. The minority that refused to give their consent often proved to be individuals who were caught in a compromising situation such as stealing or having an extramarital affair. Ironically, these exact same humiliating, compromising and sensational situations became the focus of some current reality shows such as *Cheaters* (Clissold 2004:41).

The success of *Candid Camera* is partly due to the focus on ordinary people. As Clissold (2004:43) points out, the lyrics of the theme song declared the mission of the programme:

When you least expect it, you're elected.  
You're the star today.  
Smile! You're on *Candid Camera*.  
With a hocus-pocus, you're in focus  
It's your lucky day.  
Smile! You're on *Candid Camera*.

The message to the audience was that surveillance techniques are fun and the person caught on camera is very fortunate. Clissold (2004:43) further argues that the essence of reality television was also expressed in the jingle, namely:

random democratic selection ('least expect it' and 'elected'),  
open and instant access to celebrity status (you're a star today),  
deceptive authority and transformation ('hocus-pocus'),  
and surveillance ('in focus').

The main difference between *Candid Camera* and reality television as it is known today is that *Candid Camera* had set out to record the unguarded moment whereas reality television gives full disclosure on surveillance practices. The 'stars' of *Candid Camera* became famous for a couple of minutes in comparison to reality television participants who plan their celebrity career even before the show is aired. Despite the differences between *Candid Camera* and current reality shows, the ideological precedent set by *Candid Camera* cannot be ignored (Clissold 2004:52).

### **2.3 Defining reality television**

Many labels such as Tabloid TV, Trash TV, Humiliation TV and Victim TV have been used to describe the genre of reality television. In fact, the phrase 'reality television' has been labelled as the most overused and misused phrase of the century. Despite the fact that audiences immediately know what is meant by the term reality television, a clear and concise definition of the genre remains illusive. Instead, it seems more valuable to describe the inherent nature and mutually inclusive attributes of these programmes, rather than argue the merits (or lack thereof) of proposed definitions.

It is evident that reality television possesses four characteristics that contribute to the essence of this genre, namely the tendency to focus on *ordinary people*, the *voyeuristic* element involved, the encouragement of *audience participation* and the *attempt to simulate real life*.

Well-known reality programmes broadcast in South Africa include shows such as *Survivor*, where participants have to survive the elements of a remote location, and *The Amazing Race*, where contestants race around the world to win a cash prize. Other favourites among reality television fans are *Idols*, a musical talent contest, and *Big Brother*, where participants are locked up in a house without contact with the world outside the house. What then is the common denominator that classifies these different programmes as the same genre? One possible answer is the tendency to favour *ordinary people* (Cummings 2002:xi).

Having ordinary people on television is not a new phenomenon. However the interaction with the medium when referring to reality television is. As Couldry (2000:46) observes, ordinary people are not expected to be ‘in’ the media, but rather ‘on’ the media in a very limited capacity. Although ordinary people have been appearing on television for many years on shows such as game shows, talk shows, documentaries, etcetera, reality television takes a different stance on ordinary people.

The trend is to place ordinary citizens in unusual situations – usually to win a prize – and observe their actions (Cummings 2002:xii). The unusual situations to which participants are exposed may vary from the daily mundane to the unexpected extreme. They are constructed in such a way to ensure that the situations create conflict and drama among the participants, and as such they indicate that reality in itself is not good enough, but producers need to present a heightened reality (Kavka 2003:70).

According to Killborn (1994:424), regardless of the activity, the main requirement remains that the viewer must always be able to relate to what is being broadcast. In fact, it is the very quality that the viewers themselves could have been subject to the experience that often proves to be the main attraction of the programme. Audiences also enjoy watching reality television because the lives of real people matter more than those of fictional characters (Kavka 2003:70).

Reality television has given producers the opportunity to “get local faces on air without going to the immense expense of creating a drama programme” (Kavka 2003:68). Viewers are fascinated to meet the unknown neighbour who resembles cultural ordinariness, yet individual uniqueness. One of the basic principles associated with this genre is featuring people ‘like us’ on a television show, without minimising the drama and entertainment that makes television attractive (Kavka 2003:68).

Another attribute of reality television is creating ‘instant celebrities’ and drawing audiences with the notion that they could themselves at any stage become famous. Many of the participants are not necessarily famous for a specific talent or worthy contribution but rather well known on the basis of their ‘well-known-ness’ or, simply stated, famous for being famous (Holmes 2004:111).

The appeal of reality television can be attributed to ‘ordinary’ people gaining access to more than their 15-minutes-of-fame, to quote Andy Warhol’s famous prediction. The nature of reality television fosters an intimate relationship between viewers and participants, which is reinforced through the medium of television itself that “both television personalities and viewers exist within a common universe of experience” (Langer 1981:363). Reality shows that promote audience participation take the ‘ordinary’ element to the extreme, as the fate of ordinary participants is in the hands of ordinary viewers (Cummings 2002:xii).

In a survey conducted by Reiss and Wiltz (2001:52), reality television audiences indicate that this genre allows them to fantasise about fame and status. One of the biggest drawing cards of reality television is the message “that ordinary people can become so important that millions will watch them” (Reiss & Wiltz 2001:52). The hope that next time they could be famous is one of the factors that keep audiences glued to the screen.

The latest trend in reality television may seem to contradict the focus on ordinary people. Programmes such as *The Simple Life*, *The Osbournes*, *The newly weds* and *I’m a celebrity, get me out of here* clearly feature celebrities instead of the usual man-on-the-street approach. Celebrity reality shows feature celebrities in their private capacities and not as actors, musicians or artists. However, the argument that reality shows focus on ordinary people still applies to reality shows using celebrities as subjects.

The premise of the argument is that reality television makes celebrities ‘ordinary people’ by means of parasocial interaction. When celebrities participate in reality shows, a clear distinction is made between career persona (what I do) and personal identity (who I am). Viewers are usually exposed to the actress, actor or musician, performing within a career capacity. Viewers are very seldom allowed access to celebrities outside their occupational responsibilities. Reality television, however, gives viewers the opportunity to experience celebrities outside the conventions of their career persona and see ‘the real person behind the celebrity mask’. Viewers get to know celebrities as ‘ordinary people’ – what their favourite food is, how they act under pressure, their personal preferences, etcetera.

Parasocial interaction refers to the phenomenon that occurs when viewers create relationships with characters on television as if the characters exist in real life (see 3.1 for detailed discussion on parasocial interaction). When observing celebrities in ‘real life’ situations, instead of a character on a set, viewers form parasocial relationships (intimacy at a distance) with the ‘real’ person and not a fictitious character. Celebrities are thus presented as the guy or girl next door or, in other words, as ‘ordinary people’ just like you. Whether reality television makes ordinary people celebrities or celebrities ordinary people, the focus still remains on the ‘ordinary’ person.

Another aspect central to reality television is that of voyeurism. Voyeurism in the traditional sense of the word refers to watching someone without his or her knowledge. This definition clearly proves problematic for reality television, as participants are fully aware that they are being observed and it carries their consent (Mapplebeck 2002:22). The applicable definition is that of *mediated* voyeurism, which refers to voyeurism within the mass media context, thus differentiating this phenomenon from other disciplines such as psychology and sociology (Calvert 2000:2).

Calvert (2000:2) defines mediated voyeurism as:

The consumption of revealing images of and information about others’ apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of the mass media and Internet.

Mediated voyeurism increases as boundaries between the *public* and *private* are blurred and the private becomes the subject of public discussion and speculation (Calvert 2000:2).

Reality television viewers derive pleasure from and value the public display of other people's otherwise private lives. The reciprocal relationship between viewers and participants lies in the desire of the audiences to watch and the desire of the participants to be watched (Calvert 2000:42). Observing the lives of others gives the audience a sense of power and control. Since the voyeur is receiving information, the audience has a privileged vantage point regarding the person being watched. The voyeur has access to knowledge that the person being spied on does not (Calvert 2000:69).

Audiences are comforted by observing the failures, humiliation and rejection of other people. This makes their own defeats and failures seem acceptable. In a society where perfection reigns, reality television promotes the underdog, the loser and the unattractive person. Imperfection and defeat are qualities celebrated by reality television (Siegel 2003). Another gratification received from voyeurism is the *perception* of truth and reality created by surveillance techniques. Reality television programmes create the illusion that the camera is an innocent and objective observer, free from the traditional manipulation techniques associated with television production. Therefore, the story is told by the images and not the producer or the presenter (Calvert 2000:61).

The subjects being watched often become role models for the viewers. Since these subjects are portrayed as real people with real problems, their situations create reflective opportunities. Viewers will imagine themselves in the same situation and compare their own reactions to the reactions of the subjects. Voyeurism creates a safe environment for viewers to analyse their own behaviour if exposed to similar situations. This leads to conclusions on socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and the viewers will often mirror the behaviour of those they have been observing (Calvert 2000:66).

A more simplistic explanation of voyeuristic behaviour is peoples' curiosity about the "private lives of others" (Wong 2001:492). Reality programmes give audiences a legitimate and socially accepted reason to pry into the private affairs of others, something that would otherwise be impossible (Wong 2001:492).



Not only is the audience constantly watching the participants of reality shows, but most reality television programmes also encourage the audience to *participate* on various levels. The development of technology and the accessibility to interactive media caused a paradigm shift in the traditional view of active audiences, by creating an environment where audiences go beyond responding to a text, to a level where they have the power to change the text (Tincknell & Raghuram 2004:254).

The relationship between audiences and reality television has entered a new level as audiences are invited to participate, and this participation is made an essential part of the plot. Audiences are encouraged to vote for their favourite candidates, make suggestions on the activities given to the participants, join a chat on the website with the participants or join the show as a member of the audience (Tincknell & Raghuram 2004:258).

The traditional definition of ‘active’ audiences rests on the premise of viewers’ “intellectual engagement with a text” as opposed to the latest reality television notion of audiences’ “intervention in a text” (Holmes & Jermyn 2004:27).

One of the most crucial marketing tools to draw active audiences is giving the viewer the power to determine the outcome of the show. However limited this power to influence the outcome (viewers are usually given a choice to keep one or two participants), the illusion of a power shift remains the central attraction. This perception is reinforced by the fact that participants do not have access to the media themselves, thus giving the audience a sense of empowerment as the real ‘author’ of the show (Tincknell & Raghuram 2004:264).

The range of opportunities to participate actively as an audience is not limited to the voting procedure alone, but the exposure to debates and discussions in the media as well as the opportunity to join a chat site and interact with other fans of the show emphasise the engagement with the text (Tincknell & Raghuram 2004:264). Reality television programmes often have an official website and a dedicated telephone number where fans can read more about the programme or send an SMS (short message service) to their favourite contestant.

Television fans are not merely part of an active audience, but their participation extends to emotional investment in a programme and sharing the experience with other fans (Foster 2004:272). According to Jenkins (1988:98):

One becomes a fan not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some type of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a community of other fans who share common interests.

Reality television combined with new technology has changed the face of active audiences; audiences can take the viewing experience to work by watching these programmes on webcams, voting on the Internet and joining chat rooms to discuss developments on the programme. Reality television has become part of everyday life as viewers discuss these programmes with friends and family, and read commentary on participants in daily newspapers. These various degrees of participation are certainly unique to the genre of reality television.

The claim that reality television is a representation of real life has been the centre of many academic debates. The term *reality television* in itself proves to be problematic as it implies that other television is somehow unreal (Cummings 2002:xi). It is generally accepted that certain television genres such as dramas, soap operas and sitcoms are fictional. Even documentaries often make use of misleading techniques. Is reality television then unique claiming to represent 'the real' or is it merely a new way of manipulating realism (Cummings 2002:xi)?

A discussion on reality television will be incomplete without posing the question: how real is real? Clark (2002:6) argues that the term reality television is mutually exclusive, that there is no such thing as reality television, only different degrees of un-realness. To illustrate this principle, Clark uses the example of a news bulletin, where the newsreader is giving a summary of the day's 'real' news.

Viewers neither believe nor mind the un-reality of the person reading the news who is seemingly captured in a box in the living room. However, viewers do believe the intimacy effect created by television that this person is speaking to them personally. Realistically speaking, the newsreader is talking to a glass lens and the concept in itself that someone is getting paid to talk to a glass lens is un-real.

Clark (2002:6) takes this example to the extreme by focusing on the fact that the news presenter is not even talking, but reading the words of a teleprompt. Every aspect of news bulletins seems to be fake – the person is not really confined to a box, is not really talking to the viewer and is not really talking but reading. However, fake as it may be, viewers still react personally to the perception created and therefore the un-real image becomes real in their psyche.

Reality television programmes seem to have a mutual understanding of how they interpret the *real*. The focus is on people and gaining emotional and psychological insight rather than explaining their lives. The structure of a reality show often takes ordinary *real* people out of their real environments and places them in a staged or artificial situation. The reasoning is that although the situation may be un-real, the real person will emerge when the traditional confines of society are stripped away (Cummings 2002:68).

Television viewers are fully aware of the un-reality of the situation and they do not expect to see real people in real life situations. On the contrary, they expect to watch people who know that they are being filmed, to put on an act and play the camera and the audience (Hill 2002:324). The drawing card is waiting for the possibility of a slippage, which will for a moment reveal something real of the character.

Hill (2002:324) describes this as “audiences look[ing] for the moment of authenticity when real people are ‘really’ themselves in an unreal environment” and reality television thriving on the “tension between performance and authenticity”. In the search for confirmation of the existence of unscripted, authentic moments in life, audiences turn to reality television. The attempt is delusive as reality television stages the unreal environment and moments that are supposed to be authentic (Wong 2001:492).

Another perspective is that the word 'reality' acts as a modifier when used in context with 'reality television'. The object being modified (television in this context) is applied and changed to a generally accepted idea of what the concept of 'reality' means and therefore it does not claim to be a more accurate depiction of reality. The word 'reality' is merely a representation of society's idea of reality (Siegel 2003).

The construction of a reality television programme is manipulated from beginning to end. Producers create an unreal environment, search for participants who are willing to live in this environment and allow others to observe the results (Mapplebeck 2002:20). This practice is also known as 'manipulated observational documentary' and simply means that reality television puts the conventions of traditional documentary making on display (Mapplebeck 2002:20).

Reality television's claim to represent real life will always be argued and contested as producers constantly intervene and manipulate the programme in order to draw higher audience ratings. This is evident in the search for participants when far more people are interviewed than being needed for the show. Producers are looking for personalities that will be good entertainment, create conflict and add humour to the show. This selection process itself often forms an integral part of the programme as the most humiliating moments of hopeful candidates are exposed on television (Dunkley 2002:43).

Friedman (2002:7) summarises the debate on the real as:

The proliferation of reality-based programming... does not represent a fundamental shift in television programming, but the industry's reliance on 'reality' as a promotional marketing tool is unprecedented. What separates the space of contemporary reality-based television...[is] the open and explicit sale of television programming as a representation of reality.

The four characteristics associated with the genre of reality television provide insight into this diverse and broadly defined phenomenon. *Project Fame*, the case study of this research, possesses all four identified elements. Firstly, it focuses on *ordinary people* and their musical talent and ability. Thousands of hopeful participants attended the auditions in order to be selected as one of the sixteen members in the Academy. None of the chosen participants had celebrity status before entering the Academy.

The sixteen participants in the competition spent most of their time confined to the walls of the *Project Fame* house. Each room in the house is equipped with its own surveillance cameras that operate 24 hours a day, and the viewers can watch contestants around the clock, from preparing for their Gala Music Evening to brushing their teeth. It is also compulsory for the contestants to wear their microphones day and night. Surveillance practices clearly provide audiences with the opportunity to act on the *voyeuristic* notion associated with reality television.

*Audience participation* in *Project Fame* extends across various activities. Audiences are encouraged to vote for their favourite contestant in order to keep them in the competition. Other activities such as scrolling messages on the television screen (sent by fans via SMS), polls and chats on the Internet as well as participating as a member of the audience during the live gala show are just some of the activities encouraging audience involvement.

The fourth element associated with reality television is the *attempt to simulate real life*. As with so many other reality shows, *Project Fame* takes the participants out of their normal environment and places them within an artificial environment with the claim that the 'real' person will emerge when stripped of the natural confines of society. The claim to the 'real' includes real and unscripted interaction between contestants, real emotions as well as real disappointments and achievements during the various stages of the competition.

## 2.4 The reality television audience

Reality TV is one of the hottest television genres to come around. Young viewers are particularly addicted to the shows and many are dedicated to three or more of them.

Mycoskie interviewed by Higgins (2003)

Even though the genre of reality television is fairly new and not many audience studies have been conducted, producers seem to agree that this genre attracts primarily the youth and young adults. The high audience ratings for the United Kingdom's version of *Big Brother* posed the question why viewers become addicted to watch a show about nothing. To answer this question and in order to determine who watches the programme, Hill (2002:327) conducted a study with 9000 television viewers in Britain.

Audience ratings showed that during the first broadcast season of *Big Brother*, 67 per cent of the UK population watched the programme at least once. More than seven million votes were cast by viewers to vote for the winner of the series, which broke the UK record for audience participation in a television programme. The website received three million page impressions per day, which made it Europe's most popular website for the summer of 2000 (Hill 2002:326).

Research provided the answer to the question of who is watching reality programming and the conclusion is that reality television appeals to everyone. A total of 72 per cent of children between the ages of four and fifteen watched reality shows. The more popular reality programmes were watched at least occasionally by 70 per cent of adults. Referring back to Hill's sub-genres of documentaries, the *created-for-television* genre was enjoyed by only 28 per cent of adults. However, this genre was supported by 48 per cent of the sixteen-to-twenty-four-year-olds and 69 per cent of the thirteen-to-fifteen-year-olds, which supports the general assessment that reality television shows attract a younger audience (Hill 2002:328).

Hill (2002:330) reached the conclusion that *Big Brother* formats of reality television are not an all-round entertainer, but rather appeal to the young, upwardly mobile viewers. In fact, the sixteen-to-thirty-four-year olds were “two times more likely to have watched it than older viewers”.

When given a range of activities to choose the most favourite characteristics of *Big Brother*, the following activities scored the highest percentages in order of most favourite to least favourite (Hill 2002:332):

- Seeing people live without modern comforts, e.g. television
- Watching group conflict
- Seeing contestants visit the confession room
- Seeing people do tasks set by the television makers and viewers
- Watching people do everyday things

Interestingly, the website activities scored the lowest as favourite activities, with viewers stating reasons such as its being too difficult to access the Internet from home and that they would rather watch the show in order to participate in conversations about *Big Brother*.

When comparing these research results to the amount of hits that the website received, Hill (2002:332) suggests that the television community of *Big Brother* may be completely different from the website community. Hill’s conclusion is supported by research done in Germany also suggesting a distinction between television viewers and the Internet community (Hill 2002:333).

Palmer (2002:303) reports that reality formats possessing the attributes of programmes such as *Big Brother* are very popular among sixteen-to-thirty-four-year-olds who are seen as upwardly mobile. The profile sketched was internationally matched by all versions of the show. According to Frank (2003), the under-twenty-five generation will not only determine the future of reality television but also the future of television in general. The under-twenty-five generation have received reality television with open arms and their media choices are changing television as a medium (Frank 2003). In an interview with McCarthy (2003), Koplowitz remarked that advertisers are eager to advertise during reality show time slots, due to the young audience that reality shows attract.

Extensive research has been conducted by MTV (music television networks) on the generation born after 1978. Also known as the 'media-actives', this generation is generalised as a group that has been exposed to unlimited options and choices regarding their media consumption and therefore they expect their media experience to offer them the option of an active role. The media-actives have a different way of accessing and processing information from their parents and these patterns are even more distinctive when it comes to reality television (Frank 2003).

Television programmes traditionally used to have a broadcast window of a couple of years, if not decades. Programmes currently have a viable audience for only two or three seasons. Television culture dictates that programmes must focus on immediacy and that popularity is fleeting and disposable. Reality television addresses this exact need when it caters for an audience that demands continuous change (Frank 2003).

According to Frank (2003) reality shows "are created to burn big, burn bright and burn out" and that "continuous reinvention is mandatory". When the media-active generation watch reality programmes with a dating theme, it is not only to find out who is the chosen partner, but the show also connects with the viewers because the theme of dating is current and directly related to their stage of life as well. The themes of the shows must be relevant to the immediate experiences of the generation.

The media-active generation also uses reality shows to connect with their peers and support their choices. Shows such as *Idols* and *Pop Stars* are seen as a reflection of themselves and they can easily identify with the contestants. Immediate access to the show is regarded as a necessity. A generation that is used to multiple channel choices, immediate access to friends via cellular phones and SMSs and the world of the Internet expects to get "what I want when I want it" (Frank 2003).

The media-active audience will continue their media habits as they enter adulthood and broadcasters that are used to a more passive audience will have to examine these habits, and produce and develop programmes that will meet the needs of this new audience (Frank 2003).



## 2.5 The future of reality television

Some critics argue that reality television is just a phase that its audience will outgrow very soon. Despite these comments and negative commentary on the value of reality television, current indicators show that at least for the short term, reality television is here to stay.

Research in Britain has shown that participation in parliamentary elections is declining while thousands of viewers participate in the *Big Brother* telephone polls (Cummings 2002:xiii).

The impact of reality television on society is summarised accurately by Clark (2003) when he states that:

Once, Brits could tell summer had arrived when a seasonal shower stopped play at Lord's cricket ground. Not anymore. Nowadays, summer is on the way when *Big Brother*, the Endemol show that put reality television on the U.K. media menu in 2000, returns. What is clear is that, provided reality shows remain true to their roots as event TV, the genre is here to stay.

The prediction that reality television will have a prosperous future is supported by Cummings (2002:69) when he states that the emphasis on "ordinary people, both as subjects and as interacting viewers, is more enduring than any particular format". He describes this phenomenon as democratisation, in other words, a change from the bureaucratic broadcasters deciding on important people as subject matters to production houses involving audiences in the lives of Jane and John Does. Other genres may soon adopt some of the reality television techniques, as the importance of connecting with the audience in a more direct way increases (Cummings 2002:70).

According to Kilborn (1994:436), the viability of reality shows will always remain high due to the combination of low production costs with high audience ratings. Kilborn also predicts that new types of reality shows would develop and simultaneously increase the controversy around reality-based programming. Although Kilborn (1994:436) questions the potential of reality shows to empower the audience, new and accessible technology has proven that the power of the audience is only limited by the confines of existing technology.

Reality television has also made its mark in the South African context. In an interview with Penstone (2002:34), Carl Fischer, the CEO of Magicworks, commented that the current enthusiasm for reality television would decline but that the genre itself would not disappear. Fischer states that there will always be a demand for shows where “viewers are able to identify with situations and characters”.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

History has proven that the continuation of a television show is based on audience ratings and the genre of reality television is no exception. The future of this phenomenon depends on producers’ knowledge of their audiences and the demands of an ever-changing broadcasting environment. By empowering audiences to interact actively with the text, producers also empower the genre of reality television to attract a large audience, and rise to the challenge in securing advertising revenue.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **3 INTERACTIVE TELEVISION**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In recent years broadcasters and producers have realised the value of extending the television programme beyond the confines of the television set, and utilising other media to draw and retain audiences. The goal is to make the television programme a social construct whereby the programme is integrated into everyday life. Through the use of technology such as the Internet, viewers have 24-hour access to additional information on their favourite programme as well as the opportunity to enter into discussions with other viewers, which in itself becomes a sub-community in society.

Interactivity extends to multiple levels and degrees of participation. For the purposes of this study, reference is made to primary and secondary interactivity. Primary interactivity refers to audiences engaging with the television show itself. Viewers have the option of not only engaging with the text, but they are also given the power to change the text, such as voting for a contestant or sending an SMS for public display during the show.

Another form of primary interactivity is para-social interaction. The concept was developed by Horton and Wohl in the 1950s to describe the relationships formed between audience members and television characters (Palmgreen, Wenner & Rayburn 1980:170). Levy (1978:19) refers to para-social interaction as “intimacy at a distance” and concludes from his research that audience members experience the fictitious relationship with newsreaders as very real. A correlation was also drawn between the frequency of exposure to news bulletins and respondents who viewed the newsreader as a ‘friend’.

Livingstone (1990:3) explains the process as viewers engaging in para-social interaction with characters as if these characters were real, thereby “blurring the boundaries between viewing and living”. Viewers also make this experience part of their everyday life by discussing the plot and characters, etcetera and referring to their own real-life experiences to interpret what they see on the screen.

A study conducted by Pitout (1996:177) on South African soap opera viewers, revealed that viewers often audibly engage in conversations with characters. Viewers also displayed emotional involvement with the characters not only moving them to tears, but also to take action. When describing their relationships with the characters, viewers do it passionately and lovingly. Pitout (1996:184) concluded that viewer enjoyment often relates to the interaction between viewers and the events on screen.

The first level then involves the actual television programme and the various ways in which audiences can engage with that text. Secondary interactivity refers to programme-related participation, where the television show is the subject matter, but interactivity does not influence or affect the text that is being broadcast. Examples include discussions with fans on the Internet, partaking in opinion polls and attending the official appearances of the contestants.

Audiences that choose to engage in activities that extend beyond merely watching the show are seen as 'fans' of the show. Bielby, Harrington and Bielby (1999:36) explain:

In the business of television, viewers matter more than fans,  
but the product itself matters more to fans than to other viewers.  
The distinction between a television viewer and a television fan  
is an important one. To 'view' television is to engage in a relatively  
private behaviour. To be a 'fan' however, is to participate in a range  
of activities that extend beyond the private act of viewing and reflects  
an enhanced emotional involvement with a television narrative.

In other words, viewers are more important to broadcasters than fans, but the programme itself is more important to the fans than the viewers. Fans invest more time and emotion in their viewing experience by not only watching the show, but also participating in activities such as voting, Internet participation, etcetera.

### **3.2 Defining interactivity**

Interactive television, also known as iTV, has become the buzzword associated with digital television and satellite broadcasts. Initially the lower case i was used to indicate a product that was in some way linked to the Internet (Birkmaier 2002). Today, the lower case i is used as a collective reference to all elements associated with interactive television, not just the Internet.

Contrary to popular belief that interactive television is a new concept of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, critics claim that interactive television has a history dating back to the 1950s. One of the first television programmes to be associated with audience interaction in the USA is *Winky Dink and You*. This programme was aired between 1953 and 1957 and applied the interactive element by using special plastic sheets that children attached to the television set and drew on with crayons (Birkmaier 2002).

In 1977 Qube, a division of Warner Communications, provided audiences with thirty television channels ranging from pay-per-view to interactive channels. Even though the channels proved to be popular among the viewers, the high costs of implementing the devices in the home made it a non-viable proposition. In 1994 Time Warner introduced the most sophisticated and expensive interactive television device, with features that included games, electronic programme guides and interactive shopping. Once again the costs associated with interactive television outweighed the benefits (Birkmaier 2002).

The challenge to developers of interactive television is to adapt the television set to a complete interactive capacity, yet making it financially viable for a market that is neither informed nor exposed to the benefits of interactivity. While the struggle continues, broadcasters and producers turn to existing media to fulfil the interactive function.

In the South African context, various programme formats have adopted the interactive experience. Talk shows such as *3 Talk* give viewers the opportunity to call in live or send SMS responses to the programme. Soapies have their own websites for fan participation and often launch competitions where the viewers choose their next actor/actress for a role in the programme. Educational programmes tend to the needs of scholars by giving them the opportunity to call the programme and ask subject-related questions.

According to Hall (2002), interactive television marks the end form of a series of technologies known as 'enhanced TV'. Enhanced television refers to programmes that offer viewers the option of interacting with the content. Interaction is a direct result of merging television content with Internet data.

Supporters of interactive television view interactivity as an essential element to make the viewing experience more enjoyable to the viewer, and thereby increasing television use. Even before television made its debut, radio programmes realised the value of interactivity with their audiences as they encouraged listeners to call in and request or dedicate a song. It was only natural for this form of audience participation to flow over to the medium of television, even though participation is limited to only answering a few calls from thousands of hopeful participants (Willis 1994:72).

Rogers (1995:314) defines interactivity as "the degree to which participants in a communication process can exchange roles and have control over their mutual discourse". He also states that when interactivity forms part of the communication process, it is likely that this interactivity will produce more effective outcomes. The concept of interactive television within the context of reality television refers to two dimensions, namely the technological dimension and the sociological dimension (Tincknell & Raghuram 2004:254).

Both these dimensions fulfil an integral function in studying active audiences. In the technological dimension, audience participation depends on the existence, availability, accessibility and affordability of specific technological devices. In the sociological dimension, the interactive engagement with various media creates an environment with multiple texts, which results in multiple interpretations, values and meanings.

### **3.3 Interactivity and technology**

Technological developments such as digital technology and interconnected networks shaped the face of interactive television. Television became a flexible medium as audiences continuously gained more control over the medium (Kim 2001:76). One of the earliest technologies associated with audience control is the VCR (Video Cassette Recorder). The VCR gave audiences the power to choose what television programmes they would like to watch at their preferred time. Audiences were no longer homebound to watch their favourite television programme at a specific time (Deery 2003:169).

For many years the low-tech telephone encouraged audience participation even though it was restricted to a limited degree of response (Deery 2003:162). Telephonic participation has been enhanced by the cellular phone and its ability to function not only as a traditional telephone, but also to send short text messages, known as SMSs. However, it is the explosion of the World Wide Web that introduced “unprecedented forms of interactivity, some of which are dialogic, viewer-generated, and outside industry control” (Deery 2003:162).

Hall (2002) argues that most of the technology needed for full interactive television does exist and that the only challenge that broadcasters face is to combine these technologies effectively. Within the broadcasting industry itself, technology has developed at a rapid speed. Despite the need for cheap television programmes, other factors have also contributed to the rise of interactive reality television.

One of the factors is the availability and accessibility to lightweight recording equipment of broadcast quality sold at a relatively low price (Kilborn 1994:427). In fact, broadcasting equipment is currently readily available at affordable prices and viewers even have the opportunity to acquire video material and submit their footage to various reality shows.

It is however the technology of surveillance cameras that took reality television to new heights. In the words of Jon Dovey (2000:55):

The low-grade video image has become the privileged form of TV 'truth telling', signifying authenticity and an indexical reproduction of the real world; indexical in the sense of presuming a direct and transparent correspondence between what is in front of the camera lens and its taped representation.

Surveillance culture has become the norm in society, moving beyond banks to small shops and parking lots, and eventually to television as a form of entertainment. Closed-circuit television (CCTV) provided the broadcasting industry with cameras that can be hidden with ease and possess the ability to focus, zoom and pan as well as the means to monitor subjects 24 hours a day (Jermyn 2002:80).

The notion of voyeurism combined with 24-hours surveillance techniques has created a "heightened sense of realism" (Jermyn 2004:80). Audiences do not have to rely on voice-overs or narratives to guide them through the visuals. The sense of 'realism' is further endorsed by the audiences' knowledge of how the footage has been obtained, in other words the knowledge that CCTV cameras are present 24 hours a day adds to the credibility of the show (Kilborn 1994:428).

Technology has become inseparable from reality television, referring to both producing the programmes by means of technology as well as encouraging audience participation through various technologies. Audience participation, in reality television in particular, relies heavily on technology beyond the television scope and on audiences to acquire the operational knowledge in applying technology to their viewing experience.



The way in which audiences use technology is influenced by various elements. Kang (2002:332) identifies certain factors that are associated with the use of new technology, namely demographics, technology orientations, motivations and prior experiences. Demographics refer to socio-economic factors while age and education are seen as the most important indicators of the use of new technology. Highly educated individuals will have a better understanding of the functioning of technological devices and younger people seem to be less reluctant in using new technology (Kang 2002:332).

Audiences often have a predisposition regarding technology, such as advantages associated with the use of technology, availability and perceived complexity. Perceptions, preconceived ideas and orientations towards technology will influence the extent to which that technology is adopted. Based on research conducted by Lin, Kang (2002:333) argues that the higher the perceived advantages and utilities associated with technology, the greater the use of that technology. The likelihood of adopting new technology also increases when these technologies are perceived as being easy to use.

Uses and gratifications studies have supported the relationship between the user need or motivation and the actual use of technology, also known as the uses and gratifications theory (see 5.3 for detailed discussion). Rubin and Perse (1987:59) identified two main types of motivation in technology use, namely instrumental and ritualistic use. Instrumental use is the purposeful use of technology in order to gratify a certain need, while ritualistic use would include the habitual use of technology in order to gain company or to pass time, for example. Even though these require different degrees of audience interaction, both are motivated and driven by specific needs (Rubin & Perse 1987:60).

Studies conducted by Kang (2002:340) support the theory that prior technological experiences influence the use of technology. It also seems that if the operating systems of new technology correlate with existing technology, audiences are more likely to engage in new technological uses.

When referring to interactivity in the context of communication technology, it is seen as a multidimensional concept. Heeter (1989:221) identifies six dimensions of interactivity, namely:

- Complexity of choice available
- Effort that users must exert
- Responsiveness to the user
- Monitoring information use
- Ease of adding information
- Facilitation of interpersonal communication

The complexity of choice refers to the number of choices available to viewers as well as the degree of complexity to exercise that choice (Heeter 1989:226). Digital satellite television (DSTV) offers audiences a range of programme content and the only action expected of viewers is to turn on the television set and select a channel. Most of the interactive programmes on DSTV such as *Project Fame* also give viewers the option of accessing additional information on their television set via the remote control.

Other interactive choices include voting and sending text messages by cellular phone as well as accessing the Internet for various activities such as voting and chatting to other fans. The various interactive choices give viewers the choice not only to interact by means of different technologies, but also to choose the degree to which they want to partake.

The second dimension relates to the amount of effort that users must exert in order to participate (Heeter 1989:222). Logic dictates that the less effort required from viewers, the more likely they are to participate in activities and that the more effort viewers choose to exert to participate, the more involved and loyal they are to the television programme. Viewers of *Project Fame* have the option of participating with little effort by accessing information on DSTV, voting or sending text messages via cell phones. Activities that demand more effort include Internet participation, joining the show as a member of the audience and attending the official public appearances of the contestants.

The third dimension, responsiveness to the user, refers to “the degree to which a medium can react responsively to a user” (Heeter 1989:223). The response that viewers receive includes both human and technological responses. The dimension of responsiveness cannot be separated from viewers’ expectations. Heeter (1989:230) supports the ‘media frame’ concept developed by Fredin and Krendl and states that audiences have a specific structure of expectations that they apply to understand and evaluate their interactions with a particular medium.

“The frame establishes a general relationship between the individual and the medium, and the medium and society” (Heeter 1989:231). The development of a media frame is not static but evolves over time as a result of viewers’ experiences with the medium. Different individuals have different expectations and experiences with the same medium, influencing their perceptions and future interaction with that medium.

When viewers of *Project Fame* access the official website in order to obtain more information, the expectation exists that that information will not merely be a summary of what was broadcast but will also provide additional information to the show. Viewers who send a text message to be broadcast expect to see that message scrolling on the screen. The medium then reacts to the viewer by broadcasting the received text message. The perception of the success of the response is directly influenced by the expected response that the viewer was hoping to achieve. When the active search for a response is rewarded, viewers are encouraged to participate again.

Monitoring information use refers to the continuous measurement of the use behaviour of a specific medium. The goal is to obtain feedback on user preferences and habits in their use of a particular media system. Feedback of this kind is not an optional response or activity for users but a monitoring system that users are often not aware of and that they probably could not avoid if they wanted to (Heeter 1989:232).

The process of obtaining feedback is divided into two categories, namely purposive feedback and non-purposive feedback. Purposive feedback refers to conscious feedback and non-purposive feedback refers to unintentional feedback (Heeter 1989:231). Within the context of *Project Fame*, viewers provide conscious feedback when asked to vote for their favourite contestants and when they partake in opinion polls. Non-purposive feedback will include the number of daily hits received on the website.

The fifth dimension is “the degree to which users can add information to the system that a mass, undifferentiated audience can access” (Heeter 1989:224). The implication of this dimension is that a clear distinction between source and receiver is not always present. When the receiver is using the medium, he will simultaneously provide a message to a mass audience and become the source. The traditional role of the user as mainly a receiver is changed substantially (Heeter 1989:224).

The official website for *Project Fame* is a clear example of this dimension. Viewers have the option of interacting with each other and exchanging their impressions of the contestants. Anyone in the world could access that discussion and receive the information posted on the website. Fans of *Project Fame* can also create their own websites alongside the official website. Viewers all over the country can access multiple websites on the subject matter.

The final dimension is the facilitation of interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication in this context does not necessarily refer to face-to-face communication, but to communication between two people or a small group. Interpersonal communication therefore includes interaction via an Internet chat room or the sending of SMSs. The degree to which a media system facilitates interpersonal communication will have an impact on the use of that system as an interactive medium. The conclusion is that media systems have the ability to facilitate mass communication, interpersonal communication or both (Heeter 1989:225).

Once again *Project Fame* meets the criteria of the dimension by facilitating a chat room on its official Internet website, where fans of the show can interact with each other and are viewed as a sub-community of the bigger *Project Fame* audience. When viewers send text messages for broadcasting purposes, they are communicated to a mass audience that is watching the show. It is clear that *Project Fame* facilitates both interpersonal and mass communication.

The concept of interactive television has been redefined by the explosion of the Internet as a standard platform for interactive communication (Birkmaier 2002). Several television networks in the United States of America noticed an almost immediate increase in website activity when a website address was displayed during a television show. Research indicated that 40% of television viewers were surfing the Internet while watching television (Birkmaier 2002). Internet activity is becoming synonymous with television viewing and interactive programmes.

### **3.4 Television and the Internet: media and cultural convergence**

Brooker (2001:470) formulated the concept of media overflow, stating that programme content often overflows to websites and that the text extends beyond the television experience and the time and space in which it is broadcast. Jenkins's distinction between 'media convergence' and 'cultural convergence' (1998) further clarifies the concept of media overflow. Media convergence applies to media industries structuring opportunities for audiences to interact across various mediums to ensure control over intellectual property.

Cultural convergence on the other hand describes the way in which audiences relate to media content, the skills acquired to ascribe meaning across different media and the desire for an interactive culture. Cultural investment in interactive television arises as a result of the cultural value associated with participation as well as perceiving "television content as a resource in social interactions" (Jenkins 1998). Within the realm of interactivity, television and Internet convergence creates an inevitable tug of war between producers and website developers to gain control and regulation of the interactive experience.

Foster (2004:28) examines the relationship between Internet and reality television fans and the implications of this interaction for television culture. He argues that the Internet functions as a popular tool for mainstream interaction and that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between fan culture created by audiences and that structured by television producers. Foster (2004:28) emphasises that even though most of the websites are audience produced (and often critical and negative towards a specific programme), these sites still feed audiences back to the producers and the consumption of reality programming.

Audience participation on the Internet often takes place in the context of forums or chat rooms, and two main streams of interaction are identified, namely 'fantasy pools' and 'spoiler sites' (Foster 2004:270). Fantasy pools are classified as sites where viewers are fans of the reality show and they engage with other viewers by speculating on the outcome of the show and competing with others by predicting the winner. Spoiler sites are opposed to the reality programme and try to spoil the experience of other viewers by bashing the programme, the contestants and the fan base.

Spoilers or anti-fans co-exist with true fans of the reality programme and spoiler sites propagate the dislike of the programme. However negative these sites may appear, the fact remains that anti-fans are as affected by the text as true fans. Anti-fans love to hate the show and they spend just as much time and effort engaging with the text, and analysing and decoding it as true fans (Foster 2004:277).

Technology has opened doors to a new trend whereby audiences can talk back to corporations and production houses, challenging the traditional convention of being mere consumers. The irony, however, is that sites opposing television programmes generate audience interest and feed the audiences back to those very powers they are challenging (Foster 2004:277).

The official *Project Fame* website offers viewers the opportunity of interacting with each other and commenting on individual participants. The site even has a link to other unofficial fan sites, but no spoiler sites are listed (Project Fame 2004). Biz-community is one website where anti-fans criticise *Project Fame* with phrases such as "the show must go", "what a waste of time" and "it sucks" (Biz-community forum 2004).

Interactivity and media overflow have created an environment with multiple texts extending past the television broadcasting of programmes. Multiple texts give rise to various interpretations and meanings assigned to those texts, also known as intertextuality.

### **3.5 Intertextuality: reality television as a media event**

There are no facts, only interpretations.

Nietzsche, 1968

The concept of intertextuality is associated with names such as Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, and it developed in the context of literature when critics were looking beyond the author as the source of literary meaning (Richardson 2000:96). Fiske (1987:108) then applied this concept of intertextuality to television culture by proposing that:

Any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledge is brought to bear upon it.

The different approach to the creation of meaning rests on the premise that the construction of meaning extends beyond the author and beyond the literary production itself. It has also seen a shift in emphasis to readers or viewers as crucial participants in the construction of meaning, thereby displacing the 'author' as the original source of meaning creation (Richardson 2000:96). Intertextuality can be summarised as the process whereby readers and viewers interpret texts and construct meaning in a dynamic interactive process of combining information generated by various sources (Meinhof & Smith 2000:11).

Knowledge of existing intertextual sources creates certain preconceived perceptions in viewers and contributes to the preference of one meaning to another. By studying the relationship between the audience and the various texts, it is possible to identify certain clues about preferred meaning (Fiske 1987:108).

Richardson (2000:81) identifies three levels of intertextuality. First-level intertextuality is defined as references of meaning construction that is created by the original text itself, for example the television show that is broadcast. Second-level intertextuality includes references of meaning construction generated by extra-textual sources of information and these extra-textual sources could be analysed as texts in their own right, such as newspaper articles commenting on a television show. Third-level intertextuality also generates references of meaning construction via extra-textual sources but the source cannot be specified for example gossip and the famous and commonly used phrase 'they say' without clarifying who 'they' are.

Fiske (1987:108) takes a slightly different approach by dividing intertextuality into two dimensions, namely the horizontal and the vertical dimensions. Horizontal texts are primary texts that are inseparably linked to one another for example the content, genre and characters of a television programme. Vertical intertextuality exists between a primary text and a secondary text (a text that refers directly to the primary text), for example the television programme (primary text) and journalism articles (secondary text), (Fiske 1987:108).

According to Fiske (1987:109), horizontal intertextuality cannot be separated from the genre component. By classifying a television programme into a certain genre, the audience is already exposed to a set of pre-oriented expectations even before seeing the first broadcast of a programme.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, reality television tends to resist the traditional characterisation of genres. However, it still possesses generic qualities that separates it from other genres. Reality viewers will expect to see a programme that attempts to simulate real life through ordinary participants, have the option of interacting to a certain degree and experience a voyeuristic style and presentation of recorded footage.

Genre classification serves two purposes, namely standardising and familiarising the overlapping elements in television programming as well as differentiating it from other programmes. It also provides audiences with the necessary information of what to expect and thus triggers the memory of previous programmes from the same genre, which regulates audience expectations and perceptions (Fiske 1987:114).



Fiske (1987:114) quotes an unpublished paper from Hartley that accurately summarises the influence and effects of genre categorisation:

Audiences' different potential pleasures are channelled and disciplined by genres, which operate by producing recognition of the already known set of responses and rules of engagement. Audiences aren't supposed to judge a western for not being musical enough, a musical for not being horrific, or a sitcom for not being sufficiently erotic. Such is the 'contract' of genre. It entails a loss of freedom of desire and demand in order to achieve efficiency and properly labelled packaging.

Skovmand (1992:86) argues that television shows should not be analysed within the confines of genres and literature alone, but rather seen as extensive fields of cultural practices, which are not only communicated by television itself, but also through other practices such as gossip and interaction. Television texts are therefore not meticulously shaped to communicate a specific meaning, but are records of social events.

Fiske (1987:115) explores this argument based on the premise articulated by Barthes that the intertextual relationship in our culture is of such a complex nature that in essence all the texts ultimately refer to each other and not to reality, thereby creating a universal culturally accepted meaning of interpretation. Based on this argument, a television programme can be understood only in comparison to other television programmes and not by comparing it to reality.

The representation of a bomb explosion can for example be understood only in relation to other bomb explosions that have been seen on television as many viewers have not seen or experienced a bomb explosion first hand. Even viewers who have experienced a bomb explosion will interpret it by referring to similar texts to which they have been exposed and so integrate the text with the real experience. Therefore, a cultural meaning exists for the interpretation of a 'bomb explosion' and viewers refer to this cultural frame of reference for decoding and producers refer to the frame of reference for encoding (Fiske 1987:115).

Critics agree that cultural history and everyday situations are two elements that also serve as ideological frameworks in the construction of meaning. Many television shows are based on, and adapted to, a specific cultural and national background that gives viewers preconceived belief systems and general knowledge when interpreting television texts. In order to engage with the television text, viewers have to refer to everyday experiences and prior experiences with the specific genre in their construction of meaning (Mikos & Wulff 2000:113).

Vertical intertextuality and secondary texts support the “circulation of selected meanings of the primary text” and usually take place as part of the viewers’ social interaction (Fiske 1987:117). The written and spoken meanings generated about a television programme suggest that television not only play a crucial part in society’s leisure activities, but that it also influences the culture of society through newspaper articles, magazines, radio and the tabloid press.

The meanings and interpretations generated through intertextuality are more often than not read back into the primary text, thereby influencing the preferred meaning generated by the text itself. Fiske (1987:118) illustrates this tendency by focusing on journalistic articles about television and placing the viewers’ interests on the one side of the scale and the producers’ interests on the other side. Producers need as much publicity about their programmes as possible and journalists often rely on press releases to obtain the information. On the other hand, journalists often provide viewers with critical writings, thereby confirming or challenging a certain response to a television programme.

The latest tendency of reality television is to run polls for its audiences. Other mass media such as the print media and the radio often buy into the frenzy and even though they do not create the activity, it is given public status through endorsement. Activities such as voting and opinion polls serve to enhance the pleasure of viewers choosing to participate interactively (Fiske 1987:123).

Media reception and meaning construction are influenced by two processes, namely mimesis and poiesis. The relationship between audiences and texts develops in an era that is consumer oriented and audiences do not necessarily respond to a media text in the way prescribed by the text itself. Mimesis refers to this process where audiences ascribe meaning to a text as dictated by the text, corresponding to initial mass media theories that audiences are passive and that the media enforces its ideologies on viewers (Bachmair 2000:116).

Since the paradigm shift to a more active audience, critics have acknowledged that audiences combine existing cultural meaning with the meaning communicated by the text in order to create their own unique comprehension of a text. A hermeneutic relationship now exists between media and audiences, meaning that the role of the audience in meaning production is as vital as the meaning communicated by the media. The active production of meaning is called the process of poiesis (Bachmair 2000:116).

Bachmair (2000:118) illustrates the process of poiesis by comparing the mass media to a 'self-service buffet', offering audiences various resources for the production of meaning. Audiences choose their own selection of meanings from the buffet and integrate the meaning of the text into their everyday experiences.

The texts generated by reality shows are often received from various media sources or authors and not only from the programme itself. Couldry (2002:283), Scannel (2002:271) and Hill (2002:333) view reality shows such as *Big Brother* as 'media events', meaning that the mass media (newspapers, radio and the press) contributes to the creation of additional texts, thereby making the programme a multi-level media event.

Contestants who are voted out, the stories of their friends and families, and reports by the press help establish reality programmes as events worth talking about. Many reality shows thrive on the publicity they generate as well as the spin-offs associated with that publicity. Producers are quite aware of the "sort of coverage that excites the media" and it forms a crucial factor, especially in the selection of the participants (Hill & Palmer 2002:252).

According to Tincknell and Raghuram (2004:261), reality shows such as *Big Brother* offer multiple sources or avenues for the production of meaning. These avenues are created by the show itself, such as the programme that is broadcast and the official Internet site. On another level, these shows are absorbed by the media that is outside the control of the producers of the show, such as independent websites, newspapers and tabloids. The third level of meaning is offered by the participants themselves who are voted out of the game and give their own interpretations on the television show. All of these additional texts offer a wider text than the one created by the producers of the show, and the additional texts often create opposing meanings to the meaning generated by the original text.

Intertextuality applied to reality television has proven to be an economic success to all participating mass media. The continuous success of commentating on reality television shows including media such as the internet, popular press, radio, celebrity magazines and tabloids have made coverage of other television genres seem futile. The first series of *Big Brother* that was aired in the United Kingdom generated advertising revenue in the tabloid press of over £13 million (Holmes 2004:121).

This trend is supported by Klinger's argument (1989:5) that intermedia reports and coverage as well as promotional material assist in creating a "commercial life support system for a film". Even though applied to film, the theory proves to be very useful in reality television studies as well. Klinger further states that the intertextual goal is to produce various sources of access to a text, which in turns maximises the audience and ensures that the text is explored "as extensively as possible in the social sphere".

To illustrate the principal of preferred meaning and referring back to the quote by Nietzsche that there are no facts, only interpretations, the *Project Fame* website (Project Fame Interact 2004) hosted an interesting discussion between three viewers, namely Mar, Spaceygirl and Thopza:

Mar (2004/08/19 11:45:43 AM) wrote:

Entertainment is what counts!!

Wow, this show is GREAT!! Yes we might not agree with who sings what and who is on probation, but that is just it ENTERTAINMENT!!!! The guy with the biggest support base will win no matter if he is on probation every week! And it doesn't matter if he sings the best or acts the best, the important thing is we are being entertained and all the wonderful contestants get the exposure win or lose if you have it you will become famous after the show! And the winner well I believe should be the guy who entertained us the most!!!!

Spaceygirl (2004/08/20 08:33:19 PM) responded:

Talent is what counts!!

This ain't Big Brother ..it's supposed to be about TALENT, not 'entertainment value'!!!

Thopza (2004/08/23 03:35:56 PM) also contributed to the debate:

Talent is what counts!!

WHATS MUSICAL TALENT IF IT'S NOT ENTERTAINING????????

BE REAL!!! entertainment is one of the reasons Tebza is in the top 5 coz even though his voice is not as good as Dare's, he knows how to use it and he's got rhythm enough to certainly entertain us more than Dare does!! let's be true to ourselves, there are lots of singers out there with terrible voices but have great fan followings and make loads of money! i say, VOTE FOR THE TALENT THAT ENTERTAINS U!!!

Even though these viewers are exposed to the same text and the same genre, they still show different expectations and different preferred meanings. The website also illustrates that the debate between the supporters of the different contestants is never ending, as fans criticise the competition and each other, and encourage the opposition to change their votes (Project Fame 2004).

*Project Fame* has certainly received its share of publicity in the press. A search on the website of the national newspaper *The Star* showed 51 articles written and published about *Project Fame* (The Star Archive 2004). The Afrikaans newspaper *Beeld* published 80 articles relating to *Project Fame* (Beeld 2004). Articles varied from features on contestants to criticism of, and support for, the programme. The articles published in *Beeld* criticising the show include headings such as “*En daar is flouerige PF ook verby*” translated to “End of dull PF”, and “*Knoeiery met Fame se stemme*” translated to “Meddling with Fame votes”, (Beeld 2004). *The Star* criticises *Project Fame* with articles such as “*Reality shows are like Madiba’s retirement*” and “*Off-key start to life with Project Fame’s 16*” (The Star 2004). Positive articles about the show include articles such as “*Project Fame rolls out top 5 for grand finale*” and “*A superstar for the continent*” (The Star 2004). Many articles including “*Project Fame stand off*” (The Star 2004) and “*Stem vir Lindiwe en basta met die res*” translated to “Vote for Lindiwe and forget the rest” (Beeld 2004) comment on the performance of contestants. Viewers who have access to these secondary texts are influenced in their interpretation of the primary text, whether confirming existing meaning or challenging it.

The Producers of *Project Fame* entered into partnerships with seven radio stations that each ran a weekly opinion poll encouraging listeners to vote for their favourite participants via the radio station (Project Fame 2004). Although these votes did not count towards the official voting process, the results of the opinion polls were announced every week during the Gala Show of *Project Fame* (see addendum for more details on radio station participation).

It is clear that interactive television programmes add another dimension to message interpretation and intertextuality. Viewers are not bound to one text only, but through Internet participation, voting for participants and other activities, they are not only exposed to multiple texts with multiple meanings, but they also have the power to change the primary text.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century holds the promise of unequalled technological convergence that will redefine the concept of interactive audiences. Convenience and choice are the words dictating this process. Audiences' needs and desires are becoming more prominent by the day and interactivity is no longer seen as an option but rather as a necessity. Even genres such as soap operas, quiz shows and talk shows have integrated the interactive experience through websites, opinion polls and cellphone services and options.

The interactive experience inevitably leads to media overflow and the creation of secondary texts. The relation between primary and secondary texts creates a complex set of intertextual readings, making the meaning that audiences ascribe to a text even more unpredictable. Producers may be able to control the primary text, but cannot control the secondary texts and can therefore not dictate the preferred reading of a text.

While audiences gain more control over the television viewing experience, producers have no choice but to extend the television programme beyond the confines of the television monitor itself, and where possible, to create secondary texts themselves even though they offer only limited control. An understanding of the interactive audience has never been as crucial and necessary as the current reality television trend reveals. Yet an understanding of audiences has never been as elusive and unpredictable as the understanding of the reality television fan.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4 PROJECT FAME

#### 4.1 Introduction

The announcement that M-Net and Endemol SA were launching the first series of *Project Fame* in South Africa gave rise to new dreams of stardom for many celebrity wannabes as well as a new wave of excitement among reality television devotees. When asked why Endemol SA had decided to undertake the production of *Project Fame*, executive producer Marie Rosholt responded:

It is a dream project! A chance to live the experience of shaping one or more superstars. It is a show that is emotive and universal in its appeal, a winner!

(Meet Marie Rosholt... 2004).

The South African version of *Project Fame* is the 22<sup>nd</sup> international series of the programme format originally introduced as *Operation Triunfo* in Spain. The sixteen Spanish contestants sold over six million albums between them and at one stage during the show seven of the Spanish music top ten were performed by the students of the show. The show has been produced in countries such as Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Russia and Spain with a phenomenal market share of 90% in Greece. More than eight million UK viewers watched the British version, *Fame Academy*, and the final show received approximately seven million votes (Get ready for...2004).

What made this show different from the other talent competition reality show *Idols* is that contestants had to show additional skills besides their singing ability, such as playing a musical instrument or composing and writing a song. The show also had its own dedicated 24-hour channel enabling viewers with Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) access to watch the show around the clock (Meet Marie Rosholt...2004). *Project Fame* therefore combined the *Idols* and *Big Brother* format, offering viewers the best of both worlds.



#### **4.2 The *Project Fame* concept**

Students spent most of their time training and living in the Academy, with 24-hours surveillance, enabling audiences to watch not only the leisure activities, but also the grooming of the stars into superstars. The Academy boasted twenty-seven remote-controlled cameras and four manned cameras, since every room in the Academy was subject to surveillance. Bedrooms were equipped with special infrared cameras to ensure that night-time activities did not escape the watchful eye of the curious viewer. The only privacy the contestants were allowed was inside the bathrooms (Project Fame 2004).

The programme was broadcast on two channels namely M-Net and DSTV channel 37. Both channels are available only to paying subscribers, with M-Net allowing non-subscribers a two-hour window of viewing known as 'open time'. A thirty-minute highlight package was broadcast five days a week on M-Net open time with an additional two-hour live gala show on Sundays. The DSTV channel broadcast the live action 24 hours a day for the duration of the show. The show was hosted by two presenters, James Alexander and Vusi Twala, who did the links for the show and presented the live gala shows on Sundays (Project Fame 2004).

Students were subject to 69 days of extensive training from Mondays to Fridays in the Academy that was managed like a 'school'. They were allowed to exit the Academy only for special excursions or performances. The curriculum was presented by six teachers: two responsible for voice training, a music teacher, two fitness and movement coaches and a guidance counsellor. Special celebrity guests also made appearances on the show to share their experience and knowledge with the students and viewers (Project Fame 2004).

Every Sunday marked the gala evening where one student was eliminated. The elimination process was designed to allow as much input from various people as possible. The first vote belonged to a jury, known as the board, consisting of well-known and respected industry musicians who were tasked to nominate four students whose performance did not meet their requirements. The teachers then had the opportunity to save one of the four, and the other contestants could also save one of their fellow contestants, leaving two students on probation for a week.

During the probation week, the public had the opportunity to vote for one of the two students on probation and keep one more student in the Academy. The results of the viewers' choice were announced during the gala evening and the contestant with the least votes was eliminated from the show (Project Fame 2004).

Contestants were required to follow a strict timetable allowing them to train in all musical disciplines, and to rehearse songs and dance routines to be performed during the Sunday gala show. Time was allocated for relaxing and socialising, and the students could spend free time as they chose. Mondays were assigned as recording days when the students recorded the songs from the previous day's gala show. On Tuesdays, the students were not permitted to sing, giving their voices a well-deserved rest (Project Fame 2004).

Nine students from South Africa and seven students from the rest of the African continent were selected to participate in the show. Prizes included a recording contract for the winner and the two runners-up as well as a commitment from the recording company to promote their newly launched singing careers. The winner was also awarded a VIP lifestyle for a year with spectacular prizes such as air travels to various countries, jewellery and clothing. The other fifteen contestants had the opportunity to be part of the recording of five CDs and two compilation CDs providing them with exposure that many newcomers in the music industry can only dream of (Project Fame 2004).

#### **4.3 The *Project Fame* contestants**

Three teams were commissioned to select twenty-six contestants from the thousands of entries around the African continent. Each team consisted of one person in charge of the musical component and one responsible for selection. The person in charge of music screened the contestants based on the strengths and weaknesses of their musical ability, while the selection person focused on the contestants' television appeal. The selection process was scheduled over many rounds of elimination, all recorded on camera (Project Fame 2004).

Entries were open to anyone older than eighteen years and the oldest applicant was in his late sixties. The applicants for the show were predominantly male with 49% of the applications from South Africa and 51% of the applications from the rest of Africa. The audition phase of the process auditioned 24% of the contestants from South Africa and 76% from the rest of Africa. From the second phase, 36% contestants from South Africa were shortlisted with contestants from the African continent filling the remaining 64%. Twenty-six finalists were chosen to participate in the final elimination round. The heat process narrowed the contestants down to a total of sixteen students who entered the Academy as the official Project Fame contestants (Project Fame 2004).

Bodea entered *Project Fame* as a twenty-one-year-old student from Zanzibar, Tanzania. He worked as a producer in a studio in Zanzibar and has been singing since the young age of nine. His motto was “everyday is good because of being alive” and one of his greatest musical influences was *The Temptations*. Bodea was encouraged to enter the competition when he went to pay his DSTV licence. He believed that Project Fame was a new style and challenge to invest and give back to his home country. During his stay in the Academy, Bodea developed a romantic relationship with Robyn, a female contestant from Cape Town (Project Fame 2004).

South African contestant Robyn was finally convinced by her friends to enter the *Project Fame* competition. Robyn listened to a variety of music genres such as jazz and R & B and was inspired by music that is sensual. She viewed musical entertainment not only as performing a song, but as having the stamina to “carry out funky dance moves too” (Project Fame 2004).

Another one of Robyn’s passions was football and her love for the game had inspired her to train an all-girls soccer team. Her motto, “this too shall pass”, proved to be spot on since she was voted out in the early stages of the competition, but not before stealing the hearts of two other contestants, Bodea and Jonathan. The budding romance between Robyn and Bodea was the talk of the town before the two were separated when Bodea was voted out of the competition (Project Fame 2004).

Claudia was a nineteen-year-old student from Cape Town. Her first musical performance was at age five and even though she forgot her lines, the audience was still impressed with the cute little girl. Starting off as a dramatic arts student, Claudia later changed her major subject to jazz study, a change that she viewed as one of her greatest achievements since she had to pass an audition to be admitted into the degree. Claudia's motto for *Project Fame* was "if it is to be, it's up to me" (Project Fame 2004).

One of the Nigerian contestants was the twenty-three-year-old Daré, who was born into a family of musicians. Daré worked in the entertainment industry as a full-time DJ and voice-over artist. This experience had taught him that fame was overrated and seldom balanced with the income of entertainers. According to Daré his greatest achievement was being independent and he enjoyed travelling, meeting new people and new experiences. His motto for *Project Fame* was "keep trying to try" (Project Fame 2004).

Daré was responsible for one of the most controversial and talked-about incidents in the Academy. When asked by one of his fellow students what he would give a seven-year-old girl for her birthday, he answered a pregnancy. This sparked outrage from various human rights groups demanding that he be expelled from the competition. After apologising during the gala show for his remark, explaining his comment as a tasteless joke, and after a reprimand from the headmaster, Daré was allowed to remain in the competition. Despite all the negative publicity, Daré still managed to finish as the second runner-up in the competition (Project Fame 2004).

Twenty-three-year-old Tumi is a South African that has been involved in music since the age of twelve when he joined the church choir. Tumi viewed his ability to perform various musical genres as his greatest achievement. As a keen participant in competitions, Tumi was appointed as the 'Master of Ceremonies of the Year' by radio station Y FM's Rap Activity Jam (Project Fame 2004).

Tumi was introduced to opera music when a schoolteacher approached him to represent the school in an opera competition. Within five weeks he taught himself the words and proceeded to represent the Gauteng area at a competition in Durban where he finished second. His motto was simply "go for it" (Project Fame 2004).

Another South African, Johan, is the youngest of four children and while his peers were playing sports he was much more interested in rock music and playing the keyboard. Besides the keyboard, he played the electric and bass guitar. Johan's interest in rock music led him to join a rock band that has subsequently been interviewed on television, thereby marking his greatest achievement. When entering the competition, Johan was training as an electrical apprentice. "Respect others and they will respect you" is the motto he lived by during *Project Fame* (Project Fame 2004).

Jonathan was a twenty-one-year-old communication student when he entered the Academy. He started his own rock band called *Lonehill Estates* and he was also a regular guitarist at a hotel in Pretoria. In his free time, he enjoyed sketching and teaching guitar to primary school children. His favourite band was *Jars of Clay* and he enjoyed a variety of music genres. Jonathan's motto for the competition was "it's not whether you win or lose, it's how many people remember you when you die" (Project Fame 2004).

Jonathan had a soft spot for another contestant, Robyn, but she was romantically involved with Bodea. Jonathan became an icon for the diabetic community, as he himself is a diabetic, not allowing the condition to lessen the quality of his life. Many young fans posted messages on the website thanking him for his positive attitude towards living with diabetes. Jonathan was also very outspoken about his Christian faith and often encouraged other contestants with verses from the Bible. Jonathan was the first runner-up in the competition (Project Fame 2004).

Twenty-year-old Karen from Kenya started singing at the age of fourteen. Karen became hooked on rapping when entering a rap competition as a teenager. She wanted to share her experiences with people through her music and viewed *Project Fame* as her greatest achievement. She described her personality as magnetic and enjoyed telling jokes. Karen viewed music as her calling and had a stern motto stating "the road to hell is paved with good intentions" (Project Fame 2004).

Kudzai was twenty-five year old Zimbabwean resident when entering the *Project Fame* show. She worked as a travel agent and one of her hobbies was learning new languages. Kudzai wanted to be a professional musician since she led a nursery rhyme at the age of four (Project Fame 2004). She viewed herself firmly grounded in reality stating that fame and everything else coming with celebrity status would not go to her head. Kudzai's family is a very important part of her life and her motto read "your character will do for you what your gift can't do" (Project Fame 2004).

The next contestant, Lindiwe, was twenty five, lived in Zambia and was the only married contestant. She loved Afro-jaza, soft rock and folk music, and said that she had developed her own style of music. Lindiwe already had several music awards behind her name such as the Ngoma award for Best Female Performer in 1999 and a Battle of the Bands award for Best Female Performer in 2000. Overcoming her shyness was one of her greatest achievements even though she still did not enjoy public speaking. Lindiwe's faith in her talent and personality was supported by the faith of her fans and secured her position as the overall winner of the *Project Fame* show (Project Fame 2004).

Twenty-three-year-old Didge had just been offered a job as a television presenter in his home country, Kenya, when he entered the Academy. He loved the entertainment industry and wanted to use the *Project Fame* experience to expose his originality and eventually influence Kenyan music for the better. Not only had Didge written a collection of 300 poems, but he also had a fascination with hats and had collected over 250 hats within five years. The first time Didge ever went to the cinema was at the age of 22 when he watched *The Matrix*. His motto was to "live life to the fullest" (Project Fame 2004).

After seeing the UK version of *Project Fame*, eighteen-year-old Monica did not hesitate to enter the competition. This South African lady was studying education when entering the Academy, combining the two passions in her life, namely music and teaching. Monica was very excited about having South African musician Nataniël, as one of the board members and judges. She admired and respected the fact that he had made it in the music industry on his terms and conditions and that he did not care what people thought of him. Monica promised her fans that she would personalise her music, and bring her own experiences and feelings into it, and that she would live up to her motto: "do your best" (Project Fame 2004).

From the start of the competition, Monica expressed her desire to become an actress in the locally produced soap opera *Egoli – Place of Gold*. After seeing another reality television star and *Big Brother* finalist, Stefan Ludik, landing an acting job on the set of this popular soap, Monica hoped that her reality television debut would secure her the same opportunity. After the *Project Fame* competition, producer Franz Marx offered Monica a role in the soap (*Project Fame 2004*).

Another South African contestant, Steve made a living out of modelling before passing the *Project Fame* auditions. He wrote his first song at age sixteen for a girl he fell in love with. Even though he never told her about the song, he learned to express himself through music. Steve was a member of a band called *Esperanto* that had been invited to perform at an event in Paris during the time in which *Project Fame* was produced. He saw himself as a versatile musician when it comes to musical genres and his motto to live by was “stop being self-conscious” (*Project Fame 2004*).

Twenty-five-year-old Tebogo was born into a musical family and grew up in the Free State. He saw music as a form of self-expression and said that he could not live without self-expression. Like many other contestants, Tebogo was also part of a band and their greatest achievement was playing at the North Sea Jazz Festival in Cape Town, which hosted an international audience. He realised his musical talent in grade nine when he joined the school and church choirs. Tebogo lived by his motto: “don’t be afraid of self-actualisation” (*Project Fame 2004*).

As a relative of one of the board members and judges, Tebogo was often in the firing-line of viewers’ comments. Many viewers accused the board members of favouritism when judging Tebogo’s performance, going as far as saying that Tebogo had only passed the auditions because of his connections and not because of his talent (*Project Fame 2004*).

Tracey-Lee grew up in the Western Cape and was twenty-four when she entered *Project Fame*. As a member of a jazz band, she played the guitar and keyboard for three years. She was working as an HIV counsellor at a clinic, but her passion was performing and entertainment. Her favourite artists were Jennifer Lopez and Beyonce Knowles. Tracey-Lee became hooked on musical performance when she was forced to participate and sing at a school show in grade eight. Her advice was: “just be honest” (Project Fame 2004).

Twenty-one-year-old Jid’dah was a computer science student from Nigeria. She viewed her greatest achievement as being alive because according to her, living is dangerous. Jid’dah had been composing music for twelve years and her music was influenced by Celine Dion, Mariah Carey and Toni Braxton. Jid’dah entered the competition purely to enhance her musical skills and winning the competition did not bother her very much (Project Fame 2004).

Jid’dah also anticipated a great deal of conflict with her fellow contestants as she explained that her laid-back attitude was sometimes perceived as “weird, wacky and controversial” (Project Fame 2004). The much anticipated conflict was seen right from the start of the competition as many contestants struggled to get along with Jid’dah. The conflict reached a point where Jid’dah was considering dropping out of the competition, but her agony was soon ended as she became the first person to be eliminated from the show (Project Fame 2004).

#### **4.4 The *Project Fame* teachers**

The credibility of the show was grounded in the fact that the producers were able to secure the endorsement and participation of well-known, respected key players in the South African music industry. Multi-award-winning actress, businesswoman and director Fiona Ramsey was appointed as Head of Performance in the Academy. With twenty-six years of experience in the entertainment industry, including international movie credits, Fiona was a natural choice to be included in coaching the students in the fine art of delivering award-winning performances (Project Fame 2004).



Janine Neethling, another award-winning musician, was appointed as Head of Music. With an impressive CV and a career that started as a musical director for theatre productions, her knowledge was invaluable to the training of the students. Janine has produced nine albums and acted as musical director for many successful musicians in South Africa such as Amanda Strydom and Sibongile Khumalo. She was also appointed as the head of music at the South African School of Motion Picture and Live Performance. Janine was responsible for matching the correct song to each student's voice (Project Fame 2004).

Cheslyn and Hayley Henry were assigned as Head of Movement, giving them the responsibility of choreographing each student's performance. Being highly qualified dancers, the couple has toured and performed internationally – with Cheslyn winning the Universal World Freestyle and Rock 'n Roll title. Hayley had been an assistant director and co-manager of a dance company in Cape Town. The couple assisted the students in creating their own stage presence through movement and choreography (Project Fame 2004).

With the high expectations and demands from the Academy, Guidance Counsellor Musa Njoko was assigned to ensure the emotional well-being of the contestants. Musa inspired many by acknowledging her HIV status at a time when speaking about the disease was not encouraged. She has been interviewed by the BBC, CNN and Oprah Winfrey. Musa is the founder and director of Khanya Aids Interventions, which develops Aids policies and training for the government and other partners. As a motivational speaker, Musa assisted the students in facing the challenges of the Academy (Project Fame 2004).

Every school needs a headmaster to handle the daily management of activities and enforce the rules and regulations. Peter Terry was appointed as the Principal of the Academy. Peter has experience in front of and behind the cameras, launching his career in the 1970s as the Artistic and Administrative Head of PACT Drama (Project Fame 2004).

He has directed several productions that won numerous awards such as *The Death of a Salesman* and *The Buddy Holly Story*. Assigned the duty to ensure the smooth running of the Academy, Peter Terry kept the students on their toes by revoking privileges such as telephone calls from home when disobeying the rules (Project Fame 2004).

Head of Voice RJ Benjamin has been a songwriter since the age of seven and was a voice coach at the National School of the Arts as well as the head of voice at Allenby School of Music. RJ is well known for teaching improvisation, song interpretation, and arranging and composing songs. He has trained various South African celebrities and musicians. RJ received formal training in piano and later moved on to jazz harmony. Since RJ made teaching his choice of career, he has been a sought-after mentor in the music industry (Project Fame 2004).

#### **4.5 The *Project Fame* Board**

The judges, better known as the Board, have also made their mark in the music industry and, like the teachers, they brought credibility to the show. Judith Sephuma launched her professional singing career in 1994. She studied Jazz Performance at the University of Cape Town and during her studies she worked with various bands, including the Cape Symphonic Orchestra. She has performed internationally and was invited by the South African government to perform in Holland for the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. Another highlight in her career was performing at the inauguration of President Thabo Mbeki. Judith has received various awards and her debut album reached platinum status (Project Fame 2004).

Nataniël needs no introduction to the South African audience. Labelled one of the most controversial celebrities in South African, he has also established himself as one of the most successful in various areas of the entertainment industry. Nataniël's career includes the release of eleven albums, forty theatre productions and the publication of nine books. He has experience as a producer, director, playwright and public speaker (Project Fame 2004).

Board member Richard Loring boasts a career of forty years in the entertainment industry. He has been described as a 'pioneer of the South African live entertainment industry'. Richard's achievements include nineteen musicals, thirty singles, sixteen films and various television and film appearances. He has received numerous awards not only for his achievements, but also for his community service. Richard traded a business career for the bright lights of the entertainment industry. "He has sipped cocktails with royalty, shared the stage with legends and introduced the world to the next generation of young talent" (Project Fame 2004).

Singer and composer Siphho “Hotstix” Mabuse dominated the music arena in the 1980s, with a sound known as ‘township pop’. Siphho took an interest in music at an early age when he learned to play the drums. At age fifteen, he was a professional drummer and his first band was known as *Harari*. The band made history when they were the first black band to appear on South African television and the first black group performing at the Colosseum in Johannesburg. Siphho’s international career marks performances in France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the USA (Project Fame 2004).

Antos Stella is a record company executive who has worked her way from personal assistant to management level. She has a large network of contacts both nationally and internationally, and she has launched the careers of artists like Lucky Dube and *The Corrs*. Her ‘ear’ for music and intuition for musical trends have taken her all over the world. She believes that South African music has come a long way in our own country as well as abroad, and she is adamant that the next international explosion will be from the African continent. Antos’s skills and experience proved to be invaluable in judging the contestants of *Project Fame* (Project Fame 2004).

#### **4.6 The *Project Fame* viewers’ experiences**

We hope that this show will capture the imagination of the viewers and provide them with an inside view into what goes into the moulding of a celebrity. The market share achieved in other territories has created similar expectations in our target audience. It is intriguing to understand how a 'Charlize Theron' from Benoni becomes a Hollywood star.

Marie Rosholt (Meet Marie Rosholt...2004)

In combining the *Big Brother* and *Idols* format, *Project Fame* producers aimed to meet the expectations of their target audiences. They were not only providing the audience with 24-hour coverage of the show, but also offering them various opportunities to interact and participate in the show. By securing broadcast time from M-Net in their ‘open time’ slot, the producers ensured that non-subscribers could also follow the daily happenings and activities in the Academy, with a half-hour highlight package broadcast five days a week and the live broadcast of the gala show on Sundays (Project Fame 2004).

DSTV channel 37, the 24-hour broadcast channel, offered subscribers more choices with advanced options on the channel. Viewers could choose to watch one of three broadcast signals from different places in the Academy, thereby selecting their preferred conversation or activity and not being forced to watch the director's choice of footage. The channel also offered viewers the option of accessing the diaries of the contestants, which that consisted of a daily summary of the experiences and conversations of each *Project Fame* contestant (Project Fame 2004).

Popularity polls could also be accessed via channel 37 and even though the popularity polls did not count towards the official voting process, they gave viewers the opportunity to compare their favourite contestant against the popularity of other contestants (Project Fame 2004).

The viewers were also encouraged to send SMSs to the show because they were broadcast as scrolling text across the bottom of the screen. These text messages included messages to the contestants, to other viewers encouraging them to vote for a specific person as well as messages to friends and family. The producers also incorporated the text messages into the show by choosing the SMS of the week and announcing the winner during the morning meeting with the *Project Fame* contestants (Project Fame 2004).

The viewers had three ways in which to participate in the voting and elimination process. They could vote for their favourite contestant by accessing the official website for the show and casting their vote on the Internet, allowing one vote per person. They could also vote telephonically by calling a dedicated number. The third option was to SMS the name of the contestant to the show (Project Fame 2004).

The *Project Fame* experience and activities extended across various platforms. Certain radio stations entered into partnerships with the show and viewers could partake in popularity polls run by the various radio stations. Once again, the popularity votes did not count towards the elimination process, but these votes were announced during the live gala show.

Various public appearances were also scheduled where viewers could meet the contestants and obtain their autographs. Wednesday evenings marked the ‘probation party’ when the contestants who were placed on probation the previous Sunday made a public appearance and socialised with members of the public (Project Fame 2004).

The official Internet website of *Project Fame* arguably provided viewers with the most information about the show and the contestants. The drop-down menu offered viewers the opportunity to access information about what was ‘hot’, the contestants, the show, competitions, the Academy and interact (Project Fame 2004).

The ‘hot’ menu hosted the latest news on the programme and the contestants, with news and feature articles including additional information for viewers. The viewers could also choose to watch a selection of footage comprising short clips that had been packaged for easy Internet access. The ‘gallery’ option featured a collection of photographs taken during the show that viewers could download and add to their private collection of *Project Fame* memorabilia (Project Fame 2004).

When choosing the ‘contestants’ menu, the viewers had access to the contestants’ daily diaries, a written summary of the daily events and the conversations of each contestant. It also hosted a short biography and ‘questions and answers’ for each contestant. The popularity poll and voting option could be accessed via the ‘contestants’ menu. Viewers who wanted information about the show and the presenters simply had to select the ‘show’ menu. Various viewer competitions were listed under the ‘win’ menu (Project Fame 2004).

The ‘Academy’ menu provided viewers with information about the Academy itself, the procedures and the contestants’ daily activities. Information about each of the teachers and board members could also be obtained from this menu. Another feature was the interactive gallery allowing viewers to take a virtual tour through the Academy where the contestants spent most of their time. The guests and celebrities that visited the Academy and the gala show were also given a special mention on the website. The sponsors and partners of *Project Fame* advertised on the ‘Academy’ menu with hyperlinks listed to their own websites (Project Fame 2004).

The last drop-down menu entitled 'interact' hosted various interactive options of which the 'forum' received the most attention. Fans could post messages for each contestant, interact with other fans and comment on the show in general. The 'chat' option allowed viewers to join live chats on the Internet with the contestants and other guests. The website also listed other fan sites with hyperlinks to access the unofficial fan sites, with the option to book contestants for performances (Project Fame 2004).

#### 4.7 Conclusion

The concept of the programme, the teachers and the board members certainly played a vital role in the production of *Project Fame*. Even more crucial was the contestants chosen to entertain the viewers. However, the success of the programme did not depend solely on these key players. The success of a programme is usually determined by its audience ratings, making the *Project Fame* viewers the ultimate judges. Therefore, it seems only appropriate to allow the *Project Fame* fans to have the final word (Project Fame 2004):

Bottomboy (2004/05/28 09:02:06 AM) wrote:

This RTV is the way to go forward. MNET keep it up 🍌

Bendoh (2004/05/26 04:36:52 PM) wrote:

Well I think this programme is the bomb, I want to be chosen among the contestants, once again this show is great 🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌

Edwest (2004/07/09 06:36:38 PM) wrote:

I just want to say THANK YOU for giving me value for my money. As a DSTV subscriber I get bored most times watching movies from abroad and other shows that ooze creativity when we have guys like you lurking around. You guys make my day. My wife and I can't help but watch the show everyday 24/7...

You know what even makes it more interesting?? We engage in healthy arguments and conversations about the show and its contestants and it certainly keeps us together. Thank you guys. 🍌🍌

Nkey (2004/08/28 10:07:31 PM) wrote:

This is a very special way of entertainment which kudos must be given for. I appreciate all MNET/DSTV has done for people in the name of entertainment. This PF is about the greatest so far.

Stinky (2004/09/01 04:35:40 PM) wrote:

When is Project Fame 2 coming? Much better than Pop Idols and much better than Big Brother. Please, please more Project Fame 'cos the whole concept is excellent. I am still playing all the CDs. 📺Capetown

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **5 AUDIENCE-CENTRED THEORIES**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The 1920s marked the beginning of the technological revolution of television viewing when the first experimental television broadcasts took place. Britain was the first country to introduce regular broadcasting in 1936 with the United States of America following in 1939. In the 1950s, television officially overtook cinemas as the most popular medium of entertainment in Europe and North America, forever changing living standards, leisure activities and mass audience studies (McQueen 1998:3).

According to McQueen (1998:3), 94% of Britons own a television set and spend an average of over 25 hours watching television a week. The Americans spend on average more than five hours a day watching television. Two and a half billion people watched the internationally televised funeral of Princess Diana (McQueen 1998:3).

In South Africa almost 18 million citizens own a television set with an average of 7,5 million people watching television on a weekly basis. More than 4 million South Africans subscribe to receive additional television channels (AMPS 2002). The importance and influence of television in the daily lives of audiences can be seen from the amount of time spent on the medium as well as the amount of money advertisers pay broadcasters. In the words of McQueen (1998:5), “how can we afford *not* to study something that has become so central to modern society?”.

This chapter focuses on the audience theories underlying this study, especially the uses and gratifications theory, and reception theory that form the foundation of this study. A brief historical overview contextualises the development of the uses and gratifications theory as well as reception theory within a particular research tradition. The characteristics as well as the strengths and weaknesses associated with each theory will be discussed. Finally, a discussion of the theoretical approaches of the abovementioned theories will summarise the value of each theory for this study.



## **5.2 Traditions of audience-centred theories**

The concept of audiences has been around for thousand of years, with public events such as theatre and musical performances draw many spectators, resulting in different audiences.

The concept of a mass media audience could, however, could be traced back to the introduction of the printed book. The establishment of a mass media audience gave rise to the need to research the mass media audience by media industries. Research practices in turn gave rise to different approaches, paradigms and theories of audience studies (McQuail 1997:2).

McQuail (1997:16) divides audience research into three traditions, namely the structural, behavioural and sociocultural traditions. The structural tradition of audience measurement is the earliest and simplest kind of audience research, measuring the size of the audiences and the reach of the mass media. Research in this tradition investigates media use patterns and demographic data by usually applying quantitative research methods. Section 6.1 examines the application and contribution of current quantitative audience research.

The behaviourist tradition includes media effects and media uses. Earlier research focused on the effects of the media on its audience, assuming that the audience is passive, non-resistant and influenced by the mass media. Effects theories view mass communication as a one-way process where the audience is the passive target of media stimuli. Challenging the notion of the passive audience, another mainstream in behaviourist tradition emerged namely the uses and gratifications theory. Media use then became the centre of attention with researchers viewing audiences as active or in charge of their media consumption. The uses and gratifications theory is a move away from behaviourism because the emphasis in this theory is on active participation of audiences and the social origins of media gratifications (McQuail 1997:18).

The cultural tradition includes aspects from both the social sciences and the humanities. Media use is seen as a sociocultural practice indicative of the social and cultural audience experiences. Early research in the cultural tradition focused on the decoding of messages within a cultural context resulting in conclusions that texts are polysemic and open to various interpretations. The cultural tradition supports the view that media consumption is part of everyday life and inseparable from the particular social context of the audience.

Reception research emphasises the role of the viewer in the decoding process and reclaims the power of the audiences to resist dominant messages (McQuail 1997:18). In addition Pitout (1996:213) refers to the interaction between viewers and texts as a process of negotiation.

McQuail (1997:21) compares the research traditions in the following table:

**Table 5.1** Three audience research traditions compared

	Structural	Behavioural	Cultural
Main aims:	Describe composition enumerate relate to society	Explain and predict choices, reactions and effects	Understanding meaning of content received and of use in context
Main data:	Social-demographic, media and time use	Motives, acts of choice and reaction	Perceptions of meaning, social and cultural context
Main methods:	Survey and statistical analysis	Survey, experiment and mental measurement	Ethnographic and qualitative

Although the uses and gratifications theory is associated with positivist research, it is also suitable for studying audiences qualitatively. In her critical evaluation of the uses and gratifications approach, Pitout (1989) pleads for this approach to be used both qualitatively and quantitatively. Furthermore, she suggests a converging between uses and gratifications and reception research in order to address the shortcomings in both theories' approach to research.

It is important to note that all the theories have different points of departure and different views in interpreting and understanding research phenomena. Wood (2004:63) identifies four building blocks of theories, namely ontology, epistemology, purpose and focus. The first building block or basis of any theory is the way in which it views human nature and the underlying assumptions about human nature, also called ontology.

Theories that assume that human behaviour is controlled through external forces, denying any form of individual control or choice, follow a deterministic ontology. At the other end of the scale is the humanistic ontology, believing that human behaviour is self-governed and that people have a free will. Theorists who believe in free will assume that individuals create their own meaning and interpretations, which will in turn influence how they think and act (Wood 2004:52).

The uses and gratifications theory challenges the deterministic view of the effects theory by recognising a more active audience and focusing on what audiences do with the mass media instead of what the mass media do to the audiences (Pitout 1989:5). Reception theory also supports a humanistic ontology assuming that texts are open to various interpretations, that audiences are never passive and that the cultural context of media consumption influences interpretations (Reimer 1998:135).

Epistemology refers to the philosophical context of knowledge or how knowledge is acquired. Knowledge is either based on the existence of phenomena or on human perceptions. Objective epistemology supports the belief system that a singular, universal truth exists and that truth is the same for everyone. Another assumption is that truth exists external to the human mind and independent of emotions. Subjective epistemology on the other hand states that there are multiple perceptions of reality, none of which is superior to the other. Reality is therefore seen as a subjective interpretation of experiences rather than an objective truth (Wood 2004:57).

The uses and gratifications theory focuses on individual needs and gratifications, assuming that media consumption is not the same for everyone. Therefore, the uses and gratifications theory follows a subjective epistemology, stating that no single universal truth exists to describe or explain media consumption (Lane 2003). Reception theory argues that texts have multiple interpretations and interpretation depends on cultural circumstances and the individual decoding process. Reception theory also rejects the notion of a single truth and follows a subjective epistemology (Corner 1999:80).

The third building block of theories concerns the purpose of the theory. In other words, does the theory aim to discover and generate universal laws that are consistent over time or does it aim to identify patterns that are situational (Wood 2004:59)? Both the uses and gratifications theory and reception theory aim to identify trends and patterns in audiences' media consumption, recognising a dynamic communication process, rather than searching for a constant universal law.

The focus of a theory constitutes the final building block and refers to the content being addressed by the theory. A behavioural focus supports the belief that observable behaviour is the only relevant phenomenon to be investigated. The assumption is made that motives, meaning, intentions and other subjective phenomena are irrelevant to research. A humanistic focus views behaviour as an outward sign of internal mental and psychological processes. Motives, perceptions and intentions affect behaviour and therefore the investigation of cognitive and psychological processes will render more insights than observing behaviour (Wood 2004:62).

The uses and gratifications theory as well as reception theory lean towards a humanistic focus, investigating the internal processes that influence media consumption. It is important to note that the points of departure in audience-centred theories are not an either-or rigid division. Instead, theories vary to the extent that they support a specific belief system, e.g. the degree of determinism, objectivity and behaviourism (Fourie 2001:234).

When studying the uses and gratifications theory as well as reception theory and the shift in ideology from a passive to a more active audience, it is important to understand what is meant by the term 'active audience'; in this context specifically relating to television.

### 5.3 Defining the 'audience' in audience-centred theories

Defining audiences as 'active' viewers is still considered a controversial subject, with many critics claiming that even passivity is an active choice. Grossberg, Wartella and Whitney (1998:239) explain this statement by using the example of the so-called couch potato who looks very passive, slouched on the couch with a bag of potato chips. However, that person consciously decided to watch television at that specific moment, turned it on, fetched the bag of potato chips and maybe even consulted the television guide to determine what programmes were showing.

The argument is furthermore extended to cognitive activity. Grossberg et al (1998:239) argue that the couch potato has to make sense of what is broadcast on television. This implies the cognitive activity of focusing attention on the screen, processing the video dots to a familiar image, interpreting the image and filling in some blanks where necessary, and making sense of the message being communicated. By recognising the various viewpoints on active audiences, it seems more valuable to view audiences as 'active' with various *degrees* of activity, rather than categorise them as either active or passive.

Audiences can also be defined according to the specific programmes they watch, such as the audience for *Egoli-Place of Gold* or *Project Fame*. It is also possible to classify audiences according to genre, such as the soap opera audience or the reality television audience. Another way of defining audiences is through their social profile, including elements such as gender, age, race, income group etcetera (McQueen 1998:163).

Within an academic context, Ang (1991:26) identifies two paradigms of audiences, namely the 'audience as a market' and the 'audience as a public'. When viewing the audience as a market, Ang refers to the consumer-product relationship between audiences and broadcasters. In this relationship, the transfer of meaning is of less importance, while effective communication according to this paradigm is established as soon as audiences pay attention, resulting in a quantitative approach to audiences.

Through a process known as ‘audience ratings’ in the television industry, the media monitors viewing activity by compiling data from viewers who act as ‘people meters’. The ratings give broadcasters an indication of how many people are watching a specific programme and the demographic information of that audience, effectively labelling audiences as ‘commodities’ to be sold to advertisers (Williams 2003:192).

The ‘audience as a public’ refers to the social relationship between the audience and the media, and marks the field of research that determines more than merely who the audiences are and their size, resulting in a qualitative approach to audiences (Ang 1991:28). When researching the audience as a public, academics attempt to learn “more about how they [audiences] interact with and respond to what they see, hear and read” before making a judgment on the power and influence of the media (Williams 2003:192).

The move from the passive audience to the active audience is also referred to as the active audience paradigm. In an attempt to learn more about the relationship between the interactive reality television viewers and the media, two audience-centred theories form the theoretical foundation of this research, namely the uses and gratifications theory and reception theory. Both the uses and gratifications theory and reception theory fall under the active audience paradigm.

## **5.4 The uses and gratifications theory**

### ***5.4.1 The origin and characteristics of the uses and gratifications theory***

The 1940s and early 1950s marked the rise of the uses and gratifications theory, based on widespread dissatisfaction with research results aiming to determine the short-term effects of viewer exposure to the mass media. A need to move away from the traditional effects theories, such as the stimulus-response theory and the related theories, to a more receiver-oriented theory supported the development of the uses and gratifications theory (Pitout 1989:37).

The uses and gratifications theory originated as a simple and straightforward method to determine the relation between the popularity and attraction of radio quiz programmes and day-time serials on the one hand, and personality and social factors on the other (Bryant & Heath 2000:360). The premise of the theory focused on more knowledge about audiences, the acknowledgement of the importance of individual differences in the audience experience – yet not denying the power of the media to attract and hold audiences – and a focus on case studies to provide aid in exploring psychological factors relating to audience experience (McQuail 1998:151).

According to McQuail (1998:152), the appeal of the approach lay in the possibility to differentiate and provide “variables of attention to television”, which could in turn provide valuable answers to the “causes of addiction or to the consequences of over-indulgence” in media exposure.

By re-defining the media audience from passive to active (active meaning purposive), the question that the uses and gratifications theory asks is what people do with the media, instead of the traditional question of what the media do to the people (Schröder 1999:39). Katz and Klapper are two of the most prominent theorists considered to have made an important contribution to the development of the uses and gratifications theory (Lane 2003).

The 1970s introduced the rediscovery and elaboration of the uses and gratifications theory. Another question was then embraced by this school of research, not only questioning what people do with the media, but also why and for what exactly audiences use the media (Chandler 2004). The 1974 publication of the classical work of Blumler and Katz, *The uses of mass communication*, was an important phase in uses and gratifications research as it was instrumental in conceptualising the focus of the uses and gratifications theory (Bryant & Heath 2000:361).

In their comprehensive evaluation, Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974:21) identified five basic assumptions of the uses and gratifications theory namely:

- Audiences are viewed as active participants in the communication process. Media use generally tends to be a purposeful and goal-directed activity, however, not denying that coincidental media use does exist at times.
- Viewers make specific media choices to meet their needs and therefore the initiative lies with the audience to link need gratification and media choice.
- Various sources of need gratification exist, thereby creating direct competition for the media. Mass communication meets the needs of only a “segment of a wider range of human needs” and the degree to which the mass media fulfils these needs varies.
- Viewers are able to identify and recognise their needs, and to articulate them verbally.
- Value judgments relating to cultural significance and meaning should be subordinate to the exploration of audience orientation. Therefore, in order to understand cultural significance, it is crucial to comprehend interpersonal reasons for media use first.

Katz et al (1974:20) furthermore identified seven aspects central to uses and gratifications research by stating that this type of research is:

concerned with (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.

In an attempt to make the uses and gratifications theory more complete, another dimension was introduced to this research field emphasising that a distinction be made between gratifications sought before exposure and gratifications obtained after exposure (Bryant & Heath 2000:363).



Palmgreen, Wenner and Rayburn (1980:183) contributed valuable information to this dimension by conducting a study between the relation of the gratifications sought and gratifications obtained, specifically relating to television news. The findings of the study lead to three important conclusions, the first being that “individual gratifications sought are moderately to strongly related to corresponding gratifications obtained”. The lack of a perfect match between expectations and perceived gratifications therefore implies that not every gratification will necessarily be gratified.

The second conclusion according to Palmgreen et al (1980:183) is that the “degree of dependence on a particular program is positively related to the strength of the GS [gratifications sought] versus GO [gratifications obtained] relationship”. The degree of dependence relates strongly to the availability of functional alternatives to provide gratifications. In other words, gratifications sought from viewers who watch only one news programme will be shaped more strongly by the gratifications obtained from the programme than viewers who watch more than one news programme. Those viewers who watch more than one news broadcast obtain gratifications from a wider variety of sources and therefore a single news programme will be inadequate in needs gratification. The final conclusion drawn from the study is that even though the dimensions of seeking and obtaining gratifications are similar, differences do exist.

Further studies also proved that the expectations and perceptions held about media characteristics influence the motivation to search for that gratification that ultimately impacts on audiences’ media consumption. Consumption will in turn influence the perception of gratifications obtained and will either reinforce or challenge the existing expectations and perceptions about the ability of the specific media source to meet certain needs (Rosengren et al 1985:22).

For example, if a viewer is seeking information about a specific topic, the motivation exists to seek that information by watching a documentary channel. The expectation exists that the documentary channel possesses the necessary information to contribute to existing knowledge and perhaps answer some questions. If the channel meets the expectations of the viewer, this outcome will feed back to confirm the original belief that the documentary channel will provide the necessary information. On the other hand, the channel may not be as informative as expected, which will then challenge the viewer's belief and consequently change the motivation to seek gratification from that specific channel again.

It is therefore important to distinguish between the gratifications sought by audiences and the gratifications they perceive to have obtained. According to Palmgreen et al (1980:184), the gratifications sought refer to the audience member's motives for mass media consumption. The gratifications perceived to be obtained refer to the subjective probability of a mass medium or programme content to provide audience members with the required gratifications.

'Expectancy' is a central concept to the uses and gratifications theory, especially in relation to the assumption of an active audience. The media itself offers various sources and alternatives for needs gratification, not to mention non-media alternatives, implying that the audience must have certain perceptions and expectations about the potential of each alternative to meet a required need (Rosengren, Wenner & Palmgreen 1985:22).

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century again marked the revival of the uses and gratifications theory and research. The technological revolution resulted in scholars such as Johnson and Kaye (2002:54), Luo (2002:4) and Stafford (2004:3) advocating the value of the uses and gratifications theory in interactive technology research. According to Johnson and Kaye (2002:54):

The calls for the uses and gratifications approach to studying the Internet echo the pleas of several uses and gratifications scholars to adapt that approach to the study of emerging communication technologies.

Although the uses and gratifications approach was traditionally linked to television audiences, many researchers have found the approach very well suited for Internet research, in particular. It is specifically the assumption of active involvement in media usage that has made the uses and gratifications theory applicable to interactive research (Luo 2002:4).

Within television research, needs gratifications take place by simply switching on the television and choosing a channel. Needs gratifications within interactive technology such as the Internet however, require more advanced input and activity. The seemingly insignificant act of pointing to, and clicking on, a link actually indicates how active the web user really is. Unlike television channel surfing where the viewer is merely searching for an appealing image, web surfing requires the surfer to read actively and comprehend the information presented by a link in order to determine where he is going next (Hunter 2005). The assumption is that web use is a goal-directed activity and users utilise the Internet in an attempt to satisfy specific needs (Johnson & Kaye 2002:54).

Stafford (2004:3) identifies two general types of needs gratifications based on uses and gratifications research results from interactive studies, namely content gratifications and process gratifications. Content gratifications refer to the content that is carried by the medium such as information or entertainment and the motivation to obtain specific information. Process gratifications on the other hand refer to gratifications obtained through the experience of media usage such as playing with technology or browsing the Internet, and “concerning the actual use of the medium itself”.

When applying these types of needs gratifications to the analogy of interactive reality television, content gratifications will be obtained when viewers search the Internet or read magazines to learn more about their favourite contestant. The quality of information obtained provides needs gratifications. Process gratifications occurs when viewers vote via SMS, for example, and the use and application of cellphone technology itself provides gratifications.

Research by Dreze and Zufryden, McDonald, and Stafford and Stafford has shown that content gratifications and the information presented by the websites are more important to Internet users than the experience of surfing the Internet (Stafford 2004:2). Stafford (2004:2) points out that a potential third gratification also needs to be investigated, namely social gratifications. Stafford argues that the Internet is rapidly emerging as the preferred tool for interpersonal communication and social networking. Once again, this type of needs gratification proves very valuable to interactive television research, as chat rooms and websites facilitate social interaction between fans to exchange different viewpoints and discuss the development of the television programme.

Recent studies also elect to apply the uses and gratifications concepts developed by Rubin and Perse (Johnson & Kaye 2002:54). In the 1980s, Rubin and Perse (1987:59) conducted a study investigating audience activity and television news gratifications. They distinguished between three types of audience activity, namely intentionality, selectivity and involvement. Intentional media use refers to the planned and purposive use of available media, directing the viewers' motives for media use and implying that content plays an important role in media choice.

Selectivity refers to a viewer's conscious decision in selecting specific media use to gratify a specific need. The third type of activity, involvement, refers to the psychological processing of content whereby audience members recognise media content that is personally relevant to them. Acknowledging the variable nature of audiences, Rubin furthermore identified two media-use orientations known as ritualised and instrumental uses (Rubin & Perse 1987:59).

Ritualised use forms part of habitual activities and focuses more on the medium than the content being communicated. It includes less intentional media consumption activities such as passing time and relaxation. Instrumental use on the other hand is more "intentional and selective and reflects purposive exposure to specific content". Rubin and Perse (1987:83) conclude that viewers are guided by their motives and expectations in media consumption.

As expected, the instrumental use of the media was positively linked to intentional and involvement activity, while the ritualised use of the media was linked to non-selective activity. The study also confirmed that the degree of audience activity is an “important variable in media uses and effects” (Rubin & Perse 1987:83).

It is important to distinguish between the theory and the method application of the uses and gratifications theory. When applied as a research method, the uses and gratifications theory provides researchers with a research method that assists with data collection. This is evident in the many Internet studies conducted, i.e. a study conducted by Payne, Dozier, Nomai and Yagade to compare the uses and gratifications of the Internet and newspapers (Payne et al 2003:115). In the study, Payne et al examined “interaction, surveillance and diversion as uses associated with the Internet and newspapers” through quantitative research methods.

The aim was to determine the strengths and weaknesses of both newspapers and the Internet to provide the gratifications sought by the users. The respondents were asked to complete questionnaires with items that were operationalised on a three-point scale. The quantitative data was entered into an SPSS data file for analysis. Quantitative data analysis allowed the researchers to determine correlations between the uses and gratifications for the Internet in comparison to newspapers.

Another quantitative uses and gratifications study, conducted by LaRose and Eastin, investigated the correlation between self-regulation, Internet self-efficacy, habit strength and Internet usage (LaRose & Eastin 2004:364). The participants were requested to complete an on-line questionnaire that applied structural equation modelling techniques. A quantitative sampling method i.e. random sampling, was applied to recruit participants. The data was analysed statistically to provide answers to the hypotheses.

The abovementioned studies apply the uses and gratifications theory as a research method mainly to determine correlations between variables. However, for the purposes of this study, the uses and gratifications theory is applied as a theoretical component to the study, i.e. the assumptions of this theory serve as the theoretical approach to obtain data and support the interpretation of the data. Therefore, the theory is adapted to qualitative design and research methods.

The qualitative nature of this study aims to determine what factors motivate viewers to participate interactively in the programme, which gratifications the participants sought from interactive participation and whether the perception existed that the gratifications sought had been obtained. The goal is not to determine the correlation between the gratifications sought and the gratifications obtained, but rather to explore whether needs existed and whether the participants felt that the needs had been gratified.

The key assumptions from the uses and gratifications theory that form the theoretical foundation of this study are summarised as follows: the interactive reality audience is an active audience. Therefore, interactive participation is purposeful and goal directed. The interactive experience offers various sources and ways of participation, and audiences select a specific interactive experience to provide a specific gratification. A distinction is made between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained. Interactive participation in reality television generates three broad types of gratifications, namely content, process and social gratifications. Finally, interactive participation could either be ritualistic or instrumental.

From the foregoing discussion, it is possible to conclude that the uses and gratifications theory has made a valuable contribution to television studies and the understanding of the active audience. The recent trend to apply this theory to technological and interactive studies validates the legitimacy of utilising this theory in examining the combination of television and its interactive component.

#### ***5.4.2 Categories of needs gratification***

Numerous studies have been conducted in order to determine and categorise the needs gratifications obtained from media consumption. Since this study is not focusing on television alone but on the interactive component as well, the categories applied in current Internet uses and gratifications research are adopted for the purposes of this study. Many scholars such as Lin (1999:79), Bryant and Heath (2000:362) and Hunter (2005) elect to apply the five categories of needs as identified by Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, namely cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs and escapist needs.

Cognitive needs involve the strengthening of information, the acquisition of knowledge and the understanding of our environment. Another dimension that is also satisfied in obtaining information is curiosity and exploratory drives (Bryant & Heath 2000:362).

The interactive experience generated by reality television provides various avenues of knowledge acquisition and is certainly able to gratify the cognitive needs of audiences.

Affective needs refer to emotional experiences and the strengthening of aesthetic and pleasurable experiences. The pursuit of pleasure and entertainment is one of the most basic motivations for media consumption (Hunter 2005). One of the ways in which *Project Fame* addresses the need for entertainment is offering viewers the option of a 24-hour a day access to a reality television programme. *Project Fame* also arranged public appearances by the stars of the show, and viewers were allowed to attend the gala performances on Sunday evenings.

Personal integrative needs relate to the confirmation of credibility, confidence and stability as well as the status of the individual. The personal integrative needs originate from the individual's desire for self-esteem (Severin & Tankard 1992:273). Interactive reality shows offer viewers the opportunity to enter into discussions with other fans on the website, thereby testing and confirming their opinions about the contestants. By allowing viewers to decide the fate of the contestants and vote for them, the message is continuously communicated that each individual vote is of utmost importance.

The desire for affiliation and social contact is addressed in the social integrative needs. Individuals continuously search to strengthen contact with family, friends and the world (Bryant & Heath 2000:362). One of the ways in which *Project Fame* addresses this need in encouraging audiences to send SMS messages is by scrolling SMSs across the screen during broadcasts. Many viewers send personalised messages to their loved ones. Once again, the website also serves as an avenue for social contact.

The fifth needs gratification, escapist needs, refers to the desire to escape, to release tension and seek diversion (Severin & Tankard 1992:273). In participating in the various interactive opportunities presented by reality television, viewers have multiple options to escape from the pressures of everyday life and release tension.

The discussion of the categories of needs gratifications provides the underlying theory for the motivations for interactive reality television participation. The key assumption is that it is possible to classify the motivations for interactive participation under cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative and escapist needs.

From the above, it is clear that the uses and gratifications theory acknowledges the importance of individual factors influencing media consumption. It argues that audience members have different purposes in their media consumption resulting in different mass media effects. Yet it is possible to identify general habits and tendencies in media use.

#### ***5.4.3 Critique of the uses and gratifications theory***

As with most communication theories, the uses and gratifications theory has received its fair share of critique and scrutiny. Not denying the importance of the role of the individual as emphasised by the theory, critics have identified certain areas of concern. It is however this exact strength of individual emphasis that has also become the main critique against the theory.

By focusing on the individual as the unit of analysis, the emphasis is on the psychological aspect of media consumption to the exclusion of social and cultural influences. Media consumption more often than not entails a social activity with friends or family. Therefore, meaning and gratifications are influenced by social and cultural interaction and not merely by internal psychological processes alone (Williams 2003:178). The focus on the individual's needs also rejects the possibility that the media can have an unconscious influence over its audience and does not fully recognise the power of the media in society (Lane 2003).



Another primary flaw is the assumption that all media consumption is goal oriented and purpose driven, leaving little room for coincidental or unplanned viewing, or motivations based on the reputation of a programme or the lack of variety, rather than gratifying a specific need (Williams 2003:179). According to McQuail (1997:73), very little empirical evidence exists to suggest that media consumption is generally initiated by a problem and concluded with a solution.

McQuail (1997:73) also argues that when prompted, audiences will recognise many of the expected gratifications, but that need gratification may not always be a conscious activity. It is important to note that audiences often comprise members with overlapping and inconsistent expectations and motives. The conclusion is that the uses and gratifications theory overestimates the “rationality and activity of audience use behaviour”.

Many critics argue that the uses and gratifications theory exaggerates the active and conscious choice, excluding the possibility that media can be forced on people rather than being a free choice. Free choice is ultimately limited to the content presented by the mass media. Furthermore, the emphasis on active choice leads to the exaggeration of openness of interpretation, assuming that audiences may obtain any kind of gratification regardless of the content offered by the mass media (Chandler 2005).

The uses and gratifications approach also raises methodological questions. Schröder (1999:41) points out one methodological problem encountered in quantitative research – the fact that the gratifications list compiled by the researcher will determine the results of the study. The findings are therefore limited by the researcher’s imagination and “no matter how exhaustive the list, there are always going to be potential gratifications that are not included” (Schröder 1999:41). Unless open-ended questionnaires are used, the validity of uses and gratifications theory research is questioned. As already indicated this research study uses a more open-ended research methodology to determine the interactive participation of television viewing.

The reliance of the theory on retrospective self-reports presents another methodological problem. Viewers may not always be aware of the reasons for their media consumption and the reasons articulated may be the least important. Individuals may simply offer explanations that they have heard others mention (Chandler 2005). Hunter (2005) also argues that media users often try to present their media use in the best possible light, not mentioning gratifications obtained that may be perceived in a negative light.

Bryant and Heath (2000:365) add to the debate that the uses and gratifications theory “offers a more rational view of media users than is realistic”. In other words, media consumption is often ritualistic but when asked to complete a questionnaire, the respondents rationalise their action in ways that may not be an accurate account of media use.

In summary, the main lines of attack have been identified as firstly social and political objections, accusing the theory of ignoring the social context and reducing complex processes to a simple state of needs gratification. In order to address this shortcoming, reception theory forms the second theoretical foundation of this study, examining the interpretation of texts in a social and cultural context.

The second critique refers to theoretical and methodological issues, accusing the theory of inadequacy, ambiguity and questioning the validity of the research methods used. Since the uses and gratifications theory is applied in a theoretical context and not as a methodology in itself, qualitative research methods allow for less restricted research results.

Despite the critique against the uses and gratifications theory, it is still seen as the most relevant theoretical orientation for this study, especially in the light of the combination of television viewing with interactive technology. Interactive participation in reality television requires an enhanced investment from viewers, more than merely choosing to watch the programme, whether time, money or cognitive investments.

The assumption is made that viewers who consciously choose to participate in any of the interactive processes beyond the viewing experience do so with very specific expectations. In return, they receive some kind of reward or gratification for ‘investing’ or participating in the interactive process. Furthermore, interactive participation is viewed as a conscious choice and not a coincidental experience.

## **5.5 The cultural studies approach to reception theory**

### ***5.5.1 The origin and characteristics of reception theory***

Reception theory in the context of media studies refers to two theoretical paradigms, namely reception aesthetics and cultural studies (Pitout 2001). The cultural approach to reception theory is applied for the purposes of this study. The late 1950s marked the beginning of the cultural approach, when the New Left political group emerged as the opposition to the British Communist Party. Cultural studies developed in an attempt to create a critical political practice and to conceptualise culture as an everyday practice that needed to be understood in political terms (Dalgren 1998:52).

The year 1963 marked the second important stage in the development of cultural studies with the formation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, first under the leadership of Hoggart, then under Stuart Hall. The decade of the 1970s is known as the ‘golden age’ of cultural studies when much groundbreaking work was done, including the work by Stuart Hall (Dalgren 1998:52).

With the uses and gratifications theory initialising a shift in focus from a passive to an active audience, the next trend in audience-centred theories builds on the concept of an active audience. Hall’s approach to the communication process was to focus on communication as a whole, from the moment of producing a programme to the moment of audience exposure to that message. Hall also emphasises that texts are polysemic, in other words open to numerous interpretations and readings, and that a correlation does not necessarily exist between the encoding and the decoding of the message (Hall 1980:130).

According to Hall (1980:134), the content of media messages is encoded through ideology. Various aspects influence the meaning of content in the media, e.g. the production process, which is shaped by institutional constraints and professional codes in order to produce a preferred meaning for audiences. However, it is possible that a number of messages are encoded during the production process. On the receiving end, the decoding of the message is open to a number of interpretations, and the ability of audiences to understand a text is based on social and cultural circumstances in which audiences are located (Hall 1980:134).

Hall identified three hypothetical positions influencing the decoding of media messages: the dominant, the negotiated and the oppositional. The dominant decoding of a message refers to individuals who accept the preferred reading prescribed by a text. Negotiated decoding involves the adaptation of a preferred reading, neither accepting the preferred meaning as is, nor rejecting it. The oppositional decoding of a text takes place when audiences recognise the preferred meaning, reject it and construct meaning based on their own values and beliefs (Hall 1980:136).

The encoding-decoding model shifted the focus to the interactive process taking place between audiences and texts as well as the social context that influences this interaction. The model also emphasises that meaning does not reside in an isolated text. Audiences cannot be viewed as “blank slates” approaching media messages without any prior influence or preconceived notions and ideas (Eldridge et al 1997:130).

Contrary to uses and gratifications research, Hall did not focus on the individual in isolation, but recognised the social and cultural contexts and backgrounds that affect people’s interpretations. Therefore, perception is not an individual psychological process but rather socially and culturally established. For the purposes of this study, the same approach is adopted as with the encoding-decoding model, assuming that social and cultural constructs influence meaning construction.

It is important to note that Hall’s theory was not based on empirical studies, and the first research putting the encoding-decoding theory to the test was David Morley’s *Nationwide* study (Williams 2003:196).

Based on the principles articulated by the encoding-decoding model, Morley conducted a study arguing that a distinction be made between the social processes influencing the encoding of a message and those influencing the decoding of the message. According to Morley (1992:85), it is possible to interpret the same event in different ways: messages that remain polysemic and contain “more than one potential reading” and messages that have been encoded in a specific way can always be read in a different way.

*Nationwide* was a BBC news magazine programme from the 1970s, compiling stories from different nations and regions in the United Kingdom with a special feature on human interest stories. Morley and Brunson examined the preferred encoded message producers tried to communicate and then interviewed audiences from different social and cultural groups to determine their interpretations of the programme (Morley 1992:81).

Morley (1992:93) defines the aims of the study as follows:

To construct a typology of the range of decodings made, analyzing how and why they vary, demonstrating how different interpretations are generated and to relate these variations to other cultural factors.

The theoretical orientation of the *Nationwide* study therefore argued that the meaning audiences ascribe to the programme depends on how broadcasters structure the programme and the cultural codes of interpretation that the viewers bring to the text (Morley 1992:92). Therefore the text and the audience cannot be separated from the social context, ideologies, and dominant and subordinate groups, while recognising the media’s influence and power in this structure, resulting in different readings from the same text.

The *Nationwide* study supported Hall’s theory of at least three possible ways of reading a text and proved that different groups ascribed different meanings to the same text (Morley 1992:117). The conclusions drawn from this study highlighted that people are not passive in meaning construction and in order to understand media interpretations, it is crucial to examine both the text and the social and cultural experiences contributing to meaning production (Williams 2003:197).

Therefore, reception theory allows researchers to investigate the readers' negotiation with texts in the process of interpretation against the background of their social and cultural circumstances.

From the *Nationwide* study, it is possible to conclude that meaning creation is influenced by social and cultural factors, yet not ignoring the power of the text and the media in setting boundaries for interpretations. The assumption is made that the audience is active within the boundaries dictated by the text and the media, e.g. the voting procedure in *Project Fame* gives audience members the power to vote for contestants and change the text, but voting is limited to two contestants.

### ***5.5.2 Critique of cultural studies***

Seaman (1992:308) proposes that the concept of 'freedom of interpretation' or polysemic texts, proves problematic in an academic context. The notion that audiences are free to choose a programme and free to choose their way of interpretation contradicts the fact that audience freedom is indeed limited by the options available for interpretation. Seaman (1992:307) also suggests that unless audiences are genuinely aware of the beliefs and perspectives that influenced the making of a programme as well as the filtering of information during the production process, it is wrong to assume that viewers are truly free in their decisions.

Another critique of cultural studies is that it is excessively broad in scope. Cultural studies include research on working-class culture, popular culture, subcultures, media studies, racism and feminism. Wood (2004:281) claims that if the latter constitutes cultural studies, the question that is raised is: what does *not* constitute cultural studies?

According to Williams (1999:275), the methodological tendency of cultural studies to reject quantitative methods with the corresponding methods of reliability and validity proves to be problematic. The absence of quantitative research and total reliance on subjective research-gathering methods has resulted in a research field "ending up playing with words, rather than numbers".

Curran (1990:150) confirms that cultural studies show a resistance in quantitative studies and therefore they over-rely on the subject within a group context to provide answers to the research questions. Another argument he presents is that research conducted to explain individual differences often proves to be inadequate and the lack of a clear definition of 'decoding' also poses methodological questions.

Another methodological problem raised is the opinion that research results reflect the disposition of the researcher rather than substantiating compelling arguments or evidence.

According to Seaman (1992:303):

Merely describing an interpretation that is coherent with the observations is not adequate to establish the interpretation as true, reasonable, complete or even plausible.

The main critique of cultural studies can be summarized as first the interpretation of polysemic or open texts and second the methodological approach. Regarding the 'openness' of a text, this study will assume that viewers are active in the meaning construction process, but that the process is limited to the boundaries dictated by the text and the media. The qualitative qualities of the cultural studies approach support the exploratory nature of this study (see section 6.3) and since this study does not aim to generalise findings, the lack of quantitative support does not impact negatively on the results.

### **5.6 The uses and gratifications theory and cultural studies as active audience approaches**

Roscoe, Marshall and Gleeson (1995:88) point out that the term 'active audience' has been used in many contexts and that defining the term is crucial in active audience research.

Roscoe et al support the definition proposed by Schlesinger, Dobash, Dobash and Weaver that active audience research examines how audiences ascribe meaningful interpretations to television messages, based on the assumption that audiences actively engage with the media.

Upon receiving a message, audiences compare the message to their existing frame of reference, values and attitudes. Then they either reject, accept or negotiate the meaning, making them 'active' in their media consumption. Within the active audience tradition, active viewers are generally associated with social activity, in the sense that they bring preconceived knowledge and experience to the viewing process, but also negotiate meaning through social interaction (Roscoe et al 1995:89).

Roscoe et al (1995:91) also underline that active audience research cannot ignore the agenda-setting function of the media. Contrary to traditional effects theories, agenda setting in the context of the active audience theory does not imply that the all-powerful media tells viewers how and what to think, but rather sets the agenda by proposing the issues to be discussed. The media therefore has the power to highlight and promote certain accounts while excluding others. The conclusion is that instead of perceiving audiences as passive and being told how and what to think, audiences are active in their media consumption, but within the boundaries and parameters set by the media.

In order to clarify the concepts of 'active', 'social' and 'critical', Roscoe et al (1995: 92) undertook a study to determine audience interpretations of various issues presented in a documentary programme called *Who bombed Birmingham?* Their research indicated that audiences were active in meaning construction, by questioning, discussing and reflecting on meanings presented. It was also proved that viewers would draw upon their social and occupational experiences in negotiating meaning. The participants in the study furthermore admitted to consulting external sources to the text to assist in meaning production.

The key issues presented by the documentary proved to be the key issues of group discussions as well, supporting the agenda-setting theory that the media proposes the topics to be discussed. Roscoe et al (1995:106) concluded their study by reiterating that audiences are active within the boundaries set by the text, thereby acknowledging the power of the audience to decode different messages, but not denying the role of the media "in shaping public understanding". It is also argued that meaning production cannot be separated from the social, political and historical contexts.



Reimer (1998:138) adds another dimension to active audience studies, based on Hall's theory of contextualisation. Reimer includes the context of everyday life and states that it is impossible to understand communication processes separately from everyday life activities. According to Reimer, media practices differ from everyday life practices but they still relate to the same context, e.g. the decision to watch a specific television channel is not only made in reference to other media sources such as the radio, but against everyday activities such as visiting a friend.

All decisions made are conscious albeit habitual, and examining them within the same context, they express something about who the viewer is. It is important to study both media practices and leisure activities to determine how these practices combine to form a person's lifestyle (Reimer 1998:138).

Kitzinger (1999:13) points out that research has proven that audiences refer to their social, political and personal frames of references in order to engage critically with a text. Distrust of the media and logic often support audience decisions to reject certain media messages. It is important though to understand that although "audiences can be active this does not mean that the media are ineffectual". Different interpretations of media messages neither undermine nor overwrite the powerful influence of the media (Kitzinger 1999:4).

## **5.7 CONCLUSION**

Mass communication is clearly a dynamic process, constantly evolving, and the lack of one comprehensive theory explaining all the aspects of mass communication is indicative of the obstacles and challenges presented by this field of study. Both the uses and gratifications theory as well as reception theory present their own merits and critique. But irrespective of the preferred approach, researchers still share the same goal, i.e. to learn more about audiences (Schröder 1999:38).

In combining two approaches, an attempt is made to complement the shortcomings of one theory with another and to utilise the positive aspects of each theory to the fullest. The uses and gratifications theory acknowledges the importance of the individual's expectations and how they influence the perception and interpretation of media messages, but it unfortunately excludes the social context of communication.

Cultural studies focus on the social context and highlight the individual's interpretation of media messages, although more prominence should be given to the power of the message and the text itself.

The foundation of this study is based on the following theoretical assumptions:

- Audiences bring their own needs, values and expectations to the viewing process.
- The perception of gratifications obtained influences future media choices and experiences.
- Audiences ascribe their own meaning to texts, within the boundaries dictated by the texts.
- The viewing experience cannot be separated from the bigger social, cultural and political context.
- Audiences are active in decoding messages, but this does not render the media or the message powerless.

The history of reception and audience research such as Morley's *Nationwide* study, Ang's *Watching Dallas* and Fiske's *Charlie's Angels* seem to prove only one thing – the more we learn about audiences, the more we realise how little we actually know. Each study seems to produce more questions than answers, and it is this challenge that keeps drawing researchers back to the heart of mass communication studies: an attempt to gain some insight into the television viewing experience.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

Broadcasters and producers in the television industry view audience ratings as the most important research studies in their field. The concept of audience ratings is defined as the universal standard used by advertisers and broadcasters on which to base their business and financial decisions. Many broadcasters apply the Nielsen method to determine how many viewers are exposed to the broadcast of specific programmes (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:330).

The Nielsen method allows for quantitative research among various households where the house members act as people meters, keeping a diary of their media consumption. Households have to keep a record of what programme is being watched and who is watching it. The results are quantified and generalised to determine the popularity of a programme among the viewing public (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:330).

Although the importance of this kind of research cannot be ignored, it is also important to note that audience ratings focus on the ‘frequency of exposure’ and not on the ‘degree of attention’ paid to the programme. The quality of media consumption is therefore taking a backseat to the number of people exposed to the programme and viewers are reduced to a commodity to be sold to advertisers (McQuail 1997:58).

Ruddock (2001:9) explains the difference between the two approaches by using the analogy of a football game. The question is whether the viewing public could be measured in the same way as counting the crowd for a football game and, if so, whether it would supply the necessary information needed to understand audiences. It is only logical that on social, psychological and communication levels, the mere counting of heads will not provide answers to complicated research constructs. Ruddock (2001:13) summarises the relationship between the different methodological approaches in audience studies by saying that “generally quantitative methods are too methodologically rigid and theoretically naïve to be of much use to the kinds of question asked in cultural studies”.

Quantitative research therefore certainly meets the research objectives in determining the size of an audience. However, when focusing on exploring, describing and explaining the viewing experience, a quantitative research approach may not be able to provide answers to the research questions. Based on the foregoing discussion, it is possible to conclude that a qualitative research design is most valuable for the purposes of this study.

This chapter explains the methodological approach to the research study as well as the execution of the process of obtaining research data. Important research constructs such as validity and reliability are also addressed, followed by a discussion of the method of data analysis.

## **6.2 Demarcation of the study field**

For this study a qualitative research approach is applied to obtain data, focusing specifically on exploratory research. The goal of the study is to explore the different factors that influence and motivate viewers to participate interactively in reality television. Exploratory research is usually applied when there is little knowledge about a topic. Therefore, the nature of this study does not require the generalisation of data and a qualitative approach allows for more valuable answers to the research questions.

According to Wimmer and Dominic (2003:111) the main difference between qualitative and quantitative research is the questioning approach. Contrary to a quantitative research approach, a qualitative research approach uses flexible questions, allowing the researcher to change questions or pose follow-up questions at any time. Furthermore, quantitative research follows a deductive model in data analysis where hypotheses are developed prior to the study and the data either confirms or disproves the hypotheses. Qualitative research applies an inductive method whereby data is collected and grouped together, and explanations emerge from the data obtained.

Only one interactive reality show, *Project Fame*, is chosen as the focus of the study, since it was the most recent broadcast of an interactive reality show at the time of the study. Once again the aim is not to generalise the findings to all the viewers of interactive reality television shows. By allowing for flexible questioning and applying an inductive approach to the research study, the aim is to identify trends and tendencies in an unexplored research field, as has been indicated earlier.

Data was gathered by applying focus group interviews as the research method (see section 6.7). In order to obtain information relevant to the research problems and questions, participants in the study were viewers of the *Project Fame* programme as well as communication students at the University of Johannesburg (see section 6.8). The study is executed at a single point in time and not repeated; therefore, it is a cross-sectional study.

### **6.3 Research objectives**

The goals, aims or objectives of a research study can usually be divided into three categories, namely exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Exploratory research refers to research conducted in a field where little or no knowledge exists on the research topic or in order to gain new insights into phenomena. Descriptive studies aim to describe the characteristics of existing phenomena. Explanatory objectives investigate the causal-effect relationship between variables (Du Plooy 2001:49).

Reality television as it is known today emerged in the last ten years and very little has been written about it, let alone been researched. A NEXUS search revealed that no prior studies had been conducted on reality television in the South African context up to 2005. It is therefore clear that reality television research is still in its infancy stage and that an exploratory research approach is currently most needed in this field of study.

The objective of this research study is to explore the relationship between the genre of interactive reality television and its audience, and gain a better understanding of the dynamics influencing this relationship. The goal is not to provide final answers to the research questions or problems, but to identify and investigate key aspects of the relationship.

## 6.4 Research problem

The primary research problem is formulated as follows:

- What motivate viewers of the reality programme *Project Fame* to participate actively in this programme?

The secondary research problems that also form part of the study are:

- What gratifications do viewers seek from participating actively in the reality programme *Project Fame*?
- What gratifications do viewers perceive to have obtained from participating actively in the reality programme *Project Fame*?

It is important to note that although this study distinguishes between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained, the goal is not to determine the correlation between the two variables. Section 5.4.1 discussed the differences between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained, and examined how these differences were addressed in other quantitative research studies.

Studies that aim to determine the correlation between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained generally apply quantitative measuring instruments such as the Lickert scale. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, a Lickert scale was not used. The objective is merely to determine whether the participants sought gratifications from interactive participation and whether the perceptions existed that the gratifications had been obtained. Once again it is important to mention that the aim of this study is not to investigate the possible discrepancies between the two variables.

Answers to the secondary research problems are obtained through focus group interviews in order to determine whether needs existed and whether the participants perceive those needs to be gratified.

## 6.5 Research questions

Based on the abovementioned research problems, the following research questions will be addressed to obtain answers to the explorative objectives of the study:

- What motivates viewers to participate actively in the reality programme *Project Fame*?
- What gratifications do viewers expect to obtain when participating actively in *Project Fame*?
- What perceived gratifications have been obtained by participating actively in *Project Fame*?
- How frequently do viewers vote for characters in *Project Fame*?
- How often do viewers watch *Project Fame*?
- Which interactive opportunities do viewers utilise?
- Do viewers of *Project Fame* consult other sources besides the regular broadcast of the programme for more information about this reality show?
- How does watching *Project Fame* form part of the viewers' daily activities?
- Do viewers discuss *Project Fame* with friends/family?
- Do viewers form parasocial relationships with the contestants of *Project Fame*?
- Do social and cultural influences affect the interpretation of messages as communicated by the programme *Project Fame*?

## 6.6 Defining key concepts

The research problem and research questions refer to 'active participation'. Within the context of this study 'active participation' refers to interactive opportunities that viewers may utilise to enhance the viewing experience, excluding the traditional viewing of the programme but including the interactive opportunity to choose which camera angle to view.\*

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\* DSTV channel 37 offered viewers the option of choosing between four different camera angles. By using a split screen, four different camera angles were broadcast simultaneously and through the interactive guide, viewers could choose which one of the four channels they preferred to watch at any given time.

Interactive opportunities include the following activities: voting for participants via the Internet, telephone or SMS; sending a text message for broadcasting; visiting websites with information on the programme; entering a chat room for a discussion on the programme; attending official appearances of the participants; participating in opinion polls; and utilising the interactive opportunities accessed via DSTV.

### **6.7 Data collection: focus group interviews**

Focus group interviews have been chosen as the method of data collection for this research study. The use of focus group interviews (also known as focused interviews and group depth interviews) as a qualitative research method can be traced back to the 1940s. It originated under the leadership of Paul Lazarsfeld at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University. Upon receiving a government contract to investigate audience responses to radio propaganda programmes, Lazarsfeld and Merton conducted the first experimental focus group research (Morgan & Krueger 1998:38).

Groups of approximately twelve people were seated simultaneously in a radio studio, and each chair was supplied with a red and a green button. The respondents were asked to press the red button every time they responded negatively to a message and the green button every time a favourable impression was made. Merton developed a standard set of interviewing procedures for the group since quantitative data did not assist the researchers in describing the subjective responses of the group. Although focus group interviews were initially utilised for commercial marketing research, the potential of collecting data by means of focus group interviews was soon realised and adopted by the academic community (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson 2001:3).

Focus group interviews are defined as a group discussion that explores specific issues in an attempt to understand people's attitude and behaviour. The group consists of six to twelve people and a moderator facilitates the discussion in an unstructured way (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:124). It is the characteristic of group discussion that distinguishes focus group interviews from other qualitative research methods. The underlying assumption in focus group interviews is that "with a permissive atmosphere that fosters a range of opinions, a more complete and revealing understanding of the issues will be obtained" (Kitzinger & Barbour 1999:4).



According to Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996:5) focus group interviews have the following characteristics:

- Selected individuals are required to share their views, opinions and beliefs on a selected topic in an informal setup.
- The group consists of six to twelve members and is relatively homogeneous.
- A moderator facilitates the discussion with prepared questions and encourages the participants to respond.
- The objective of the discussion is to determine the perceptions, feelings, beliefs and attitudes regarding a specific topic.
- Focus group interviews neither generate quantitative information nor aim to generalise the findings.

Wimmer and Dominick (2003:124) summarise focus group interviews as a controlled group discussion that aims to gather information about an unknown field of study, to assist in identifying themes for survey research or to determine people's perceptions about a certain phenomenon. The method of focus group interviews is used most successfully used in obtaining exploratory research data. It allows the respondents to generate their own priorities and use their own vocabulary to express their perceptions. The process, in turn, stimulates the thinking of the researcher (Fern 2001:7).

Focus group interviews have many inherent advantages, such as allowing the researcher to obtain in-depth data and preliminary information that could be investigated further through other different research methods (Puchta & Potter 2004:7). Furthermore, the focus group interview stimulates conversation not only between the moderator and the group, but also between the different group members, leading to greater participation. Participants are encouraged to form and articulate opinions about the specified topic (Vaughn et al 1996:18).

Another reason that contributes to the popularity of focus group interviews is the unstructured and open-ended questions that allow for flexibility and follow-up questions. Within a focus group interview, the moderator has the opportunity to clarify confusing answers from the participants, thereby making the data more valuable to the researcher (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:124). Although the moderator has a structured guide to follow during the focus group interview, it is likely that the discussion will reveal unanticipated and unexpected, yet relevant issues to the topic at hand. The study is therefore not limited to the questionnaire or the moderator guide (Vaughn et al 1996:19).

According to Vaughn et al (1996:18) the focus group interview is a dynamic, interactive process and it allows the researcher to observe personal reactions and experiences in a social context. The method also encourages the participants to disclose information more freely, supplying the researcher with a range of opinions and data that is richer and fuller than that obtained through individual interviews (Vaughn et al 1996:19).

On the practical side, Wimmer and Dominick (2003:124) argue that focus group interviews can be conducted very quickly and are less time consuming than individual interviews. Focus group interviews conducted in an academic context usually tend to create minimal financial expenses.

Despite the valid advantages of focus group interviews as a research method, the disadvantages associated with the method cannot be ignored. A potential problem arises when one participant in the group becomes a self-assigned leader, dictating conversations and enforcing his or her opinions on the rest of the group. Such a person usually creates resentment from the rest of the group and will impact negatively on the group dynamics and data results (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:125).

On the opposite side of the scale, some individuals may be shy and not confident enough to express their opinions in a group context. A pre-group questionnaire completed by the participants before beginning the focus group assists in data collection from individuals participating to a lesser extent.

Focus group interviews are not an appropriate method of obtaining quantitative data. Additional research methods such as questionnaires have to complement the focus group interview in order to obtain quantitative data. Since focus group interviews mainly aim to provide answers to “why” or “how” questions, they are most likely to provide inconclusive answers to quantitative questions (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:125). As mentioned in paragraph 6.5, two of the research questions aim to determine the frequency of viewing as well as the frequency of voting. However, these questions were not included in the moderator’s guide for the focus group interviews, but were determined from the pre-group questionnaire, answered by the participants on an individual level.

Another drawback is the small size of focus group interviews, usually consisting of volunteers and not representative of a bigger population. It renders the focus group interview data applicable to the participants of the study only and the findings cannot be generalised (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:125).

The success of the focus group interview depends to a large extent on the skills demonstrated by the moderator. The moderator has to lead the group in a professional way, encouraging participation, but stopping discussions on irrelevant topics. It also requires that the moderator creates a supportive environment to discourage and prevent remarks from individuals who dismiss the opinions of others (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:125).

The desired outcome of this research study is to explore a relatively unknown research field and to generate ideas from an audience perspective, making focus group interviews the most appropriate research method. Another reason for applying this method is the flexibility created through group discussions and open-ended questions, allowing the participants to discuss unplanned and unexpected themes related to the topic.

## **6.8 Sampling**

Sampling refers to the procedure applied to select units of analysis from a larger population. It is often impossible to research an entire population and therefore researchers refer to sampling methods to choose participants for a research study (Du Plooy 2001:100). It is however the research method that will ultimately determine the size and strategies for selecting samples (Morgan & Krueger 1998:56).

In focus group interviews, the size of the group is very important. It should be large enough to generate discussion, yet not too large to deny anyone the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. According to Bloor et al (2001:26) the ideal focus group size is between six and eight participants. Morgan and Krueger (1998:71) define the ideal focus group as consisting of six to ten members.

Another question raised is how many groups are sufficient to obtain answers to the research questions. Too few groups may result in insufficient data and premature conclusions, whereas too many groups may waste time and money. The tendency is to research three to five focus group interviews, based on the assumption that the participants are “moderately diverse and that the topic is moderately complex” (Morgan & Krueger 1998:78). If the topic of discussion is very complex, it will require more focus group interviews.

Researchers also have to choose between probability and non-probability sampling. Probability samples are drawn according to mathematical procedures where the chance of each participant being chosen is known and calculated (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:86). It implies that every unit in the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample and that the researcher has no control over the random selection of participants.

Probability samples are used when the research objective is to generalise the findings to a bigger population. Non-probability samples mean that each unit in the population does not stand an equal chance of being selected and that the researcher often predicts and controls the inclusion of the units (Du Plooy 2001:106).

Due to the explorative nature of this study, probability sampling is not an objective. The goal is to obtain specific information about interactive reality television and only participants who are familiar with interactive reality television could provide the required information. There are various ways of conducting a non-probability sample e.g. a convenience sample, purposive sample, volunteer sample and snowball sample (Du Plooy 2001:115). The most frequently used and often most applicable non-probability sample for focus group interviews is purposive sampling (Vaughn et al 1996:58).

Non-probability sampling and therefore purposive sampling are designed to select participants based on predetermined requirements and characteristics. Purposive sampling ultimately aims to develop a set of criteria that will include participants to the extent of how “they could contribute to the study” (Vaughn et al 1996:58).

Participants in this research study were chosen based on the following criteria: they were communication students at the University of Johannesburg, they had access to DSTV (digital satellite television), they watched at least 60 minutes of *Project Fame* once a week and they participated interactively at least twice for the duration of the show.

Section 2.4 investigated the reality television audience and showed that reality television programmes are targeted at teenagers and young adults between the ages of sixteen and thirty-four. University students clearly fall under the target audience. Communication students study mass media phenomena and the assumption is made that they have an advanced interest in the mass media and are therefore more likely to expose themselves to television programmes than other students. Furthermore, all sixteen contestants in the *Project Fame* house were students just before entering the competition, thereby increasing the possibility of student viewers watching the programme because they relate to the contestants.

*Project Fame* was broadcast during open time on M-Net and 24 hours a day on DSTV. The participants had access to DSTV, enabling them to watch *Project Fame* whenever they wanted to. A minimum viewing of 60 minutes, once a week, ensured maximum participation in the focus group interview and a high level of involvement in the topic. Requiring two or more interactive participation experiences ensured participation in the interactive component of this study.

## **6.9 Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted in order to ensure maximum effectiveness in conducting the focus group interviews. Six respondents who meet the requirements of the research project participated in the pilot study. The pilot focus group interview was conducted in the video studio on the campus of the University of Johannesburg. The venue proved to be suitable for the participants since it was on campus, easily accessible and convenient. The group was also provided with snacks and drinks, which proved to be very effective in breaking the ice and creating an informal atmosphere.

One of the main objectives of the pilot study was to test the possible obtrusiveness of a videotape recording of the discussion. The motivation for using a video camera is to assist in the tedious process of transcribing the data. The incorporation of visuals and audio assists in easily identifying who is speaking. Furthermore, it allows for the revision of non-verbal communication that participants may use to replace expressions, e.g. when asked a close-ended question such as 'did you read articles about the show', many participants shook their heads instead of verbally expressing an answer. Section 6.14 discusses the contribution of a video camera to this study.

The video camera did not seem to inhibit group discussion or negatively affect participation. Once the discussion started, the respondents seemed to ignore the camera completely and focus on the discussion. This is evident in the fact that not once did any participant look straight into the lens of the camera, something that often happens when people are conscious about being filmed. As expected, the transcription of the video footage was more accurate and easier than with audio alone.

The pilot study revealed that the participants tend to answer questions very briefly without substantiating their answers. The moderator was therefore continuously ready with follow-up probing and questions. Questions that could be less restrictive and more open-ended were changed to allow for more comprehensive answers.

One of the questions asked: ‘did you speak to the contestants in your mind?’, was interpreted differently by respondents than intended by the researcher. When asked the question, the group initially responded negatively. After the moderator gave an example, the group changed their response and answered affirmatively. The question was changed to ‘did you comment in your mind on things that happened in the show?’, in order to ensure clarity.

Another positive outcome of the pilot study occurred when after the discussion one participant mentioned to another that she had participated interactively because of the prizes that could be won when participating interactively. The question of why the respondents had participated interactively was omitted in the initial moderator’s guide for the pilot study, but included for the remaining focus group discussions. The pilot study also showed that six participants should be the maximum amount of respondents in each focus group interview, in order to allow each respondent the opportunity to answer comprehensively.

#### **6.10 Composition of groups**

The participants for each focus group interview were recruited from five different Communication classes. The researcher approached the lecturers of each individual class and requested ten minutes before the commencement of each class to recruit participants. The researcher explained to the students that a study was being conducted on student participation in interactive reality television, particularly Project Fame. A survey was circulated and the students were requested to complete the survey if they watched Project Fame. The survey included the name, contact number and required population parameters for prospective participants.

A total of 169 students completed the survey. From the 169 entries on the survey, 110 did not meet the requirements of the study, i.e. they did not have access to DSTV or they did not participate interactively in the show. Seven of the entries on the survey were incomplete, leaving 52 potential participants. For the purposes of this study, 35 participants were recruited – seven participants per group, including the pilot study.

Based on the information supplied in the survey, the students who indicated that they participated in multiple interactive opportunities were approached first, since the focus of the study is on interactive participation. Students were selected based on their willingness to participate and their availability. Once all the students who participated in multiple interactive activities were exhausted, the next step was to contact students who indicated that they did participate, but to a lesser extent. Once again, these students were selected based on their willingness to participate and their availability.

The students who met the requirements of the study were approached telephonically and asked to attend a discussion on the subject matter. Groups were compiled with seven participants per group to allow for unforeseen circumstances such as participants not making it to the group discussion. The evening before the focus group interview, each participant was contacted and reminded of the discussion the following day. Where possible, race and gender were separated to create a more homogenous group. Research has shown that groups that are homogenous and only moderately diverse tend to stimulate more constructive discussions than groups where participants have little in common (Vaughn et al 1996:5). All the focus group discussions were conducted in English.

The composition of each group was as follows:

Table 6.1 Group composition

Group	Date	Group composition	Home language
1	20/05/2005	3 black women	Zulu, Tswana, Xhosa
	12:00 – 13:00	1 coloured women	English
2	23/05/2005	4 white women	English
	12:00 – 13:00	1 coloured woman	English
3	25/05/2005	2 black men	Tswana, Zulu
	13:00 – 14:00	3 black women	Sotho
4	26/05/2005 11:30 – 12:30	1 black man	Zulu
		1 white man	Afrikaans
		2 white women	English
		1 black woman	Zulu



Although seven participants per group were recruited to allow for at least one person per group who might not attend the discussion, the groups averaged five participants per group. Even though the target of six respondents per group was not reached, it did ultimately not impact negatively on the. Instead, it allowed for more comprehensive and detailed accounts of each member's experience.

The demographic information of the groups is as follows:

Table 6.2 Demographic information

Group	Participant	Age	Year of study	Place of residence
1	1	19	2nd year	Kensington, Jhb
	2	20	2nd year	Soweto
	3	18	1st year	Soweto
	4	19	1st year	Kyalami Estates, Jhb
2	1	18	1st year	Sandton
	2	incomplete	1st year	incomplete
	3	18	1st year	Alberton
	4	18	1st year	Glenvista
	5	18	1st year	Oakdene, Jhb
3	1	18	1st year	Melville
	2	19	1st year	Melville
	3	19	1st year	Auckland Park
	4	18	1st year	Brixton
	5	19	1st year	Melville
4	1	19	1st year	Soweto
	2	21	4th year	Alberton
	3	20	3rd year	Alberton
	4	20	3rd year	Germiston
	5	18	1st year	Auckland Park

## **6.11 Focus group interview setting**

All the focus group interviews were conducted in the video studio on the campus of the University of Johannesburg. The venue proved to be convenient and easily accessible to the target population. Times were allocated based on the class timetables of the various participants.

## **6.12 Preparation of focus group interview material**

### ***6.12.1 Pre-group questionnaire***

The participants in this study were asked to complete a pre-group questionnaire, before attending the focus group interviews (see attachment). The objective of this pre-group questionnaire was twofold: to obtain socio-demographic information (such as race, age, gender) and information about the topics discussed during the focus group interviews.

The advantages of incorporating a pre-group questionnaire include the collection of socio-demographic data that may provide insight and understanding during the data analysis process and obtaining consent from the respondents to use the information provided. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to identify differences in viewpoints expressed in the group and expressed in the individual questionnaire. A pre-group questionnaire also provides the respondents with the opportunity to raise personal views, when not comfortable expressing opinions that may differ from the majority of the group (Bloor et al 2001:40).

### ***6.12.2 Moderator's guide***

The purpose of a moderator's guide is to provide guidance during the focus group interviews and pre-determine what information the researcher wants to obtain. The moderator's guide can be excessively detailed or it can provide the major questions to be asked, depending on the moderator's knowledge about the topic being discussed (Vaughn et al 1996:41).

For the purposes of this research study, the categories identified by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (see section 5.3.2) provided the provisional category structure for the questions. The categories are cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs and escapist needs. Another category called 'general' was added to the moderator's guide to classify questions that are applicable to all the categories and where the answers provided will determine the relevant category.

It is therefore not possible to assign the questions under 'general' to one specific category, since the question is relevant to all the categories and classification depends on the responses from the participants. The detailed moderator's guide is available as an attachment.

### ***6.12.3 Role of the moderator***

The focus group interview moderator is mainly responsible for facilitating discussion and not controlling the discussion or participating in the discussion (Fern 2001:73). Furthermore, the moderator has to ensure that the answers meet the purpose of the focus group interview and should therefore be familiar with the objectives of the study. During the focus group interview, the moderator is responsible for creating and maintaining a comfortable environment as well as controlling the topic (Vaughn et al 1996:81).

An effective moderator displays the following characteristics: the moderator is clearly in control, but is still approachable for the participants; has good listening skills and shows sincere interest in the responses; and draws out the more quiet respondents and keeps one person from dominating the discussion. The moderator must facilitate the focus group interview without displaying preconceived ideas or biases (Vaughn et al 1996:90).

According to Vaughn et al (1996:91) moderators have to be aware of potential pitfalls such as conveying too much information at the beginning of the focus group interview that may influence participation in a specific direction. The moderators should not be too passive or too controlling and not pay more attention to some participants than to others.

When statements are unclear, the moderator has to probe for clarification and not spend too much time on one single topic. It is clear that the role of the moderator is central to the success of the focus group interview, and being aware of the requirements and pitfalls minimises potential problems.

### **6.13 Conducting the focus group interviews**

Upon arrival, the participants were asked to complete the pre-group questionnaire. In order to create a comfortable, informal atmosphere, snacks and drinks were provided and the participants were informed about the objectives of the study. The moderator explained to the participants the reasons for using a video camera, confirmed that they would remain anonymous and enquired about whether any participant objected to the use of the video camera or felt intimidated by the camera. None of the participants objected or seemed uncomfortable with the use of a video camera.

The participants were also encouraged to speak their minds and informed that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. Each group was furthermore assured that the goal was not to reach a unanimous agreement on each question and that differences in opinions would not impact negatively on the study. The focus groups were conducted according to the themes in the moderator's guide. However, the moderator's guide served only as a guideline and was not followed rigidly. Depending on the responses of the participants, additional questions were often incorporated to encourage participation. The duration of each focus group interview was approximately one hour and the discussions were conducted in English.

The biggest problem experienced with the focus group interviews was recruited participants not arriving for the discussion. This problem was pre-empted and, for each group, more participants were recruited than the required number. The participants were also contacted the night before the discussion to confirm their attendance. Despite these precautions, there were still participants in each group who did not make it to the discussions.

The groups averaged five respondents per group and it proved to be a very effective number since most of the participants were very outspoken. Three focus group interviews started late due to the participants arriving late, but due to the flexible schedule of the students, this did not impact negatively on the duration of the discussion. The moderator sometimes allowed the participants to deviate from the subject and could have intervened earlier.

Despite the abovementioned problems, sufficient data was collected for the purposes of the study and the focus group interviews proved to be an effective data collection method in obtaining answers to the research questions.

#### **6.14 Transcribing the data**

The use of a video camera proved to be very effective in capturing data. As mentioned in section 6.13, the camera did not seem to be obtrusive and it did not seem as if the participants were even aware of the camera. The videotape allowed for more detailed transcription since non-verbal communication could be included, i.e. many of the participants nodded their heads when responding to a question without verbalising a 'yes' or a 'no' answer. By looking at the video footage, it was possible to include these non-verbal responses. Another example is one participant who often used the thumbs-up or thumbs-down sign when expressing herself.

Although these non-verbal responses were not necessarily analysed as separate data or statements in themselves, they assisted the researcher by confirming the context in which a statement was made in, i.e. whether a statement was made in the light of an affirmative or a negative non-verbal sign, thereby minimising possible misinterpretation. It also significantly decreased the amount of time allocated to transcribing the data, since video footage allowed for the easy identification of the participants. Upon completion of the focus group interviews, the video footage was transferred to computer and an editing software programme was utilised to transcribe the data. The editing software also allowed for speedy transcription since the rewind and pause functions are more accurate than those of a tape recorder, and the audio could be slowed down when the participants spoke quickly. It is clear that the use of a video camera and editing software increased the reliability of the transcribed data. The detailed transcriptions are attached as addenda.

#### **6.15 Reliability and validity**

The reliability of a research study refers to the measuring instrument of the study and its ability to produce the same results if applied at a different time by different researchers (Mouton 1996:144). The definition implies consistency over time. According to Mouton (1996:156) one way of increasing the reliability of a study is to apply the method of triangulation. Triangulation is the utilisation of more than one theory, sampling, researcher, source of data and/or data collection method (Du Plooy 2001:81). By applying a variety of methods to the same research study, the assumption is made that in applying different methods to complement each other, the shortcomings of each can be balanced out (Mouton 1996:156).

In order to increase the reliability of this study, triangulation principles were applied by utilising two research methods, namely focus group interviews and questionnaires. Each participant in this study completed a pre-group questionnaire before the commencement of the focus group interview. A pre-group questionnaire allows the researcher to compare the data obtained through discussions to the data supplied by the participants on an individual level.

Another factor influencing the reliability of a study is intracoder reliability. Intracoder reliability refers to reliability achieved when only one person is responsible for coding the data, as is the case with this study. This kind of reliability generally tends to be very low due to the subjective interpretation of data (Wimmer & Dominick 1994:180). The coding of the data for this research study was the responsibility of one person and therefore the intracoder reliability for this study is low. However, as mentioned in section 6.14, the use of a video camera assisted in capturing non-verbal responses as well, thereby minimising possible errors in the interpretation of the data, and increasing the reliability of the transcribed data.

The concept of validity refers to the degree to which a study actually measures what it intends to measure (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:468). According to Wimmer and Dominick (2003:160), focus group interviews and the subsequent content analysis of the data often rely on face validity. Face validity is determined by that quality of an item that is judged “to be a reasonable measure of a particular variable” (Du Plooy 2001:125). Furthermore, it assumes that accurate measurement has been obtained if the procedures of analysis were conducted and executed accurately (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:160).

The research method of focus group interviews has been accepted as a qualitative research instrument consistent with key assumptions of the qualitative research paradigm (Vaughn et al 1996:15). Since focus group interviews do not aim to generalise findings but rather explore and elicit a greater understanding of a phenomenon, the face validity of the method has been accepted by the research community (Krueger 1998:64). By rigorously following the steps in conducting focus group interviews, that is, compiling a moderator guide, conducting a pilot study and incorporating a pre-group questionnaire, this study met the face validity requirements of focus group interviews.

Fern (2001:229) points out that there are three potential threats exist to the validity of focus group interviews, namely compliance, identification and internalisation. Compliance refers to respondents who answer questions in ways that they think the questioner expects, in other words, they attempt to provide the 'right' answer. In order to minimise compliance, the respondents were informed before the discussion that there was no incorrect way to answer a question. The statement was also reflected on the pre-group questionnaire.

Identification occurs when a respondent gives similar answers to those of a participant that he or she is personally attracted to (Fern 2001:229). The respondents of this study had to complete a pre-group questionnaire before engaging in discussions with other participants and the moderator. It is therefore possible to identify discrepancies between data supplied before commencement of the focus group interview and data obtained during the discussions.

Finally, internalisation involves deep ingrained and personal opinions that are not influenced or changed during group discussions, but are not voiced either due to the desire to conform (Fern 2001:229). Once again the application of a pre-group questionnaire minimises this threat by giving the respondents the opportunity to share information outside the group context. It was therefore possible to obtain information from the pre-group questionnaire when the respondents did not voice an opinion on a specific question.

#### **6.16 Unit of analysis**

Content analysis always includes the coding of units, in other words, sections of the text are coded in a specific way. Krippendorff has identified five different types of coding units relevant to content analysis, namely physical, syntactical, referential, propositional and thematic units. When deciding on a unit of analysis, there is no right or wrong unit selection; the focus is rather on selecting the most valid unit within the context of the research study (Baxter & Babbie 2004:242).

The unit of analysis for this study is the thematic unit. Thematic unitising refers to units that may vary in length and involve multiple sentences or utterances. However, each unit relates to a specific theme, meaning that the same theme may surface in multiple ways or utterances (Baxter & Babbie 2004:243). Each statement is therefore considered a unit. A statement could be one word or multiple sentences relating to a specific theme (Baxter & Babbie 2004:247).

### **6.17 Data analysis**

According to Krueger (1998:73) analysing focus group data usually follows one of two general ways: either analysing by question (looking for themes within questions) or analysing by themes (arranging the data according to themes developed before, during or after the focus group interview). The constant comparative technique is one of the best-known techniques for analysing qualitative data and supporting analysis according to themes (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:112).

The process of constant comparative data analysis includes the following steps (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:112):

- Comparative assignment of incidents to categories
- Elaboration and refinement of categories
- Searching for relationships and themes among categories
- Simplifying and integrating data into a coherent theoretical structure

Once the data is ready for analysis, the researcher assigns each unit of analysis to a set of provisional categories. With the examination of each unit, it is compared to the other units that have previously been assigned to that category, in order to determine whether inclusion in that category is appropriate. If some new units do not meet the requirements of existing categories, it may be necessary to define more categories. Units that are relevant to more than one category are copied into all the relevant categories. The objective of the process is to compare units constantly and find similarities among the units within each category (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:112).



During the elaboration and refinement of the categories, the researcher attempts to write rules and characteristics to describe and define the different categories. Continuous revision of the definitions may be necessary during the data analysis phase. The rules and characteristics allow the researcher to explore the theoretical aspects of each category and to “reveal what you are learning about your chosen topic and help you determine your research outcome” (Wimmer & Dominick 2003:113).

Section 5.3.1 established that interactive participation in a reality programme is an active and conscious choice, driven by the desire to fulfil a specific need. For the purposes of this study, the categories of needs gratification defined by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch formed the provisional categories of data analysis. The categories are cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs and escapist needs (see section 5.3.2).

Units included in the cognitive category include statements that relate to the search for knowledge, curiosity and exploration. This category also includes the effect that the newly acquired knowledge had on the participants’ thought processes. The concept of ‘voyeurism’ could be applicable to other categories as well, but based on the definition used in section 2.3, ‘voyeurism’ is classified as a cognitive need, because it implies curiosity. Wong (2001:492) defines voyeurism as people’s curiosity about the “private lives of others”. The relevant questions in this category are:

- Did you read any articles about *Project Fame*?
- Did you ever buy a magazine or search the Internet to obtain more information?
- Did the articles that you read change your opinions about the show or the contestants?
- Did you ever feel like you were spying on the contestants by being able to watch them day and night?

Within the affective category, units relating to emotional experiences are included, as well as units that indicate a search for pleasure. Any statements relating to an entertainment dimension are also allocated to the affective category. Emotional needs and experiences result in further audience participation such as parasocial interaction, identification and matchmaking, and these concepts are therefore included in the affective category.

The viewers may not consciously experience a need for parasocial interaction or identification with the characters, but emotional needs may result in parasocial interaction and identification. Therefore, the viewers receive these emotional gratifications as a result of a search for pleasure or entertainment.

Questions pertaining to the affective category include:

- What did you enjoy most about *Project Fame*?
- Did you get emotionally involved with any of the contestants?
- Do you feel like you know the contestants personally?
- Did you comment on things that happened in the show, e.g. talk to the television screen?
- Did you play the role of matchmaker?

Units that indicate the status of the individual, the search for confirmation of individual credibility as well as the confidence of the individual are categorised under personal integrative needs. It is important to note that this category includes some emotional responses and is not to be confused with the affective category. Emotional responses included in this category relate to units that express emotion due to a possible threat to individual credibility, and emotion is directly linked to how the participants perceive their individual status.

The questions covered in this category are:

- Do you think that your votes made a difference in the outcome of the show?
- Did it upset you when people said negative things about your favourite contestant?
- Did you try to persuade people to vote for a specific contestant?

The social integrative category includes units that relate to the desire for social contact, whether with family or friends. Questions allocated to this category are:

- With whom did you discuss *Project Fame*?
- With whom did you usually watch *Project Fame*?

The last category, escapist needs, refers to the desire to escape and release tension. It also includes the need for diversity and the following questions are included:

- Did you change your daily routine to be able to watch *Project Fame*?
- Did watching *Project Fame* make you forget about your problems?
- Did you ever wish that you could swap places and be a contestant yourself?

The data is analysed systematically according to the different categories derived from the uses and gratifications theory, namely cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs and social integrative needs. Due to the fact that this study also applies the principles of reception study, the next point of discussion focuses on the audience and message reception. The final analysis looks at statements relevant to the genre of reality television and interactive technology. The findings and analysis of the data are presented in Chapter 7.

## **6.18 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the research methods and the application thereof to this particular research study. Within the exploratory context of this study, it is clear that a qualitative research approach is more applicable than a quantitative approach to gain insight into the phenomenon. The research method of focus group interviews also supports the efficient gathering of data and the necessary steps have been taken to increase the validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter 7 discusses the analysis of the data as well as the findings and possible conclusions drawn from the study.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **7 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

“You know, before, we used to watch the Oprahs and the soapies and you know, just boring television. It [reality television] brought some excitement to television”.

The abovementioned statement was made by a participant in one of the focus group interviews. It encapsulates the premise of this study, i.e. that the genre of reality television has introduced a new era in the television-viewing experience. It also supports the aim of the study, i.e. exploring whether the interactive component somehow contributes to the ‘excitement’ of reality television.

In this chapter, the data of each focus group interview is analysed and discussed according to the pre-determined categories. The first discussion is centred on the different interactive opportunities made available to *Project Fame* viewers, which of these opportunities the participants utilised and what these trends reveal about the interactive audience. The next points of discussion are the five categories of needs gratification, namely cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative and escapist. This is followed by an analysis of message interpretation according to reception theory. Finally, this chapter will discuss the participants’ perceptions of reality television as genre as well as interactive technology. Excerpts from the focus group interviews are used to substantiate the discussion.

#### **7.2 Interactive participation**

The pre-group questionnaire provides valuable information about the popularity of various interactive opportunities as well as the frequency of utilising these opportunities. Although this information provides more quantitative data, it is crucial to examine it as it sets the context for the qualitative data interpretation. Furthermore, this kind of information assists in identifying possible trends and preferences, and it supports possible conclusions drawn from the qualitative data.

Table 7.2A indicates, on an individual level, the frequency of watching the programme and the frequency of interactive participation.

The following codes are used in the table:

GP = group

PT = participant

Watch = frequency of watching *Project Fame* on a weekly basis.

Vote = frequency of voting for the whole duration of *Project Fame*.

Web = did the participant access the *Project Fame* website?

DSTV = did the participant access the DSTV interactive guide?

Appearances = did the participant attend public appearances of the contestants?

SMS display = did the participant send SMS messages for display?

Table 7.2A Individual interactive participation

GP	PT	Watch	Vote	Web	DSTV	Appearances	SMS display
1	1	7	6	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
1	2	1	0	No	Yes	No	No
1	3	1	2	No	No	Yes	No
1	4	4	10	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
2	1	4	12	No	Yes	No	No
2	2	3	12	Yes	No	No	No
2	3	3	7	No	No	No	No
2	4	7	12	No	Yes	No	Yes
2	5	7	3	Yes	No	No	Yes

Table 7.2A

## Individual interactive participation

GP	PT	Watch	Vote	Web	DSTV	Appearances	SMS display
3	1	1	0	No	Yes	No	Yes
3	2	1	0	No	Yes	No	No
3	3	7	12	No	Yes	No	Yes
3	4	3	0	No	Yes	No	Yes
3	5	7	3	No	Yes	No	Yes
4	1	4	2	No	No	No	Yes
4	2	3	8	No	No	No	No
4	3	5	26	No	Yes	No	No
4	4	3	2	Yes	Yes	No	No
4	5	7	4	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

By comparing the viewing frequency to the interactive opportunities utilised by the participants, it is possible to identify patterns between the two variables. The data highlighted in red is the data of the participants who watched *Project Fame* on a daily basis and the data highlighted in blue is the data of participants who met the minimum requirement of watching *Project Fame* once a week.

All the participants who watched *Project Fame* on a daily basis voted multiple times during the show. All these participants also sent SMS messages for display on television. Besides voting and sending SMS messages for display, all of these participants utilised at least one more interactive opportunity, resulting in the usage of three or more different interactive options during the show.

In contrast, the participants who watched the show only once a week only utilised two or less interactive opportunities and the majority of them did not vote for the contestants. The data suggests that a correlation exists between the viewing frequency and the interactive participation. It seems that the more the programme is watched, the more interactively the viewer participates, and the less time dedicated to watching the programme, the less interactive participation occurs.

However, since the data was obtained through qualitative research methods, it is impossible to generalise the findings and impossible to conclude that there is a causal relationship between the variables. It is merely possible to identify a trend and a pattern.

Table 7.2 B is a summary of the different interactive opportunities and how many respondents in this study participated in each interactive opportunity.

Table 7.2 B Interactive opportunities utilised

Group	Number of participants	Vote	Official website	Public appearances	DSTV guide	SMS display
1	4	3	2	1	3	2
2	5	5	2	0	2	2
3	5	2	0	0	5	3
4	5	5	1	1	3	2
Total:	19	15	5	2	13	9

From the above data, it is clear that the most popular interactive opportunities are voting for the contestants and accessing the DSTV guide, followed by SMS messages sent for display. All of these interactive opportunities could be exercised while watching the programme and with the least amount of effort. Accessing the website and attending public appearances require an enhanced investment from the viewers.

The data seems to be consistent with the theory that the least effort required, the more likely viewers are to participate (see Heater’s dimensions of interactivity, section 2.3).

Two of the participants in the study also supported this theory. When asked what they enjoyed most about using technology, BF answered:

“Using the remote. You don’t have to get up and go to it, you just sit back and relax”.

LV: That’s what’s nice about it [SMS]. Because people don’t want to go like out of their way to go somewhere. You just want to do it quickly.

The question about whether new technology intimidated them evoked the following response from LJ:

“I think it comes down to how badly you want it,  
how much effort you put into it”.

In the light of the above discussion – that the respondents in this study preferred to participate in activities that required less effort and that the participants who watched *Project Fame* more often participated in more activities – it is now possible to analyse each category within the bigger context.

### **7.3 Cognitive needs**

As discussed in section 5.3.2, cognitive needs refer to curiosity, exploration and the acquisition of knowledge. From the focus group interviews, it was clear that *Project Fame* received a lot of media coverage. Many participants mentioned articles in the *Heat* and *You* magazines. Although many participants were aware of these articles, most of them did not buy the magazines with the specific goal of obtaining information about the programme.

They would rather read articles if they happened to be in the magazine than buy a magazine specifically for an article, as explained by the following statements:

RD: Well the whole time that *Project Fame* was on, every week the *You* used to put in like say an article about Steve, about Jonathan and every week they'd change. So I knew it was gonna be in there. And towards the end they put like all the contestants together. And ja, I knew it was gonna be in so I didn't go out and buy.

PS: Ja, but I would not go and buy the actual magazine for the article.

LJ: Ja, if it's there, I'd read it. I didn't like go out of my way...

LV: No, if it was there I would read it.



Since the participants in this study only read the articles if they happened to be in the magazines that they had already bought, it is possible to conclude that the participants did not actively seek out magazine articles to acquire knowledge and that the articles did not necessarily meet the cognitive needs of the participants. (See section 7.8 for a discussion about secondary texts, intertextuality and the influence on meaning interpretation).

The most likely explanation is that other secondary texts such as the *Project Fame* website and the DSTV guide fulfilled these needs, as is evident in the following statements:

NC: [I enjoyed] going onto DSTV. And if I was at school and I didn't know what happened during the day, I would check what happened and read up: oh this is what happened today. And check up on the popularity poll. I used to do all of that.

KT: Ja, me too.

LJ: ...even if you like missed the day before you go onto the Internet and it has exactly what happened the day before, so you don't have to like: ahhh what happened? So that's why I wasn't always watching, because I was more or less keeping up...

RD: I found the *Project Fame* website was like easy access. You could vote easy and find information. It was nice.

HP: Did any of you go onto the Internet to read more about *Project Fame*?

MM: I tried but I got irritated. And then I just did it through DSTV.

Due to the fact that the DSTV channel broadcast the daily living of the contestants in the *Project Fame* house, the viewers had the option of watching the contestants 24 hours a day, seven days a week and watch them do everyday mundane things, such as sleeping, brushing their teeth and eating. Different opinions were aired around the subject of watching the mundane activities. The participants who did enjoy watching mundane tasks seem to agree that curiosity was the main reason for doing so and it gave the participants the opportunity to measure their own actions against those of others.

LV: I didn't enjoy them in the house at all. I don't wanna see them brush their teeth and put their make-up on, you know what I mean? And when someone is depressed and they sat on their bed and sulk. But I didn't enjoy *Big Brother* either. It's just not my thing.

DR: It's... I don't know why. I can't explain it, I like watching them. I think it's cause I got emotionally involved or attached to certain contestants that I enjoyed watching it so much.

LV: It's like human nature. It's like you wanna just watch other people.

AN: Ja, because you wonder like I wonder if people do the same things I do. Like ja, and then you watch and you're like aah, they're just like... they're normal, I'm normal then.

The participants were also asked whether they felt like they were spying on the contestants due to the surveillance cameras broadcasting every movement 24 hours a day. The majority of the participants agreed that since the contestants of the show knew that they were being watched, they (the viewers) did not feel they were intruding and spying on them. It seems as though the act of voyeurism is justified by the contestants' knowledge of the cameras and the audience.

DR: I don't think you can call it spying cause they knew we were watching them.

AN: And I think maybe like on the first *Big Brother* or the first reality programme you were like, oh my goodness. It was like all exciting and new, but now you're so used to looking in on someone else's life that it just feels like you're watching TV.

HP: Did it ever feel like you were spying on them?

KH: No.

WS: No. I felt I had a right to be there.

LJ: I just felt that I was sitting in the corner watching everything, you know. I don't know, but I didn't feel like I was spying.

PS: No, I just feel like a part of it. Like a small part of it. Like you know what was going on.

KT: And they knew we were watching.

PS: Ja.

KT: So how could you be spying?

DK: Because you'd be thinking they put themselves through this, you know. Why should you feel you're spying, you know?

KT: They want us to watch them, so.

DK: Ja.

NC: The only time I'd feel like I was spying was when they would check for the cameras and turn around. And then Mr Terry would come and be like, no your microphones or something like that. That's the only time I'd feel like I was spying, but otherwise, like no.

The participants seemed to agree that the act of voyeurism did not make them feel like they were spying on the contestants due to the fact that the contestants were aware of the cameras and the audience all the time. With the supporting statements above, it is possible to draw certain conclusions about the cognitive needs and gratifications of the participants in this study. Firstly, the participants who enjoyed the act of voyeurism seem to support the claim that voyeuristic behaviour is motivated by curiosity. Although driven by curiosity, it appears that voyeuristic opportunities result in an emotional gratification as well. The DSTV channel gave the participants 24-hour access to observe the contestants and satisfy their curiosity.

Secondly, the participants who wanted to acquire more information about the programme actively and consciously chose to seek that information. In order to obtain this information, the participants turned to very specific interactive opportunities to meet this need, namely the *Project Fame* website and the DSTV guide. This implies that utilising these two interactive opportunities was goal oriented, that a need existed, and that specific mediums were chosen to meet this need and furthermore that cognitive need gratification occurred either by accessing the *Project Fame* website or the DSTV guide or both.

#### **7.4 Affective needs**

The affective category refers to the participant's emotional experiences, the need for entertainment and the pursuit of pleasure. Section 5.3.2 argued that the participants may also receive emotional gratifications through parasocial interaction and identification with the participants of the show.

Within this definition, the first question asked was, what the participants enjoyed most about the *Project Fame* experience. Across the board the participants seemed to agree that the most enjoyable experience was watching the Sunday night Gala Shows. An interesting observation is that not one single participant mentioned the interactive activities as the most enjoyable component of the experience. This suggests that in the pursuit of pleasure, the viewing activity remains the ultimate enjoyment and that interactive features enhance the experience and exist as a means to an end, but the end in itself is the viewing experience and not the interactive participation.

The majority of the participants admitted to some degree of emotional involvement with the contestants of the show.

NC: So, it's like a soapie, but you're involved, you know. Ja, I loved it. I really got emotionally involved. Even when the show ended I was very upset. I was like: what am I going to watch now?

LJ: I had a big crush on Jonathan. I think I still do.

DM: Well I connected with Tracey-Lee because we're both from Cape Town, both coloured females, like I would vote for her.

AS: Ja, I did get excited like if someone would be voted off that I wanted off, I would go yeah, yeah! I would get sad when someone just got voted off and I think they were really good and they deserved a chance.

HP: Did it feel like you were on an emotional roller coaster?

PS: It's hard not to, with all the pain and happiness they go through. And when one is happy, you become happy and you can't help when they give a great performance to go: aah, yeah! I think it's impossible not to get some emotion from them.

RD: Yes, I cried with them, I laughed with them. I'm like... Ja, some of them when they got evicted I was crying. I'm like no, this is unfair.

Although most of the participants experienced some form of emotional involvement with the contestants of *Project Fame*, there were others who did not share the same kind of experience. It seems as if emotional involvement in the show depended on participants' commitment to, and time invested in, the show itself, as clarified by the following statements:

HP: Did any of you get emotionally involved with the contestants?

LV: I didn't. But I think it's the difference between you guys watching during the day and me not watching during the day, in that if you watch during the day you got to know them as people not just entertainers.

LV: I think once again it comes down to how heavily involved you were with them and that depends on how well you know the people, if you got emotionally involved.

When asked the question whether they felt like they knew the contestants personally, different responses were evoked. The participants generally agreed that they did feel a connection with some of the contestants of the show and that they could relate to them. However, they did not necessarily feel that they knew them personally as individuals.

It was also mentioned that the degree to which they related to different personalities was closely linked to the duration of that person's stay in the competition. The longer the person remained in the competition, the better the audience got to know them and the easier it was to relate to them. Once again, each participant's perception of how well he/she knew the contestants was influenced by the time invested in watching the programme.

DM: I felt like... you can't completely say that you know the person because you watch them all the time, when they get up in the morning, the hair's standing and they're complaining. But I think if I met them I would kind of know what they're about, with basically all of the contestants.

HP: Do you feel like you know the contestants personally?

GS: No, I don't think so. I think I know something of them because they obviously revealed a little bit about themselves, but I don't think they revealed all of themselves.

RD: I felt like I knew them. Cause I was always watching constantly and I was like... You know you listen like... when they go to a room... It's like they're talking to you. I don't know. You just get like a connection with them.

DR: I felt like I knew them on the show. But now like if I see like an advert or anything with them it's like okay, they're so and so from *Project Fame*, but I don't feel like I used to feel.

HP: Do you feel like you know the contestants personally?

WS: To a certain extent.

BF: Only some of them.

GE: Ja, some of the personalities.

WS: Ja, the people that you connected to.

KH: And the ones that were in there for longer.

KH: Not with the ones that left like early.

GE: Ja, just the ones that you related to. Especially when they talk to the camera, you get to know them better. It was almost like he was talking to me.

The participants acknowledged that they often made verbal comments on what was happening on the screen. By verbally expressing opinions during the shows, it once again indicates that the participants experienced a certain degree of emotional involvement in the show and that parasocial interaction occurred:

SG: No, I would scream. Me and my room-mates would scream and get on top of the beds and it's like you know one of them was getting married or something. It was a big thing, you know. And if something bad happened we would be so angry and like we'll be switching the thing off, this is nonsense, it's all that, we're gonna go. We got really upset and really happy. So ja, we were very emotional.

HP: Did you ever scream at the TV set?

MM: All the time. If those judges could hear what I've had to say. No it's not good, it's really not good.

RD: I shouted at the screen.

HP: Did you ever comment on things that happened on the show, so while you're watching, did you actually talk to the screen?

WS: Ja.

LJ: So many times. You're like, oh no! And you're like don't do that, why are you saying that? That type of thing. You like scream at the TV.

GE: It's almost like they can hear you.

LJ: Ja, but they can't, but it's because you see so much of what's going on in their Lives, you feel like you're there and they can hear you. And if they go on and then the judge says something badly, you're like, ag, you suck or whatever. You like get cross and happy for them, you know. You feel very much in there.

Responding to the question of whether they ever played matchmaker, the participants' reactions varied. Generally though, the comments revolved around the love triangle between Jonathan, Bodea and Robin.

DM: I was so sad for Jonathan and Robin. And ooh that love triangle. It was like shame man. I didn't really get to know Bodea cause I started watching late but then I was rooting for Jonathan. And then she was with Bodea and I'm like no man can't your eyes be open and see this guy is much better. And so that's the only love triangle that I saw and I wouldn't have minded if they got together.

KT: The Robin and Jonathan situation. I was like, why don't you just go out with Jonathan? You know you're more free with him. I'm sure you like him more. And then wham bam she loves the other one, Bodea.

BF: I was hoping that Johan and Monica would get together cause they were very comfortable with each other.

DR: I was like why do you [Jonathan] like her [Robin]? You can have me. What do you want her for? So ja, not matchmaking, kind of the opposite.

From the questions relating to the participants' emotional involvement in the show, it is evident that many of the participants formed parasocial relationships with the contestants of the show, i.e. the contestants of the show became like friends to them and they even communicated with them verbally or made comments in their minds.



The fact that the participants indicated that they related to, and connected with, some of the contestants, yet they did not feel that they necessarily knew them on an individual level could reveal an awareness of the artificial nature of the relationships. In other words, the knowledge that the relationships were artificial creations in their minds did not inhibit or restrain the participants from forming parasocial relationships with the contestants of the show. On the contrary, it seems as though despite the knowledge of the ‘unrealness’ of the relationships, the participants still received emotional gratification through parasocial interaction.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that although the degree of emotional involvement in the programme varied from participant to participant, emotional involvement did occur. The significance and importance of emotional involvement on the interactive component are evident as various participants stated that emotional involvement in the programme had motivated interactive participation:

HP: Why did you participate in *Project Fame*?

NC: Cause you get emotionally involved. Ja, I used to get upset when they would like say Bodea is useless, I’m like, no. Yes, he can’t sing that well, but he’s a good person at heart. Then I think, no I’ll vote for him. And even if I know that maybe Steve sang better than him, then I still say no, okay.

AS: Because well sometimes you know that these people are really passionate about what they’re doing and you just want to support them sometimes, you know. Just like to help them through.

DM: I think like you also become emotionally involved with them, connect with them, relate to them, and you want to like support them and stuff.

PS: Personally I didn’t vote. I guess I didn’t get attached to that.

KH: If you don’t care you’re not gonna bother [voting].

In summary, it is possible to conclude that in their search for entertainment and pleasure, the participants in this study turned to the viewing experience to fulfill the need. Many of the participants also engaged in parasocial interaction with the contestants of the show.

Inevitably, the majority of the participants became emotionally involved with the contestants of the show. Emotional involvement in turn gave rise to the need to express support and encouragement. By voting for their favourite contestants, the participants actively responded to the need to express support, once again suggesting that the participants were aware of their needs, that they chose a specific medium to fulfill the need, and that the selected medium provided the required gratification.

### **7.5 Personal integrative needs**

Personal integrative needs refer to the confirmation of the individual's credibility and self-confidence, and the status of the individual within various communities (see section 5.3.2). The first question related to this category focused on whether the participants believed that their individual votes for the contestants influenced the outcome of the final results. The participants expressed different opinions about this question, but it did reveal a very interesting notion. Several participants did not believe that their votes made a difference, yet they still continued voting.

HP: Do you think your votes made a difference in the outcome of the show?

AS: No, not really. I think as things go on, it's not just about our vote, it's the judges and themselves the people. Not every time.

HP: So you don't believe that your votes made a difference, but you still voted?

MM: I still voted because, ja, hope is what keeps us alive, isn't it?

WS: Ja, one vote I really don't think makes a difference.

HP: But you still voted?

WS: Ja, I did like a couple of times when I thought it was necessary.

BF: I voted a few times and even though it didn't swing the way I wanted it to, it still helped. They will say, jis the voting is close. And I'm like, I know, I voted, I know that, I hope it's close.

NC: Yes and no because for every person that votes ja, it all adds up. But I like to vote for the underdog... So my votes didn't help but for sure the people who were voting for Lindiwe they all added up so that one vote plus that one plus another one all added up to a big vote.

LJ: I don't think so. I mean it also depends on how many times you voted. Cause I mean I voted once in the final, you know, so I was like, ja big difference this is gonna make! But I don't think so, I think it has to be a huge amount of SMSs going through to make a difference.

GS: I think ja, because every little bit helps. See even if it's a vote of confidence you just think that... I mean one person voting, I don't think is making much of a difference but if like a million people are sitting there thinking oh my vote is not gonna make a difference, I'm not gonna bother to vote then obviously the person you like is not gonna get anywhere. If many people are having the same thoughts as you, then it's not gonna do anything.

One possible explanation for the notion of voting despite the lack of confidence in the individual vote is that voting meets a different need than that of personal integrative. As mentioned in section 7.4, the participants used voting as a vehicle to express their support of the contestants. The voting process may also provide process gratification, as expressed in the following statement:

HP: Why did you participate?

WS: Because it made me feel like more part of the whole thing.

Two participants mentioned that interactive participation was motivated by personal integrative needs:

HP: Why do you enjoy participating in interactive activities?

LV: I think the audience love being in control. And having a bit of power and knowing that they can maybe change something.

GS: Ja, you can influence what the outcome is.

When asked the question of whether they became upset when people had opposing opinions to their own, the participants generally responded in one of two ways. They either became upset or they accepted the fact that everyone is entitled to their own opinions.

NC: I got very upset. At school they used to call it *Project Lame*. I used to get very upset. I said: don't even talk to me if you're gonna say things like that. They'd say Bodea this and sometimes I'd have to keep quiet and say okay, well say what you want, you don't know. So you do get it, I mean I got very upset.

PS: Personally, I find people's different views interesting, how we can watch the same show and see totally different things.

RD: You get upset when you see someone talking about the person you like.

LJ: Ja, but sometimes people – their favourites aren't your favourite. You're like aah mine is this and this and yours blah blah blah.

WS: Ja, I would like argue with my friends. It's all like good fun type of thing. I'd still be like no, trying to convince them of your point of view.

DM: Well, everyone's got an opinion.

HP: You say that you got upset?

SG: Yes. Like Bodea is not cute. I'm like what are you looking at? Cause I'm clearly not looking at the same thing you're looking at. Or he can't sing. If the judge would be – I don't think you gave your all – I'm like what the hell are you talking about? You could see that this guy was feeling the song and it came from the heart, you know. So I got really upset and I would actually turn off the TV cause I got really upset. Whether it's just me, I don't know.

The participants who expressed their emotional involvement in the show usually tried to persuade friends and family members to vote for their favourite contestants.

NC: My brother is just as big a fan as I am. So he'd have his favourites and I'd be come on, come on we've got to see so and so... and we tried to convince each other. At school I used to try and get the guys to help me vote Bodea in but it didn't work.

GS: No it didn't work because people at my high school weren't into watching *Project Fame* at all. So I tried to convince my family to vote for other people but no, they're too strong.

MM: I ended up making it like a debt. I had a debt scheme and if you don't do this then you have to do this and I'd invite people and take their cellphones and start voting. That's how much I actually believed in the guy.

KH: I used to steal my boyfriend's phone, cause like I wanted to vote for Johan the one week and then he kept on pretending to vote for someone else. So I used to steal his phone and vote.

The questions related to this category focused mainly on the perception of the importance of individual votes and how it could increase credibility and confidence. However, the participants revealed that the scrolling SMS text on the screen played a more vital role. The interactive option of sending SMS messages to the show that would be broadcast as text was utilised to meet personal integrative needs:

WS: I liked that [SMS display]. Ja, cause it gave you a better view of what other people thought and it was a way of, you know, that everyone's a fan. That's why you're all kind of like SMSing.

GE: For me it was the SMS because you got a point of view what people actually saw or what people actually felt in the sense of they give their ideas of what is actually happening. They're also interacting, so you probably saw something and then you feel something, like I hate that person, you know. And maybe an SMS would show the same.

NC: I was upset cause I sent SMSs millions of times and they never came up.

HP: How many are millions of times?

NC: Must be over twenty.

HP: And nothing showed?

NC: No I never saw it.

HP: So did you do it all at one go?

NC: No, no, no, I tried and then I'll try again and again, but it never showed.

GE: Sometimes you feel alone and you look around and the SMS will show: okay, I'm not alone at least.

From the foregoing discussion, it is possible to conclude that the need for personal integration differs for each participant. The voting process itself does not necessarily meet the personal integrative needs of the participants. The participants either welcomed different opinions to theirs or became upset when others disagreed with them. Several participants attempted to confirm their credibility by persuading others to change their point of view. The participants who seek to confirm their status and confirm their point of view utilised the SMS text broadcast to meet this specific need.

## **7.6 Social integrative needs**

The individual's need for interpersonal communication and social contact is addressed in the social integrative category (see section 5.3.2). None of the participants mentioned any of the interactive opportunities in relation to meeting social integrative needs. It rather seems that the viewing activity itself provided gratification since the viewing of *Project Fame* usually took place within a social context, and that *Project Fame* itself became the subject of discussions.

WS: On Sundays when it was the whole Gala event thing, I'd get the whole family and say let's all sit down and watch. But during the week I watched by myself.

KH: Ja, I watched with my mom.

GE: My brother and friends. Sometimes I'd call my friends and say you wanna come over and watch, if you've got time?

DK: With family, we all watched it together.

GS: My whole family watched it. My gran sat in front of the TV all day everyday just watching *Project Fame*.

SG: You feel stupid when you get angry and excited and then like... So it's better if you watch it with others, cause you can share that same emotion.

HP: With whom did you usually discuss *Project Fame*?

WS: My sister. We sat up like half the night and discussed *Project Fame*.

DK: And during the show, you know, you get interactive. You talk about... and it's amazing. Cause *Project Fame* brought out so many opinions. My mom thinks just how mesmerised she was by Bodea's voice or something and I'd think ag no, I don't like it, you know. So ja, basically it was a social thing like you said and we interacted during the show.

DM: With everyone who watched and stuff. Like everyone had a favourite and I didn't think in my mind, oh look what that one is doing. I would say it out loud cause I hope... Like eventually it was like first my sister and myself and then my mommy got involved, then my brother, then my daddy and eventually everyone had a say and an opinion. We were lucky cause everyone in the family knew what was going on and you could comment with everyone and stuff.

AN: ...but Monday morning when we get to school, everyone's like aah, did you see that, what was she wearing? That was our thing, but I mean like ja we didn't talk about it the whole week. It was just like on a Monday we would discuss it, ja.

NC: Ja, I'd definitely at school talk about it – what about this. Our friends would actually SMS each other to like during the show while we're watching like at eleven o'clock: are you watching this? Ja, I'm watching this. Why doesn't so and so... So ja we discussed it.

In summary, the participants expressed social integrative needs and these needs were met by watching *Project Fame* with friends and family and discussing the programme content with others. However, none of the interactive opportunities offered by the show was utilised to fulfil the need for social interaction.

### **7.7 Escapist needs**

Escapist needs include the desire for diversion, the release of tension as well as the need to escape certain circumstances (see section 5.3.2). The DSTV channel offering 24 hours of access to view the contestants certainly provided the opportunity to escape. Although many participants often watched this channel, it is still the actual viewing activity that gratifies the need to escape and not the interactive activities. The majority of participants changed their daily routines and habits to be able to watch the programme as is evident in the following statements:

KH: I used to go to movies on a Sunday, so I stopped going to movies and like when I was studying, my study break was half past six to watch the highlights.

NC: I used to do my homework about eight till about ten, but then I ended up doing it at six. If they had a task or something then I'll have to adjust, then I'll do it at a certain time and then afterwards maybe I have to do it in the morning while they were sleeping and then I'll watch at night.



TT: I rescheduled my sleeping a lot.

SG: Like every weekend, I go home and then I come back on Sunday. So usually my dad will bring me back at eight. So I had to come back earlier than I could be able to watch *Project Fame* than being on the road and miss it. So I had to come back early so I won't miss it.

MM: No more gym on Sundays. Honestly, no gym. You just sit there and watch the omnibus and you sit there till five, six and you just sit there and when it's done I'm like okay, I'm starting my day now. It was just a total relaxed session.

DM: Like on a Sunday, I don't have plans on a Sunday, cause I know it's the omnibus and then you switch over to channel three and, ja. Also like you cut out your day: okay, no I have to watch especially when you know that there was like a fight and I have to see what happened. Like you're just trying to figure out when you're going to watch and when you're going to study, ja.

When asked the question of whether *Project Fame* made them forget about their problems, the participants seemed to agree that to a certain extent it did provide escape from the daily problems, but the viewing experience could not overwrite serious problems.

BF: And sometimes looking at their problems, thinking mine is such nothing compared to theirs. I'd rather watch theirs.

KH: Oh no, my problems are worse. They're not studying, they're just sitting there.

GE: No, it didn't make me forget, cause though you got insight into their problems, it still didn't make me forget. It made me feel like I was thinking of my own problems that I still had to face.

KT: You get engrossed in other people's problems for a minute. So you kind of forget what you're about. If you come home and you had a bad day at school and then like I watched the Monday night shows, you just kind of forget. Or you just had a fight with your mother, you just sit there in front of the TV and all of a sudden it's all about Bodea and, you know, it's not about you anymore and you leave the couch and you're like you wanna tell somebody what happened and then you're just over it.

AS: For those few hours, ja. I mean when you're watching something you're like watching it and you forget what happened during the day and whatever. Then afterwards, then you get back to your life.

MM: You're escaping from all what's happening in your life for that hour or two hours. And you're actually watching someone else's life.

SG: I totally disagree. If I happen to be watching and I'm going through some Difficulties, I'd wonder off even if I'm watching. But I'll be thinking, oh my Goodness, how am I going to fix my problem, you know? So it wasn't really an escape.

DM: I think it depends on the degree of the problem. Cause if it's like a big Problem, you're not gonna be wondering about Robin and Bodea's love life. But like if you've got everyday problems, it's like aah, I'm just gonna watch for five minutes and then a couple of hours later...

The majority of the participants expressed the desire to swap places with the contestants of the show and be contestants themselves, on condition that they did not have to sing.

GS: Every time they're on stage, then it was like, aah, I wanna be there.

DR: I didn't wanna do the singing part, cause I'm not a singer, but I enjoyed... I would've liked to be in the house.

SG: But it was like somebody else was living the life I wanted to live.

MM: I just want those goose bumps, 'cause I'm sure I would definitely get goose bumps from that crowd, just screaming for you and you're just standing there and you start singing, you know. That feedback, you're like pumping each other. Aah, that's the only thing I want to do. Even if I don't sing and I just stand there.

HP: Did you ever feel like swapping with them and be a contestant yourself?

KT: Always. You just want to be there.

DK: Ja, sometimes you want to be there, you know.

PS: Especially with the knowledge you have. Knowing whoever is planning whatever. I'm here, I know what he's planning, so if I was there I would do things differently from the person.

KT: Ja and then you watch the Sunday's show and somebody sings the wrong note or whatever, I'm like why'd you do that? I would've done it right. Ja you find yourself just wanting to be there and doing it right, because they're doing it wrong – or so you think.

In summary, it is clear that the viewing activity provided the majority of the participants with the opportunity to escape from their daily lives. Many of the participants made a conscious effort to change their viewing pattern and daily activities to be able to watch the programme. Furthermore, the participants generally expressed the desire to swap places with the contestants and partake in the reality show themselves. The programme also provided an escape from everyday problems, depending on the severity of the problem. It is important to note that none of the interactive opportunities met the need for escapism.

### **7.8 The audience and message interpretation**

The cultural studies approach to reception theory looks at the communication process as a whole, from the production of a message to the interpretation thereof (see section 5.5). It argues that the meaning audiences ascribe to a message cannot be separated from its social and cultural contexts, and that texts are open to numerous interpretations (Hall 1980:130).

Another factor impacting on the interpretation of the message is the availability of different sources and the way in which viewers integrate the information from the various sources in the process of meaning construction. Section 2.5 discussed intertextuality and the construction of meaning. It stated that intertextuality is the dynamic process whereby viewers combine information generated by different sources in order to construct meaning (Meinhof & Smith 2000:11).

The analysis according to the cognitive needs category concluded that the participants in this study did not buy magazines that featured articles about the programme with the specific goal of obtaining additional information (see section 7.3). This does however, not mean that they were not exposed to secondary texts. The participants read articles about *Project Fame* whenever they were published in the magazines they already bought.

The participants indicated that the articles did not influence their perceptions of the contestants or the show. It seems as if they would rather watch the programme, obtain the news first hand and draw their own conclusions than read someone else's opinion about the contestants. Another interesting fact is that the participants relied less on the media for information and due to the option of watching the contestants 24 hours a day, it seems as if they felt that they themselves had enough knowledge to make their own judgement calls, irrespective and in spite of possibly contradicting the media.

DK: They [contestants] were always there on the interactive channel, so it's...  
you watch more than you read.

NC: Ja, cause I think to myself, no ways how can he [journalist] say this, cause I watch 24/7 so no ways, I see this person all the time. I had my own theories in my head. I'd hear what you have to say and if my theories are in line with yours, but if you write in the paper and I think no, then that's not right.

DM: Like you connect more with them [contestants] than you do with the  
journalists.

Although the participants in the focus group interviews had access to magazine articles as secondary texts, it does not seem as though these secondary texts influenced or changed the perceptions created by the primary text. A possible explanation for this is the fact that the primary text (the television programme) was accessible any time of the day and the participants' personal experiences with the primary text played a more significant role than the information supplied by secondary texts.

The participants could also access the primary text as a reference at any time and the fact that they spent so much time observing the contestants may have created more confidence to trust their own perceptions and conclusions than those of others. It is also possible – as mentioned in the above statement by NC – that the participants accepted statements that confirmed their existing beliefs and chose to discard any statements that challenged their perceptions.

When analysing meaning interpretation according to reception theory, this study examines the influence of cultural and social factors on the communication process. One of the primary messages that the producers of *Project Fame* endorsed was the call for interactive participation. When asked why the participants chose to utilise the interactive opportunities, various responses were evoked. However, none of the participants indicated that social or cultural factors influenced their decision to participate in the programme.

In other words, conformation to social norms and peer pressure neither played a role in or impacted on the decision to participate. One possible explanation is the fact that the different interactive opportunities encourage individual participation and result in a solitary act, rather than incorporating social activities.

The pre-group questionnaires provide some interesting information relating to the cultural dimension of this study. One of the questions requested the participants to identify their favourite *Project Fame* contestant. The first focus group consisted of three black women and one coloured woman. The three black women all chose participants from the same race as their favourite, while the coloured woman identified a coloured participant as her favourite. Focus group two included four white women and one coloured woman. All four white women supported contestants who were also white, while the coloured woman supported a black contestant.

The third focus group comprised three black women and two black men and all five participants selected black contestants as their favourites. Focus group four consisted of three white participants and two black participants. Once again the black participants supported black contestants while the white participants supported white contestants. Most of the participants in all four focus groups explained that the reason for choosing a specific person as their favourite was that that person had the best voice and singing ability.

Based on the information listed above, it is possible to conclude that culture does influence the perceptions of the participants. All the participants watched the same programme with the same contestants, yet when it came to identifying the best contestant, each cultural group identified the best contestant as someone belonging to that same culture. This indicates that the different cultural groups have different perceptions and different evaluation frameworks.

Culture also plays a very important role in how the participants related to the different contestants. One participant indicated that she identified with a contestant based on the fact that they were both from of the same race, as is evident from the following statement:

DM: Well I connected with Tracey-Lee because we're both from Cape Town, both coloured females. Like I would vote for her.

Various other cultural and social norms and traditions also influenced the participants' perceptions of the contestants of the show.

MM: He was very domesticated. That's what I liked about him [Daré]... When you just listen to how he spoke about home and not being ashamed of that: I actually wash my own clothes. And it just didn't seem, you know, that there are people who don't wait around but encourage women's superiority and you know, feminism and all those things. It was nice to hear him. You know because he was always the only guy. The other guys were like: oh, I can't believe you wash your own clothes, there are dry cleaners...

GS: Lindiwe had a baby and she was like struggling and everything, so she actually gave up the sound of her baby to follow her dream. And I felt... and I related with her – not that I have a baby [laughter] – but I admired her for going out there, you know. I mean, I don't know if I would have the strength to do that, but she did. Because she wants to follow her dream. So I have a lot of respect for her.

Different cultures have different perceptions on gender roles in society and what kind of behaviour is acceptable for each gender. From the abovementioned statements, it is clear that cultural differences did not only surface in the programme, but that the participants' cultural frames of reference also influenced their interpretation of the message.

In summary, it is possible to conclude that external and internal factors could influence message interpretation. The participants in this study were not influenced by secondary texts to the extent that they would change their existing beliefs. Although intertextuality occurred and the participants were exposed to secondary texts, the secondary texts did not play a significant role in the interpretations of the messages. However, it seems as though social and cultural values impacted on and influenced the way in which the participants perceived the contestants of the show.

The way in which the participants perceived the contestants of the programme influenced their decisions on who to support and who to vote for. Therefore, although cultural and social factors did not impact on interactive participation directly, they played a role in the outcome of the show and had an indirect influence on interactive participation.

## **7.9 Reality television**

The participants were asked to express their perceptions and opinions about reality television as a genre. The genre seemed to be just as controversial among the participants as it is among academics. The main topic of discussion in each group was centred on the question: how real is real? The participants who labelled themselves as reality show addicts explained that they were addicted to the 'realness', the unscripted and unexpectedness of these shows. On the other hand, the participants who did not enjoy reality television contributed their attitude to the disbelief of the genuineness or 'realness' of the shows.

HP: What do you guys think of reality television in itself?

NC: I love it.

DK: Yeah, it's cool.

TT: It's addictive, I think.

KT: At first... I don't think it's... I think it's crazy, but it's addictive, you know.

But then we love it.

HP: Why do you love it? Why do you think it is addictive?

TT: Cause you see real people being themselves.

KT: Ja.

DK: The fact that you can see someone having a good day, they're happy, sad,  
you see them grow.

DM: I like it [reality television]. I watch reality TV... I'm hooked on it every day  
of my life.

AS: It's very addictive.

HP: Why?

DM: Because it's like sometimes you can see pure human emotion. Sometimes  
it's very fake, but then it's still funny. I don't know, it's just... I don't know,  
there's something about it that draws me to it. I always watch it. Because a  
reality show I always give it a chance. I guess the realness of it. And ja, just  
seeing real human emotion and seeing people in situations that haven't been  
pre-planned. Well, usually. Sometimes they claim that they have and then...  
Ja, just to see that spontaneity and I like that.

MM: I honestly think it's a conspiracy.

HP: All reality programmes?

MM: I honestly do. Because I mean, how can you be real all the time?

SG: Yeah with all the cameras.

MM: When you know there's a camera right there, you know. And yes. How can  
you? It's not possible.



HP: What do you think about reality programmes in general?

LV: It's become like a huge phenomenon. TV is pretty much... all reality TV.

AN: I love reality TV. I watch everything. On series channel like hmm, what's that programme? I watch everything. I love it.

HP: Why do you think it's so addictive?

DR: Because you can relate to it more than you can to your normal programmes.  
Because it's real.

LV: It's reality TV.

DR: Yes.

GS: I have a different vision on that, cause reality TV, it might seem to be real, but at the end of the day are the people really the way they seem to be on TV? That's my big thing cause I always look at it and I'm like, would they do that in real life?

HP: The first question I want to ask you is what do you think about reality television shows?

GE: I don't think it's real sometimes.

KH: No it is.

BF: Most of the times, I think it sucks.

HP: But you girls said that you do like reality TV?

LJ: Love it.

KH: Me too.

HP: Why?

LJ: Ag, it's so entertaining really.

KH: Ja, you get involved with the people.

LJ: Yes, you do actually feel like you know them at the end.

WS: And there's always something that's gonna keep you watching and stuff. Something that's about to happen. Cause the thing about it is like with the scripted stuff you think like oh it's happening and everything will be resolved. But with reality TV, people can interact and you have your differences of opinion and if you don't like someone, you say so.

KH: Ja, and that's real so you want to get to know them as real people.

It is interesting to note that the participants chose to describe their relationship with reality television as 'addictive', not as fans or as regular viewers but as addicts, once again expressing an enhanced involvement with the programme. It also seems that reality television 'addicts' need to believe that the programme is as real as possible.

In the pre-group questionnaire the participants indicated their all-time favourite reality television show. The three programmes that were mentioned most often are *Big Brother*, *Idols* and *Survivor*. *Big Brother* was described as entertaining and the interaction between the participants also contributed to the popularity of the show. *Idols* was mainly chosen because of the singing component associated with it. *Survivor*, on the other hand, many participants singled out due to the perceived 'realness' of the show.

### **7.10 Interactive technology**

The participants indicated that they did not feel intimidated by new technology and would try out new technologies on the market. The use of technology depends on the various needs and the ability of technology to meet the needs required. Once again, the effort required to operate technology was mentioned as playing a big role in the decision to utilise specific technology.

HP: Do you enjoy using technology such as the latest cellphones, the Internet?

LJ: Ja, for sure.

HP: What do you enjoy most?

KH: Being able to go onto the Internet and see who won American Idols.

WS: I think like everything that keep you informed. Anything you want, you can get.

LJ: Ja, with a touch of a button.

BF: Using the remote. You don't have to get up and go to it, you just sit back and relax.

HP: And you don't feel intimidated by technology and new things that come out?

BF: That depends.

KH: Ja.

BF: How difficult it is.

WS: Ja, some things are a bit like over the top.

LJ: I think it comes down to how badly you want it, how much effort you put into it.

HP: Do you enjoy using technology such as the Internet and cellphones?

[All: Yes]

HP: Why?

AS: ...It just like make life much easier. But I don't like computers, actually.

SG: I just like the Internet.

PS: Ja, I think most of the times we don't use it [technology] as much as we should.

KT: Yes, we do. I think our lives are made of technology like I can't imagine a world without technology.

HP: But you don't feel intimidated, you're not scared to try out new technology?

[All: no]

HP: And, in general, do you enjoy using technology such as your cellphones and the Internet?

AN: My cellphone.

LV: I do too.

GS: Rather cellphone than Internet.

HP: Why?

GS: Internet takes too long.

LV: Ja.

GS: There's so much on the Internet for you to do.

HP: But you don't feel intimidated by technology?

[All: no].

With regard to interactive technology, it is possible to conclude that the participants have enough confidence to experiment with different interactive opportunities presented to them. It is however clear that convenience and the effort required play a crucial role in utilising specific technology as well as the urgency of the need that is associated with that technology.

### **7.11 Research conclusions**

As set out in section 6.3 the aim of this study is to explore and examine the relationship between the genre of interactive reality television and its audience and to gain some insight into a field where little research has been done before. The study identified key aspects and trends in order to provide answers to the research questions.

The primary research question aimed to determine the factors that motivate viewers to participate interactively in the reality television show *Project Fame*. Five predetermined categories, as supported by the *uses and gratifications* theory assisted in the process of exploring possible factors influencing interactive participation. The first category namely cognitive needs indicates that many participants did experience the need to acquire more information, that the need was recognized and that specific interactive opportunities were chosen to meet the need. Two interactive features namely the DSTV guide and the *Project Fame* website were utilized to obtain information. It is possible to conclude that one factor motivating interactive participation is that of cognitive needs.

Affective needs form the second category and showed that participants utilized the viewing activity and not interactive participation to meet the need for entertainment and pleasure. The viewing activity resulted in the participants creating parasocial relationships with the contestants of the show. By meeting the need for entertainment and pleasure, the viewing experience generated a different kind of emotional need, that of expressing support and encouragement to contestants of the show. The voting process offered viewers the opportunity to actively show support and thus it is possible to conclude that affective needs do encourage viewers to interactively participate.

The third category refers to personal integrative needs such as confirming individual credibility. Participants indicated that the SMS text broadcast was applied in order to confirm their beliefs and opinions about the contestants, thereby strengthening their own credibility. Personal integrative needs therefore do function as a motivator for interactive participation.

The final two categories namely social integrative needs and escapist needs determined that although these needs do exist, participants did not turn to interactive opportunities to gratify these needs. The viewing experience ultimately fulfills the needs for social interaction as well as escapism.

The secondary research problems focused on the gratifications viewers expected to receive from interactive participation as well as their perception about the gratifications received. Sections 7.3 – 7.7 investigated the different categories of needs gratifications and all the categories concluded that:

- The participants were aware of their needs.
- The participants turned to very specific mediums to meet those needs. The fact that the participants chose to utilise a specific interactive opportunity to meet a need implies that certain expectations existed about the medium's potential to gratify the need. The participants expected interactive participation to meet cognitive, affective and personal integrative needs. They did not expect interactive participation to meet their social integrative and escapist needs since they turned to the actual viewing activity only to gratify these needs.
- The cognitive, affective and personal integrative needs dimensions were gratified by participating interactively. The social integrative and escapist needs dimensions were not gratified by participating interactively, although the viewing experience met those needs.

Due to the fact that interactive participation is an active and conscious choice it is possible to conclude from the above discussion that participants are aware of their needs and that they choose very specific interactive opportunities to meet these needs. Participants expected that interactive participation will meet their cognitive, affective and personal integrative needs. From the discussions it seems as though the expectations were met and that these gratifications were received, however the degree of satisfaction is undetermined. As mentioned in section 6.4, the aim of the secondary research problems was not to determine the correlation between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained, but only to establish whether needs existed and whether the participants perceived those needs to be gratified.

The data also identified two possible trends i.e. the more time spent watching the programme, the more likely viewers will utilize the different interactive opportunities. The second possible trend is that the least effort required from interactive opportunities, the more likely viewers are to utilize those options (see section 7.2).

#### **7.12 Evaluation of theoretical framework**

The uses and gratifications theory proved to be very useful and applicable to interactive television audience research. The main assumption of the theory namely that of an active audience, accurately describes the interactive television audience. Viewers are presented with various interactive opportunities, each resulting in different gratifications, and as such the uses and gratifications theory accurately predicted that the interactive television audience has specific expectations of the different options to meet specific needs.

Furthermore, as mentioned in section 5.4, Rubin and Perse (1987:59) distinguish between three types of audience activity namely; intentionality, selectivity and involvement. Intentional media use refers to goal directed and purposive use of available media and therefore suggests that content is of utmost importance in media choice. Participants in this study indicated that their media use was purposive and goal directed and not merely coincidental.

Selective media use refers to the conscious decision in selecting specific media to gratify a specific need. Once again participants in this study clearly displayed selective media use by identifying and utilizing specific interactive opportunities to meet specific needs.

Involvement, the third type of activity, includes the psychological processing of content to identify personally relevant media content. Participants in this study showed involvement through their ability to identify the content of each interactive opportunity and its relevance to their personal needs.

One of the criticisms against the uses and gratifications theory is that the theory assumes that media use is always goal oriented, purposeful and conscious (see section 5.4.3) and it leaves no room for coincidental media use. This criticism lacks foundation within the context of this research study since interactive participation cannot occur coincidentally but requires conscious decision-making.

The uses and gratifications theory made a valuable contribution to this study by offering a possible explanation of the process of active media consumption through needs and gratifications, and also by offering pre-determined categories of needs gratifications to a field with no existing research. However, the pre-determined categories limited the scope of the research and did not allow for investigating alternative factors that may impact on interactive participation. The qualitative application of the theory makes the generalisation of the results impossible.

Another main criticism against the uses and gratifications theory, that is also applicable to this study, is its failure to recognize the importance of social and cultural influences in media use (see section 5.4.3). In order to address this criticism, this study applied theoretical triangulation by incorporating the cultural studies approach to reception theory as theoretical foundation. Reception theory acknowledges that media consumption generally takes place within a social and cultural context.

In the context of this study, the audience and the interpretation of messages were investigated. By acknowledging the fact that exposure to secondary texts affects message interpretation, it was possible to conclude that although the participants in this study were exposed to secondary texts, they did not impact significantly on the way in which the message was interpreted.

Reception theory provided valuable information about the social and cultural aspects that influence message interpretation. Although social and cultural elements did not impact directly on the interactive component, it is clear that these elements influence perceptions that in turn impact indirectly on the interactive component. By including the cultural studies approach to reception theory, it was possible to:

- Investigate the communication process as a dynamic and interrelated dimension.
- Recognise the power of the mass media, yet not denying the influence of social and cultural factors on the communication process.
- Acknowledge viewers as active participants in the process of meaning construction.

The method of focus group interviews proved to be efficient in gathering qualitative data for the purposes of this study. The goal of the focus group interviews was to explore and identify the factors that impact on interactive participation. The interviews allowed the participants to generate discussions on the specific topics and ensured through interaction with the other participants that they communicated their different views clearly. In other words, if the participants made ambiguous statements, other participants often reacted to them and requested clarification. By using a video camera to capture data, it was possible to increase the reliability of the transcribed data by including non-verbal communication that sets the context for the interpretation of verbal statements.



### **7.13 Suggestions for further research**

The data collected from this exploratory study suggests various exciting research opportunities. Further qualitative research such as an ethnographic study where the researcher observes media usage patterns for reality television will reveal interesting trends within this new emerging genre. Due to the qualitative nature of the study it is not possible to generalize findings beyond the focus group interviews conducted and it cannot be generalized to all reality television shows. A quantitative study in this field will provide valuable information across the board for the genre of reality television.

The study was furthermore limited by the predetermined categories and future research could explore the possibility of additional needs and gratifications by not limiting the categories of the research. Since the population only consisted of university students, it is not reflective of the reality television audience and a more representative sample may provide a different quality of answers to the research questions.

Another interesting topic is exploring the degree of perceived gratifications received from various interactive opportunities. One of the shortcomings of this study is the inconclusiveness about the correlation between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained. A quantitative study applying quantitative research methods, such as a Lickert scale, will render valuable information about the correlation between the two variables.

A question not addressed by this study is the relationship between the viewing activity and its interactive component and whether a causal relationship exists. It is also possible to examine the ‘addictiveness’ of reality television as mentioned by many participants in order to determine the qualities and characteristics that make this genre so attractive to its audience.

## ATTACHMENT A

### PRE-GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participant

As a regular viewer of Project Fame, you have been chosen to participate in this research study and share your views on the programme. The information provided will be used for research purposes only and you will remain completely anonymous. Thank you for your time and contribution.

#### Guidelines in completing the questionnaire:

- Do not write your name on the questionnaire
- Please answer the questions as honest as possible
- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Your answers should only be a true reflection of your opinions about Project Fame.

1. How many times per week did you watch Project Fame?

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2. Did you vote for Project Fame contestants?

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If your answer is yes, how many times did you vote during Project Fame?

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3. Did you access the Project Fame website?

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If your answer is yes, how many times did you access the website?

---

4. Did you attend public appearances by the Project Fame contestants?

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If your answer is yes, how many appearances did you attend?

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5. Did you use the interactive guide on DSTV?

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6. Did you send sms' for display on the show?

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7. What is your favourite reality television show of all times? Why do you say that?

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8. Who was your favourite Project Fame contestant? Why was he/she your favourite?

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9. Who was your least favourite Project Fame contestant? Why was he/she your least favourite?

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10. Do you believe the Project Fame contestants were acting for the camera? Why do you think so?

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11. Do you feel that you know the contestants personally?

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12. What did you enjoy most about Project Fame? Please give a reason for your answer.

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13. What did you enjoy least about Project Fame? Please give a reason for your answer.

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14. Briefly explain the interactive experience you enjoyed most about Project Fame?

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15. Briefly explain the interactive experience you least enjoyed about Project Fame.

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16. Do you believe that your votes made a difference in the outcome of the show?

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17. Whom did you usually watch Project Fame with?

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18. Did you ever feel happy for the contestants? When?

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19. Did you ever feel sad for the contestants? When?

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20. Did you enjoy being able to watch the contestants 24 hours, anytime you want to?

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21. Is there anything you would change about the programme? If your answer is 'yes', briefly explain what you would change.

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22. What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

23. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

24. What is your ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_

25. Where do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

26. What is your home language? \_\_\_\_\_

## **ATTACHMENT B**

### **MODERATOR'S GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

#### **1. Ice breaker**

- What do you think about reality television shows?
- What do you think about Project Fame?

#### **2. General**

- Think back when you first heard that Project Fame was going to be on television. What did you expect the programme to be like?
- Was Project Fame better or worse than you expected?
- Let's pretend you are the producer of Project Fame. What would you change about the programme?
- Do you enjoy using technology such as the internet and cell phones? Why do you say that?
- What interactive feature of Project Fame did you enjoy most? Why do you say that?
- What interactive feature of Project Fame did you avoid? Why do you say that?
- Why did you participate in the interactive activities?

#### **3. Cognitive needs**

- Did you read any articles about the show?
- Did the articles that you read, change your opinion about the show and the contestants?
- Did you ever buy a magazine or search the internet to get more information on the contestants?

#### **4. Affective needs**

- What did you enjoy most about Project Fame?
- Did you get emotionally involved with any of the contestants?
- Do you feel like you know the contestants personally?

- Did you comment in your mind on things that happened in the show?
- Did you play the role of matchmaker?

**5. Personal integrative needs**

- Think back to when you voted for the contestants. Do you think that your votes made a difference in the outcome of the show?
- Did it upset you when people said negative things about your favourite contestant?
- Did you try to persuade people to vote for a specific contestant? How?

**6. Social integrative needs**

- With whom did you discuss Project Fame?
- With whom did you usually watch Project Fame?

**7. Escapist needs**

- Do you remember when Project Fame started on television? Did you change your daily routine to be able to watch Project Fame?
- Did watching Project Fame made you forget about your problems?
- You all have DSTV so you could watch Project Fame day and night. Did you ever feel like you were spying on the contestants?
- Did you ever wish that you could swap places and be a contestant yourself?

## **ATTACHMENT C**

### **TRANSCRIPTIONS OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

Participants were given the assurance that their identity will remain anonymous for the purposes of this study and their names are not mentioned in the transcriptions. All the participants gave permission to record the focus group interviews on video tape.

#### **Transcription codes:**

HP The initials of the researcher.

... Incomplete or unclear sentences.

() Responses from two or more respondents simultaneously.

[ ] Non-verbal communication.



**Focus Group 1**  
**Friday 20 May 12h00-13h00**  
**Composition: 3 black females, 1 coloured female**

HP: First of all I want to know what you girls think in general about reality television shows.

DM: I like it. I watch reality TV... I'm hooked on it every day of my life.

AS: It's very addictive.

HP: Why?

DM: Because it's like sometimes you can see pure human emotion. Sometimes it's very fake but then it's still funny. I don't know it's just... I don't know there's something about it that draws me to it. I always watch it. Because a reality show... I always give it a chance. I guess the realness of it. And ja, just seeing real human emotion and seeing people in situations that haven't been pre-planned. Well usually. Sometimes they claim that they have and then... Ja just to see that spontaneity and I like that.

MM: I honestly think it's a conspiracy.

(Laughter)

HP: All reality programmes?

MM: I honestly do because I mean how can you be real all the time?

SG: Yeah with the cameras.

MM: When you know there's a camera right there you know. And yes. How can you? It's not possible. I just think they're just there to let people like us know that oh okay, someone else can actually do that, so I'm not the only one that actually, I don't know, burps somewhere, or you know? So.

AS: But some of them are quite real like *Survivor*. You know, they really speak out their minds and things like that.

MM: Ja you speak out your mind...

AS: I hate her or something like that.

MM: Ja you speak out your mind and all that but if... cause I did research on *Survivor* and before it actually starts they actually get a memorandum of what they're not suppose to do, you know, what... you know the boundaries. Is that then reality TV?

AS: Ja I mean, you can't exactly do everything or anything. It's like that reality... what was it? The one where they recruit everyone into the house and things like that?

SG: *Big Brother*.

AS: *Big Brother*. I think that *Big Brother* just like goes beyond the lines sometimes. Like like getting the cameras into the bathrooms while they are showering and things like that. I think that's a bit too much sometimes. So I think there's suppose to be certain lines.

MM: Well then don't call it reality. 'Cause in the dictionary what they're saying is reality is not reality.

AS: It's just reality with certain rules.

DM: Ja but life has boundaries.

MM: It's making money.

DM: I mean it's against the law to go and punch someone in the face. It's assault. Now in the context of to say you're not allowed to touch someone inside, you're not allowed to hit someone inside, it's as good as assault. Life has boundaries; we can't go out there and do what we want to. In the same sense...

MM: Why not though?

(Laughter)

MM: I mean. Isn't there a saying that goes rules are meant to be broken? Aren't you a rebel in your own little mind?

DM: Why don't you, why don't you do crime?

MM: He?

DM: Why don't you do crime?

MM: Cause I honestly think I've never been pushed to do crime.

DM: And why don't you go out and take all this food and throw it around and go mad?

MM: Because I haven't been pushed to do that.

DM: Because you've been socialised to know it's wrong.

MM: No. But I haven't been pushed to that.

DM: So if someone did push you, you will go and steal the tape in there and walk out?

MM: But why do people steal bread? Or whatever? They are pushed to do it.

HP: So you think basically that reality TV is fake?

MM: Not. I think fake is a very strong word, I just think that it is what's the right word? It's overdone. It's overdone, the way they publish, the way they produce it you know. They don't like involve things like what we're talking about, the boundaries or before the show starts that you know, this is how it's been structured or whatever. You know.

SG: I agree with you.

MM: They are hiding a lot of things we don't know about and we just sit and watch and we think oh my god this is so real you know.

SG: Ja.

HP: Okay, tell me, in that context, what do you think about *Project Fame*?

SG: It was interesting. Like the judges comments it was quite irritating you know cause a person would come there and give his best and another person just shuts it down you know. So in that sense it was irritating. But like all the hard work and their performances I thought it was really great.

AS: I think it was quite nice that they got people from around the continent and things like that. Otherwise it would only be South African you know. So you kind of get a feel for everyone. Cultures.

DM: First I didn't like it. I was like this is irritating, it's taking up another channel on DSTV, I was hoping for something better and the people couldn't sing. Initially I didn't think there were a lot of people who deserved to be there. But you know it was nice because you could see how the training can improve. But like the top five like you could really see a change in these people like you could see that the training had come in and that they had learned. And then I like started to enjoy it more. Like you enter the situations and the love situations. And then you're like so tired from school and you want to come home and escape. And you go and sit in someone else's life for like an hour. And it's fun. Ja, I liked it.

HP: And you MM?

MM: Hmm. I had a problem with the judges because before I came to RAU I used to do what they're doing. Live theatrical things and all that. And I just think it's unfair how like she said they bring someone who doesn't know how long it takes to go on that big stage and stand there. And you know get someone who is a top DJ who doesn't know anything about singing live and the voice transitions and all that, who just gets there and says oh I didn't like the way you sang, try to do this. There's one judge that was from I'm not too sure one of these African countries. Number one he's a DJ who is 27 years who only started DJ'ing two years ago and just rocks up and tells someone for example Lindiwe whose been singing for years and this is her one chance, and he says I think you should try a bit harder. You know. Ja that's honestly how I felt.

HP: Okay, think back to when you first heard that *Project Fame* was going to be on TV and we never had a *Project Fame* before. What did you think it was going to be like?

MM: Like *Pop Stars*.

DM: I thought it was going to be a bad rip off of Idols.

SG: Ja, something you know a copy cat kind of thing. And seriously I didn't watch it the first couple of weeks because I thought you know what they are just gonna irritate me and I'm gonna be watching people who can't sing, and I can't stand that. So I didn't watch it. But towards the end I started to enjoy it. I was like okay this is totally different from the Idols and the *Pop Stars* and I started enjoying it.

HP: And tell me was *Project Fame* better or worse than what you expected?

(ALL: Better)

AS: I liked the fact that they actually trained them and they were actually disciplined and things like that. Like you had to do this right type of thing. I liked it.

SG: And it's unlike *Pop Stars* or *Idols*. You had to have the talent you had to know how to play some sort of instrument and sing. It wasn't like that type of thing where you feel okay today I want to do something exciting so let me go for auditions. You know it was well organised and it had... it was... structured. It had discipline and you could see when they were still in training this is how it is suppose to be.

HP: DM? Was it better or worse than you expected?

DM: Initially it was what I expected – very bad. Like she said the auditions, the people couldn't sing. And you only... When we first got *Pop Stars* it was so funny to watch the people when they sing so badly and then we got *Idols*. And then after it was so boring to see people singing badly. It was like no I don't want to watch it anymore. But then when they got into the house and the love like between Robyn and Bodea and then you're like... First when they got involved then it's like ooh, something's going on here and then they're both sad and then you get into it and by the end of it I really missed it. I like actually stayed and watch them switching the channel off and then we watched like the static and then we said okay it's finished.

(Laughter)

DM: So it was like ja, I did enjoy it.

HP: Now tell me, let's pretend you are the producers of *Project Fame* and they say you have to put the show together. What would you do differently?

SG: Change the judges. Totally. I mean you have to get people who are in the music industry. Who know how it feels like to give like they gotta be able to give a proper comment instead of breaking them down they build them. Unlike DJ's. I mean what the hell do DJ's know about? All they know is how to put on music and give their five cents worth. You know. But a musician is able to say listen you couldn't sing that song cause you couldn't reach that pitch. So don't try and sing a song like that. So ja, that's the only thing I'd change.

HP: And you MM?

MM: Auditions. The way they structured the auditions. I mean if it's suppose to be reality then shouldn't we know how it starts from the beginning? *Project Fame* just started. I mean I enjoyed it honestly. Anything live I enjoy. But it just starts and they are just there and we are not introduced to them...I like to know...

HP: You don't see the struggle?

MM: Yes. I'd like to know where someone comes from you know. And then it's nice to see this is where you're from, this is where you are now. So, I don't know how some guy the guy from Swaziland got to SA. What did they have to do you know. Out of like one guy and there are so many talented people and how did he get chosen? You know? And I honestly think he couldn't sing to save his life. And a lot of people from Swaziland have beautiful voices. And I'd like to know that.

AS: I don't think many people knew about it. You know, like they would say did you watch *Project Fame*? What's that – you know kind of thing. So I think they could've done more promos and like to get the word out there. So more people would watch.

DM: That's what I was gonna say as well. The promotion and the stuff. Like all of a sudden they were showing auditions and in Idols and even *Pop Stars* it was public. And every time when you buy a Coke can it said auditions are here. And I just saw on the TV one day that people were there and I thought what was going on?

HP: Okay, now tell me, do you enjoy using technology? Such as the Internet and cellphones.

(All: Yes, cell phones).

HP: Why?

AS: 'Cause I mean campus is so big and it's so hard to find your friends. Like where are you [pretend to talk on phone]? Then you're like okay stay there. It just like makes life much easier. But I don't like computers actually.

SG: I just like the Internet. I mean you are able to connect to the people you know. Sometimes I mean calling a person is too expensive. So and I know I love to talk and so if you send an e-mail it's like...

AS: I don't mind e-mail but I'm not like the kind of person to spend like three hours on the computer and stuff like that. I don't like computers.

HP: And what interactive feature of *Project Fame* did you enjoy most? You could access DSTV, you could vote by phone and SMS, or go on to the website, sent an SMS for display...

MM: Meeting them. I would literally just...

HP: Meeting the contestants?

MM: Yes. And speaking to them. I had the privilege of honestly speaking to two of them.

HP: During *Project Fame*?

MM: Yes. They had places where they go to...

HP: Public appearances?

MM: Yes. Public appearances. And just speak to them and ja. It's where do you start where do you go? Like in such a society. And this industry is just you know, it takes guts. And it's just nice to listen and speak to them and you know they are not arrogant.

HP: Did anyone else go to the public appearances?

AS: Well I went to one. There by the M-Net studios. We got paid to be the audience and things like that. Just screaming like Jonathan...

(Laughter)

MM: So it didn't come from the heart?

AS: No.

(Laughter)

AS: But I didn't know *Project Fame* by then. I'm like who are these people. It's like that is Jonathan, that is Tebogo. So okay we hold the board and scream Jonathan.

(Laughter)

AS: So. Ja. That's the only time actually.

HP: Did any of you vote?

AS: Ja, we voted for Tebogo.

HP: And how did you vote, usually?

(All: SMS)

DM: But I also used the Internet. That was also very nice. But it was clever because if you like click once and you try to click a few more times, it's like a-a, it wouldn't like let you in or something like that. You could just vote like once a day.

HP: But with the SMS you could vote as many times as you want, cause you're obviously paying for it then.

MM: Three rand!

(Laughter)

HP: So were you girls bankrupt after Project Fame?

AS: [Nods head]

SG: I never bothered to vote. I voted from my heart. I'd go jey, I support you.

(Laughter)

HP: Okay now tell me what interactive feature do you avoid? Which feature do you feel is mundane? You don't need it?

SG: I don't understand the question.

HP: I want to know what interactive opportunity for instance you could access DSTV guide, go onto the Internet, you can send an SMS for display, what would you hate to do? Of all of those things what would you least enjoy doing?

SG: SMS. Because I loose money. (Laugh)

AS: I wouldn't mind anything.

DM: Me neither. Cause I would call.

AS: I'd SMS and I'd call.

MM: Internet is very irritating.

HP: Why?

MM: Because you go into *Project Fame* and you are just bombarded with all these advertisements. And you click by mistake and they show you how to loose weight in ten days and really I don't need that honestly. So, ja.

HP: So it's all the adverts?

MM: Ja, there are just too many adverts you know. That's why there's free e-mail because people make you know advertisements. So, ja.

HP: Now why did you participate in *Project Fame*? Like go to the public appearances, vote...

AS: Because well sometimes you know that these people are really passionate about what they're doing and you just want to support them sometimes you know. Just like to help them through.

DM: I think like you also become emotionally involve with them (ja.. oh yes) connect with them, relate to them and you want to like support them and stuff.

AS: But it's also fun like aahh [shock] did you see that?

HP: Did you read any articles about the show?

[Only two participants nod affirmatively]

DM: The *Heat* had a few.

HP: The *Heat*?

DM: Yes. *Heat* had quite a bit. I think like every week they had. Like that Nigerian guy pointing and Bodea and Robyn kissing backstage and things. Ja.

HP: Did you buy these magazines specifically to read about *Project Fame*?

DM: No.

HP: And did the articles that you read, did it change your mind about what you thought about the contestants?

DM: No because you find that Jonathan is also reading that article about Bodea and Robyn kissing and you're like ag shame, these people at Heat are so mean. Like you connect more with them than with the reporter or journalist. So it's like you read it but...

HP: But it doesn't change how you feel?

DM: No.

AS: Unless you didn't watch. Then it just gives you more info like what happened.

HP: And did any of you go onto the Internet, to the website to read more info, the diaries, and to see what happened?

MM: I tried but I got irritated. I really did.

HP: And then you just logged off?

MM: Yes and then I just did it through DSTV. It had, yes it had where you know you just basically...

HP: So the DSTV was easier to access than the Internet?

AS & MM: Yes.

MM: And if there's nothing playing on M-TV then you just go and click and check okay, you know.

HP: Now tell me, what did you enjoy most about *Project Fame*?

(All: The performances)

HP: The Sunday night performances?

(All: Yes)

AS: Because that's where you really got...

MM: Especially if they sing your favourite songs.

DM: And the elimination. And also when they would like vote and write which contestant they think will win and you go like aahh [shock].

(Laughter)

DM: It was cool and also when they would like tell them what song they're gonna sing and if they complain and they're like I hate singing Atomic Kitten.

(Laughter)

HP: Did you get emotionally involved with the contestants?

(All: Yes)

SG: Definitely.

HP: How?

DM: Well I connected with Tracey-Lee because we're both from Cape Town, both coloured females, like I would vote for her. And she hated Bodea. And then you know he would speak behind her back and complain.

MM: Who?

AS: Bodea.

MM: Oh.

DM: Like he was complaining to that hairdresser about how Tracey-Lee looked and oh, I didn't like it. I felt like SMS'-ing and say they're speaking about you!

(Laughter)

DM: Yes I connected with her but I think it's with all the people. Like we were all rooting for her.

SG: Me too with that Nigerian guy. I just thought you know every time I hear somebody who sings a song with passion and the voice just comes through and you get goose bumps, that person I will love till the end of time. 'Cause you know I just love music and he had a stunning voice and I just loved his voice. No matter what he did or where he came from it didn't matter to me. It was his voice that mattered to me.

HP: So you connected with him?

SG: Yes, with his voice.

DM: I hated him [shows thumbs down]

MM: He was very domesticated. That's what I liked about him. That's what I think I valued about him besides that you know I felt the same. When you just listen to how he spoke about home and not being ashamed of that I actually wash my own clothes. And it just didn't seem you know that there are people who don't wait around but encourage women's superiority and you know feminism all those things. It was nice to hear him. You know because he was always the only guy. The other guys were like, oh I can't believe you wash your own clothes, there are dry cleaners and everything. Ja I liked him.

HP: And you AS? Did you get emotionally involved?

AS: No, not emotionally. I just got angry but not like emotionally, like I would cry or anything like that.

HP: But did you get excited?

AS: Ja I did get excited like if someone would be voted off that I wanted off, I would go yeah, yeah! I would get sad when someone just got voted off and I think they were really good and they deserved a chance. Ja.

HP: Now did you ever feel like you knew the contestants personally?

[DM Nods vigorously yes. Laughter]

DM: Cause you see them, like I don't know. I felt like... you can't completely say that you know the person because you watch them all the time, when they get up in the morning the hair's standing and they're complaining, but I think like if I met them, I would kind of know what they're about, with basically all of the contestants.

AS: The thing is with reality TV you kind of have to show the best of yourself. You can't really if you're stubborn or selfish or things like that... you have to like be quite conservative...

MM: It rubs off sometimes you know. For the first probably few days you try to make an impression, but there's always that one particular person that's going to stand out and everyone's gonna root and think he or she is the greatest thing you know. After a while though you get tired. You honestly get tired and you think, know what screw this.

AS: Some people can maintain it that's why I think you can't really know a person because you're not gonna give all your stories, you're just gonna give the best ones, like I was miss Whoever, when, where. You know

SG: And they don't also show their emotions cause I guess they're afraid of being perceived as weak. So a lot of them put up a front.

MM: Ooh, then you didn't see the fight between Dare and Tracey-Lee. Then you did not see that fight!

(Laughter)

MM: That was a cat fight.

DM: And Monica's like oh I feel so bad, my skin's so bad and Jonathan was like no it's fine don't worry about it. It's like embarrassing to tell someone like oh I feel bad about my skin or my weight or whatever.

SG: But isn't that to get sympathy? You can't really say you know it's being brave. Maybe she said things like that so she can get sympathy and then people would be like oh god she's still whatever and then feel sorry for her.

MM: I wouldn't go on about my pimples. You just go on. Forget the sympathy or whatever.

(Laughter)

AS: And after getting sympathy then what?

(Laughter)

MM: Maybe when she gets out she'll get like a zit add you know. I don't know.

(Laughter)

HP: Did you comment in your minds on things that happened on the show? If you see something happening would you comment on it?

[Silence]

HP: Like DM you already said you would get excited when someone gets voted out. Would you have a conversation with yourself while watching the show?

SG: I would. You would be sitting there and saying please god help this person.

MM: You can't really avoid that.

SG: And you feel crazy.

MM: But you can't avoid that. I mean you think and speak to yourself all the time. It happens all the time. You sit there and someone passes and you just think to yourself. So you can't avoid it.

HP: Did you ever scream at the TV set?

(All: Yes)

MM: All the time.

(Laughter)

MM: All the time. If those judges could hear what I've had to say. No it's not good, it's really not good.

HP: So usually when you're upset would you scream?

SG: Upset and very happy.

MM: Not exactly scream but...

HP: Ja, but voice your opinion.

MM: Yes.

SG: No I would scream. Me and my room mates would scream and get on top of the beds and it's like you know one of was getting married or something. It was a big thing you know. And if something bad happened we would be so angry and like we'll be switching the thing off, this is nonsense, it's all that, we're gonna go. We got really upset and really happy. So ja, we were very emotional.

HP: And did you ever play the role of matchmaker? Pairing people together or wishing people apart?

DM: Yes. I was so sad for Jonathan and Robin. And ooh that love triangle. It was like shame man. I didn't really get to know Bodea 'cause I started watching late but then I was rooting for Jonathan. And then she was with Bodea and I'm like no man can't your eyes be open and see this guy is much better. And so that's the only love triangle that I saw and I wouldn't have mind if they got together.

HP: And any other contestants that you thought shouldn't hit it off?

[Silence]

HP: And SG what did you think about the love triangle?

SG: I think it was stupid. I totally think it was stupid. I mean they were there for a purpose and by including love you know you kind of like, misdirected. You're suppose to do... so you don't give your all. Personally if I were to fall in love with somebody there and we're really competing, towards the end I'd feel like maybe he deserves it you know.

MM: You can't help yourself. I mean you get affiliated from social comparisons but you can't. If you meet a guy and you like a guy who shares the same interests and there's that genuine attraction, I think it's very difficult you know when it's a mutual feeling that you keep it inside. No matter what you do even though you try to keep it inside, there are certain things that you know maybe, you'll be sitting next to him and you'll click; oh I'm sitting next to him. Small things like that. I don't think you can hide it.

SG: I think they could've done better if they were like separating business from pleasure. They were there for business and it turned into pleasure so that irritated me.

AS: I actually think it makes the show more exciting.

DM: Ja.

AS: You look forward to it, type of thing. So for me I don't mind.

MM: But isn't it getting boring that there's always a love story?

SG: Exactly!

MM: I mean every reality TV show. And we still call it reality!  
(Laughter)  
MM: I just think it's a conspiracy. I'll just stay in my little world.  
HP: Now do you think that your votes made a difference in the outcome of the show?  
MM: Yes it did.  
SG: Like the whole public's vote or my vote?  
HP: Your vote yes.  
SG: No. I didn't vote.  
DM: I think my vote made a difference cause at one stage I voted for Tracy-Lee and I think she just made it in. And I think like maybe if I didn't vote and she lost like six votes then maybe she wouldn't have made it just over and beat somebody else. I think to a certain extend it did play some sort of role.  
AS: No not really. I think as things go on, it's not just about our vote it's the judges and themselves the people. Not every time.  
HP: And MM?  
MM: Ja just like what she was saying, there's just a lot of red tape you know, that we don't know about. But the judging ja, that's how I feel. But I mean that's business you know, it's something you can't run away from. It will always be like that. I honestly don't think anything you know will be free and fair you know.  
HP: So you don't believe that your votes made a difference but you still voted?  
MM: I still voted because ja, hope is what keeps us alive isn't it?  
AS: I think some people voted for the wrong reasons like most girls I know voted for Bodea 'cause he's so cute. And he really can't sing. So you know that was so unfair for other contestants who can sing and he's just cute you know. He just has to stay on.  
HP: Did it upset you when people said negative things about your favourite contestant?  
DM: Like other people or other contestants?  
HP: Anyone who said something negative about your favourite contestant.  
SG: Yes.  
DM: Well everyone's got an opinion. But only Bodea, he was the only one... I couldn't stand that guy. He couldn't really do anything right in my eyes. When he performed I was like aahh he's off the note...  
AS: Or he can't sing. But that one song was so beautiful.  
DM: I just can't give Bodea a compliment. I'm trying, I'm trying.  
(Laughter)  
HP: So SG you say that you got upset?  
SG: Yes.  
HP: What kind of things upset you?  
SG: Like Bodea is not cute. I'm like what are you looking at? 'Cause I'm clearly not looking at the same thing you're looking at. Or he can't sing. If the judge would be I don't think you gave your all, I'm like what the hell are you talking about? You could see that this guy was feeling the song and it came from the heart you know. So I got really upset and I would actually turn off the TV 'cause I got really upset. Whether it's just me I don't know.  
HP: Did you try to persuade people to vote for a specific contestant?  
AS: No.  
MM: Yes.  
HP: What happened?  
MM: I ended up making it like a debt. I had a debt scheme and if you don't do this then you have to do this and I'd invite people and take their cellphones and start voting. That's how much I actually believed in the guy.  
HP: And any of you ladies?  
(All: no)  
HP: With whom did you usually discuss *Project Fame*?  
AS: Friends.  
SG: My roommates.  
HP: Are you in res?  
SG: No I just live in a commune.  
AS: I was in boarding school last year, so I watched it with friends.  
MM: Mom, dad, boyfriend.  
DM: With everyone who watched and stuff. Like everyone had a favourite and I didn't think in my mind ooh look what that one is doing, I would say it out loud cause I hope... Like eventually it was like first my sister and myself and then my mommy got involved then my brother then my daddy and eventually everyone had a say and an opinion. We were lucky 'cause everyone in the family knew what was going on and you could comment with everyone and stuff.

HP: And then whom did you usually watch *Project Fame* with?  
DM: The same people.  
AS: Friends.  
HP: Did you usually watch it with someone or alone?  
SG: With someone.  
MM: Always.  
AS: Yes.  
DM: Yes.  
SG: You feel stupid when you get angry and excited and then like... So it's better if you watch it others, 'cause you can share that same emotion.  
HP: Now tell me when *Project Fame* first started or when you first started watching it, did you change your daily routine to be able to watch?  
SG: Yes.  
HP: What did you change?  
SG: Like every weekend I go home and then I come back on Sunday. So usually my dad will bring me back at eight. So I had to come back earlier that I could be able to watch *Project Fame* than being on the road and miss it. So I had to come back early so I won't miss it.  
HP: And MM?  
MM: No gym on Sundays. Honestly, no gym. You just sit there and watch the omnibus and you sit there till five, six and you just sit there and when it's done I'm like okay I'm only starting my day now. It was just a total relaxed session. The whole period ja.  
HP: And DM?  
DM: The same. Like on a Sunday, I don't have plans on a Sunday, 'cause I know it's the omnibus and then you switch over to channel three and ja. Also like you cut out your day okay, no I have to watch especially when you know that there was like a fight and I have to see what happened. Like you're just trying to figure out when you're going to watch and when you're going to study ja.  
HP: And you AS?  
AS: Well I didn't have much of a choice because we were only allowed to watch TV at certain times.  
MM: What boarding school did you go to?  
AS: National School of the Arts. But on Sundays you don't have like study times.  
MM: Can I ask a question?  
HP: Yes.  
MM: You went to NSA right? What did you major in?  
AS: Drama.  
MM: What are you majoring in now?  
AS: Corporate.  
MM: Why did you drop drama?  
AS: I don't know. Well I'm gonna do drama but I want to have something else. But I am going to do drama.  
MM: When? When you're 21?  
AS: No.  
HP: She's going to audition for Idols III that's coming now.  
(Laughter)  
AS: No just like anything that comes up I'll audition. It's not like my timetable is that hectic.  
MM: But it's May now and you haven't even started yet. I just honestly have a problem because I went to Trinity school of Arts in London for drama. And I'm doing drama now and that's my passion you know. And ja I always wonder, people go to NSA and they do drama and then they just... I just feel if you have a passion for something...  
AS: I do have a passion for it but the thing is I just want to have something else in my life. You can't depend on one thing you know cause our live is tough, you're not always gonna get a job.  
MM: So you want to go into TV?  
AS: Theatre. I love theatre.  
MM: If you love theatre then... but okay, I'll speak to you later.  
HP: Okay, next up. Did watching *Project Fame* made you forget about your problems?  
AS: For those few hours ja. I mean when you're watching something you're like watching it and you forget what happened during the day and whatever. Then afterwards then you get back to your life.  
MM: Like she was saying. You're escaping from all what's happening in your life for that hour or two hours. And you're actually watching someone else's life. So ja.



SG: I totally disagree. If I happen to be watching and I'm going through some difficulties I'd wonder off even I'm watching. But I'll be thinking oh my goodness how am I going to fix my problem you know. So it wasn't really an escape. If I had nothing to do then I'll watch it.

DM: I think it depends on the degree of the problem. Cause if it's like a big problem you're not gonna be wondering about Robin and Bodea's love life. But like if you've got everyday problems it's like aahh, I'm just gonna watch for five minutes and then a couple of hours later...

(Laughter)

HP: Tell me, do you feel like you were spying on the contestants?

SG: Not really spying 'cause they knew.

MM: Why should we feel like you're spying if they actually agreed and they knew what was going to happen. So why is it spying? I don't think so. They knew that they were going to be seen every day and all the fighting and everything. So they just gave us an approval, so we just sit and watch.

HP: And was it nice to be able to see them do mundane things? To watch them sleep and...

MM: I wouldn't exactly watch them sleep.

DM: No. When they go to sleep it's like no, it's over. Even the gym was boring and you only watch when you know like they're getting Nando's on a Friday so there's gonna be a fight. Or the songs choices, I'd always watch the song choices. But when they're like sitting by the pool or doing boring things then I'm like no okay I'd rather take my chances on the other channels.

HP: Did you ever wish that you could swap places with the contestants?

DM: Yes.

AS: Yes.

MM: If I could sing.

SG: I guess you know because I can sing and I sing very well it's like...

HP: Did you go for the auditions?

SG: No I'm not good with competitions. But like it was like somebody else was living the life I wanted to live. But ja, you could always sit and watch and you're like, if it were only me. It's ja, but after some time you get used to it so I'm very excited for them. And you start seeing yourself in the other person.

MM: I just want those goosebumps, 'cause I'm sure I would definitely get goosebumps from that crowd, just screaming for you and you're just standing there and you start singing you know. That feedback, you're like pumping each other. Aahh, that's the only thing I want to do. Even if I don't sing and I just stand there.

(Laughter)

HP: And people just scream?

MM: And people scream and I just smile and ja.

(Laughter)

DM: Not about the singing cause I can't sing, so I'm not. Okay I tried like when I'm singing you have to sing along. But like sometimes you'll be like oh they're getting free clothes and ooh they're going to town and ooh that's nice. But other than that no.

HP: So you never stood in front of the mirror pretending to be one of them?

DM: Ooh ja, no when they're singing I'm also like singing and like aahh I could've sing that song much better even if I sang it like...

(Laughter)

DM: But not like hectically. Like she's got a passion for it [points to MM], like she wants to do it and stuff. But that's not really what I want to do, so it's like funny and stuff. But I wasn't like oh, if only I had auditioned I could've been in the house. I would've liked to be in the house but the singing part no.

HP: So you would like the *Big Brother* thing?

DM: Ja I don't know, I prefer *Project Fame*. *Big Brohter* did not have a goal, no Sunday performance...

HP: And you AS?

AS: Just the same. I would love to get the stuff that they get and things like that. Just the freebies.

(Laughter)

HP: And if they have another *Project Fame* would you watch it?

[All: yes]

HP: And what do you think about the contestants now? Now that *Project Fame* is over? Do you still hear about them?

SG: Nothing, it's like they disappeared or something.

MM: The only person that I know of is Lindiwe, 'cause she's performing.

SG: And Tebogo.

MM: But Tebogo was always part of Jazz Worx. So you know he had already established himself. But besides them I really don't know. Jonathan is in Isidingo.

DM: Yes.

MM: But besides that all the rest are just gone.

AS: That's what happens to most like Pop Stars and Idols.

DM: Ja.

MM: The problem is that it is an African based project in that in SA we got to know a few of them cause they were either recruited to do this or go to appear somewhere or whatever. But because it's so African now and unfortunately we're not you know we don't know what's happening in other countries like Kenia or whatever, you know. We don't know. Like maybe Kudzai in Kenia is actually doing something for herself and she's well known and whatever, but here in SA we don't know. We'll only know about our own SA people.

DM: I was unfortunate enough to be watching MTV-base when they were showing Dare and I know that he is like doing something. I wasn't really paying attention but I know like in Nigeria he's doing something.

MM: He has an album out. Yes he has an album out.

DM: But the thing about SA is we choose our reality stars and we love them and we're like yeah, go and then when it's over they like star in a soap.

AS: Backstage.

DM: Oh, Backstage is the lowest. It's like I don't understand that. We watch them for weeks and we root for them and then that's it. I've been watching American Idol now and the Americans they like buy the music and when they choose an Idol they will like buy their stuff. We're like we choose them but we don't buy.

MM: That's why, because we copy from them. Don't you think it's not rooted to what South Africans link themselves to in that everything is like copyrighted from America you know? I mean *Pop Idols* honestly, okay yes it's giving people opportunities but these are all like American based, British based programmes and nothing of our own is done and structured like a campaign and organised. Like okay this is how South Africans do and how their demands and needs are and you know. And build something from that. Ja I just feel a lot could happen if things were done in that perspective. Like now there's a South African Apprentice.

SG: Really?

MM: Ja it's like a South African Apprentice and honestly I'm just thinking you're trying to compare yourself with Donald Trump. Now Tokyo – I call him Sex-whale – he's known as the owner of Mvelapandi. He's not the owner of Mvelapandi, he's just the front man because of BEE [Black economic empowerment]. And I just feel what does he actually own that is his own? Donald Trump actually owns things that are his you know. Anything that happens is his territory and then we have someone like Tokyo.

HP: Ja, they should've taken someone like Mark Shuttleworth.

MM: Ja someone that did something on their own. From rags to riches you know not from Apartheid to because you're black now you get a big position you know.

SG: No but I guess it also goes with the thing that is easy on the eye. I just can't watch Mark Shuttleworth. But Tokyo Sexwale is dignified besides....

MM: But what's the difference between Mark Shuttleworth and Donald Trump?

(Laughter)

MM: No but honestly.

SG: The reason they chose Tokyo Sexwale is because he's got good business sense.

MM: And Mark Shuttleworth?

SG: But he's not easy on the eye.

DM: And Donald Trump with his hair to the side?

(Laughter)

SG: But Donald Trump is loved.

DM: But Mark Shuttleworth too.

SG: He's not.

DM: I love him.

(Laughter)

MM: Do you know his story? Do you know where he comes from? Do you know that by the end of matric he was more than an ordinary – he was not a millionaire but he was...

SG: His story is charming. But his looks, I would not watch a programme with his looks. He is so ugly.

(Laughter)

SG: I couldn't even watch Apprentice. The only reason I watched it was because I love the way Donald Trump dresses. He looked dignified besides his terrible hairstyle. That's why I'm rooting for Tokyo Sexwale because he's dignified. He's easy on the eye.

MM: But you haven't seen Mark Shuttleworth wearing a suit.

SG: I have and he still looks horrible.

MM: When have you seen him? He never wears suits.

SG: It was some other programme and he looked horrific.

(Laughter)

MM: He's a genius. He has made a name for himself whatever and he was not on the gravy train. He's made his money, he's made his programme. It's his intelligence. His persona.

HP: Have you girls watched "*Show me the Mommy*"?

DM: Yes.

HP: Isn't that bad?

DM: It is so bad.

(Laughter)

HP: Well thank you so much for coming and for your input.

**Focus Group 2**  
**Monday 23 May 12h00-13h00**  
**Composition: 4 white females, 1 coloured female**

HP: What do you think about reality programmes in general?

LV: It's become like a huge phenomenon. TV is pretty much... All reality TV.

AN: I love reality TV, I watch everything. On series channel like hmm, what's that programme... I watch everything. I love it.

HP: Why do you think it is so addictive?

DR: Because you can relate to it more than you can to your normal programmes. Because it's real.

LV: It's reality TV.

DR: Yes.

GS: I have a different vision on that cause reality TV, it might seem to be real but at the end of the day are the people really the way they seem to be on TV? That's my big thing cause I always look at it and I'm like would they do that in real life.

LV: Especially survivor.

GS: Ja.

LV: I think survivor is very staged.

GS: Ja because I mean the camera crew and everything, they're out there and it doesn't seem that they do what the other people do, so. I mean you don't know what happens like between the times that they're not filming.

LV: Ja.

AN: But either way it's still entertaining.

GS: It is, ja it is.

RD: And it gives you something to do like when you're bored, let's go and watch reality TV. Like you get so involved in it you can't miss it you just have to watch it everyday.

HP: And *Project Fame*. What do you girls think about *Project Fame*?

LV: It didn't interest me.

HP: Not a favourite?

[Two nod negatively]

GS: I thought it was quite brilliant.

LV: In enjoyed the performance. Like almost the Idol part of it. Like I didn't enjoy *Big Brother*. So I didn't enjoy them in the house. I couldn't be bothered with them.

HP: Why don't you like it?

LV: I don't know. It just doesn't appeal to me. I don't really want to watch someone going to the bathroom brushing their teeth and stuff. I don't know. Some people are addicts, they absolutely love it. But for me I enjoyed watching them sing and perform that part of it I really enjoyed and that's why I voted, but during the week when they were just lazy and when they're just lazing around the house, it wasn't really what interested me.

DR: I enjoyed watching them learn the songs. Getting their songs and learning them and dancing and that I enjoyed.

GS: I enjoyed the techniques they would show. All the different voice, the vocal training and all that because I want to sing so everything that they learned I was like okay I need to do it myself. That's what I enjoyed.

HP: Okay cause you differ in your opinion, you think it's a brilliant show?

GS: Yes, not the part where they were just lying around doing nothing but when they were actually doing something constructive. Learning things that's what I enjoyed.

AN: Ja, I didn't enjoy it even though the house part was a lot like *Big Brother*. But in *Big Brother* they didn't have rules and they didn't have to go to class and stuff like that whereas in *Project Fame*.

DR: It was more like an aim. Like in *Big Brother* they were just there wasn't like a purpose.

GS: *Project Fame* when they gave the people like discipline. I mean a lot of people think like the music industry is quite like.. it's nothing. You go and you sing and you walk away and stuff. But there are actually discipline. You have to be able to like going to a place sit down do something instead of just like walking in and walking away. There's a lot to the music industry.

RD: I think like if it wasn't for the house and showing them everyday in the house, we wouldn't like really know the contestants though. 'Cause you see them as totally different person on stage you know. But yet some of them in the house were so different. And I always used to watch them in the house to compare them to see how they really were. Like Jonathan he kept, like in the house he was crazy and always laughing and joking and on stage the same thing, so. He was like original.

HP: So you think they are real in front of the camera. What you see is how they really are

RD: Not all of them. Some of them like Jonathan he was who he was. I mean he didn't care. So. But some of them I think they were false like ja I don't think all of them...

GS: Like Jonathan's act could be false so that people like you see. I took more from the performances cause at the end of the day you learn to know the people in the house how they are and then on stage you see them and they're singing. And you think that one doesn't sing so well because you don't like them. That's wrong to me because I would rather take their performances and how they're on stage than what they are in the house.

LV: And not let your perception of them judge who you think is better.

GS: Ja, but obviously I did do that. And if there were people I didn't like very much and when it got to voting for them I didn't vote for them obviously. But I mean I took a lot from the performances. I mean you see these people and they might be putting on an act to get votes to get people to like them. And then on stage they're not that brilliant but people like them and their personalities so they'd vote for them. That I find extremely unfair.

DR: But I think that was the whole idea of the show. That was why they did it like that. To make sure that you didn't vote for them purely on their performances because you're getting to know them as well as their performances.

LV: That's wrong. I mean what are they gonna be? They're gonna be singers. We're not asking them to be the president of the country.

DR: You don't think that's why it's like different from *Idols*?

AN: I prefer *Idols*.

DR: I also prefer *Idols*. I think that's why.

LV: I can understand that is why they would do it but at the end of the day I'm not really interested in... I mean you wanna get to know them and their personalities for sure but I also don't really care. I wanna know if they can sing. And if they can sing can they put it onto a CD and if they're gonna sell it.

RD: That's what they are there for. I mean to sing and that's it.

LV: Ja. That's why I didn't enjoy the house at all. Even like watching them learn songs. You said you took from that. I didn't. It didn't interest me.

RD: I did enjoy it. It was so nice to watch them. I don't know I just love watching them.

HP: Watch the mundane stuff?

RD: Yes. Their behaviour, I just, I don't know I love watching people.

LV: Ja that's entertainment.

RD: And how they interact with each other. Their star signs aahh I was really into their star signs and how their star signs clash and I was like sjoe that's a Virgo that's a Scorpio. I'm like oh my god.

AN: It was also nice to see how during the week they were like struggling to sing their songs and then you see them and then they pull it off. Oh wow. And then you're like yeah, good for you. Ja, that was nice.

HP: Okay, now think back to the first time you heard *Project Fame* is coming and you had no idea what it was, we've never seen it before. What did you expect it was going to be?

GS: I expected it to be like the British version.

HP: Did you see the British version?

GS: Yes I saw the British version and I thought it was much better.

LV: What was the British one called?

GS: *Fame Academy*.

LV: *Fame Academy*.

RD: I thought another *Big Brother*. Sort of like you know house parties you know. But then like I saw it when it came out.

AN: Ja I didn't really have any expectations.

DR: Ja me neither.

AN: I just watched it.

HP: And after you watched the programme was it better or worse than you expected?

GS: Better.

DR: Better.

RD: Better.

AN: Worse.

LV: I also thought it was worse.

HP: Why?

LV: I don't know just the quality and the live shows itself on Sunday were badly done. That's my opinion. Like you could see they weren't rehearsed that well and just like all together. I don't know. Who was the judges again? I can't even remember.

AN: The panel.

LV: Oh yes there was like a whole lot of them. And I always think they make a mistake there. Even on *Idols*. They choose people who I don't think know what their really talking about.

RD: I agree with you.

LV: They were bad. And that affects the show definitely. It really does. I think it got better towards the end, like it kept improving.

RD: In the beginning it was boring. I was like...

DR: When they got to know each other and they spoke more and it was nice. I found it very interesting.

HP: If you were to produce the next *Project Fame*, they say it's your baby, what would you change about it?

GS: I think they should choose their own songs.

DR: I think if they were able to choose their own songs they would have been even better. 'Cause they know what their own capabilities are and what they like and what they're good at. So.

AN: Ja, but then they keep like singing the same type of songs.

DR: Well they can give them certain categories. You say to them...

LV: Like a theme.

DR: Ja like a theme but they get to choose. It's like *Idols*.

GS: But they just want to put like a challenge to them. Because at the end of the day you've got so many pop singers and so many R&B singers. You give them different types of songs and you like push them to see what they are able to do. I mean you don't want another Britney Spears, we don't need one, we've got one. So give them something different. Try to come up with a different type of artist. Someone that does something different from what we already know. And market them in a different way.

LV: I would put only South Africans in the house because where's Lindiwe? What's she done? You don't hear about her or anything and what's the point of having them on *Project Fame* if you vote for them and you never ever hear from them. And it's because they're from another country. And they go back to their country and they are huge there but then we don't ever get to hear them. I think the only person we really hear about in SA is Jonathan, and we don't even hear about him that much.

AN: And Steve. Steve was in that Buddy Holly thing.

GS: And Jonathan is... he's new name is now Nathan Ro isn't it?

DR: Ja.

LV: But I mean the winner wasn't from SA and you don't even... And also that *Big Brother*, I hated that *Big Brother* Africa.

(All: Ja,ja)

LV: I'd rather see South Africans. And it's not anything against other countries it's just that I mean it's your country.

AN: Ja and you also relate better to people that come from your country.

LV: And they win and they leave and then you never hear from them.

HP: And are there any interactive features that you would change or that you would include?

RD: Like what do you mean?

HP: You know you had the various options, sending SMS's for display, vote, call, go onto the Internet, you could go to their public appearances, so are there anything that you would interactively introduce or take away?

GS: I think you could pretty much do everything hey? I think they should... that SMS thing, it was very distracting.

HP: On the screen?

GS: Yes, you spent more time watching the SMS's go by than...

DR: Ja, you don't wanna miss the SMS but you don't want to miss what they're doing.

GS: Ja.

RD: Some people were like so rude on those SMS's and for the family to see that.

LV: No, I think that's a good thing. If you're gonna enter a competition like that you must understand that people aren't gonna like you some people will and some people won't.

RD: Ja, but some people wrote like...

LV: Ja but then you know what then that's the channel's responsibility to like filter it out and censor it.

AN: I agree.

LV: But I don't think I mean I never ever saw anything like that.

RD: Ja not like hectic but I felt sorry cause like they're people that I like so some SMS's you're like ja this one can't sing.

LV: No but I think that's a good thing.

RD: I don't know.

LV: I actually think it's a good thing.

RD: It distracts you.

AN: It also gives you an idea of how popular some of them are.

LV: And the contestants also need to deal with people who are gonna say horrible things about them. They're not all gonna like them and that type of thing. I think no, I don't think they should take it away. But then that's like your opportunity to SMS back and say listen I love this person I think that they're great you know. So...

HP: And in general do you enjoy using technology such as your cellphones and the Internet?

AN: My cellphone.

LV: I do too.

GS: Rather cellphone than Internet.

DR: Ja.

HP: Why?

GS: Internet takes too long.

LV: Ja.

GS: There's so much on the Internet for you to do. I mean if you need to get information for work or something there are different things. I mean there's the library to go to and there's different things to use. I mean the Internet basically a lot of people just use it for entertainment and waste a lot of money.

RD: I found the *Project Fame* website was like easy access. You could vote easy and find information, it was nice.

HP: But you don't feel intimidated by technology?

(All: no)

HP: So if you have to use it it's fine?

(ALL: ja)

HP: Now what interactive feature did you enjoy most about *Project Fame*? Remember I mentioned the scrolling SMS, voting, going onto the website, attending their public appearances?

LV: Voting via SMS was easy.

(ALL: ja)

LV: That's what's nice about it. Because people don't wanna go like out of their way to go somewhere. You just wanna do it quickly. I didn't use the SMS strip on the screen.

GS: No, I did.

DR: I did my mine never came.

RD: Ja I never saw mine.

LV: You see that's the thing, when you SMS and then it doesn't come up.

RD: Because they show it's like delayed like the ones that are there from the day before and there are so many coming through.

LV: Ja but I never used the SMS strip.

AN: Ja, you wanna send the SMS and then you wanna see it.

(All: Ja)

LV: And you don't wanna see the same SMS repeat six times. Ja they should try and make that better.

HP: And what interactive feature did you avoid, did you consciously decide I'm not gonna do this?

LV: Phoning in.

DR: Ja. It takes forever, you wait and ... ja.

HP: Is that phoning to vote?

(All: yes)

HP: Did you all try to vote by phone?

RD: I tried once but it took too long.

AN: No because I knew from like *Idols* before that and whatever that you never get through and everything so I didn't even bother. I just sent SMS's.

HP: Now why do you think did you enjoy participating in the interactive activities? Going onto the web, sending SMS's, why did you do that?

AN: To try and get the person that I like to win.

LV: I think the audience love being in control.

AN: Ja.

LV: And having a bit of power and knowing that they can maybe change something.

GS: Ja, you can influence what the outcome is. But I also find that I mean that people could vote and SMS as many times as they wanted to and I think that is unfair because some people were voting constantly for one person. And there were a lot of people voting like that and I think that some of the voting... the evictions were unfair because they were voting for one person and that person came out. Not in the end because I know she deserves to win. But I mean that the other people that were kept in the house, they were voted on for okay their singing ability and popularity but if people had let's say you were able to send in one vote I think it would've been more faire like that.

LV: But isn't... is it not okay that if you really like someone and you vote for them 30 times? You're gonna go and buy their album. That's how much you like them.

AN: It was like that *Big Brother* thing that Richard guy winning. And all the people in his town were like phoning like the whole time.

GS: Ja but that is an unfair advantage.

AN: And no one even liked him and he won.

LV: Don't you think that every time he's gonna that. That every contestant's family is gonna do that? Because people say that Heinz Winckler won because his father got syndicates to vote. But they monitor that. They monitor to check that like people don't redial everyday. I don't know I think that it's okay for you to sit there and vote 50 times if you like. That doesn't matter that much. I understand for like a whole town.

DR: Ja but the whole town.

LV: But I think it is wrong like...

DR: It's an unfair advantage.

LV: That is wrong.

GS: I agree.

HP: Do you believe that your vote did make a difference in the outcome of the show?

GS: I think ja, because every little bit helps. See even if it's a vote of confidence you just think that... I mean one person voting I don't think is making much of a difference but if like a million people are sitting there thinking oh my vote is not gonna make a difference, I'm not gonna bother to vote then obviously the person you like is not gonna get anywhere. If many people are having the same thoughts as you then it's not gonna do anything.

DR: Ja I don't know if this is what you just said but if everyone thinks their vote isn't gonna count and no one votes then what's the point in it? You must like just vote.

HP: Did you read any articles about the show?

GS: Yes, the *You* magazine.

LV: And in the *Heat*.

GS: Ja they wrote a lot about *Project Fame*.

HP: Did you specifically buy these magazines because they had articles about *Project Fame*?

LV: No.

GS: I did once or twice.

LV: No if it was there I would read it.

RD: Well the whole time that *Project Fame* was on every week the You used to put in like say an article about Steve, about Jonathan and every week they'd change. So I knew it was gonna be in there. And towards the end they put like all the contestant together and ja, I knew it was gonna be in so I didn't go out and buy.

DR: I didn't mind the articles but I just didn't like at the beginning of the shows like also when Survivor starts they put an article in the You and they predicted what was gonna happen. Like they said this person is maybe gonna get to the top. I don't like that. They should leave it 'cause the people have already like a pre-idea and I think they should have a fresh... so that they can make their own assumptions. So I don't like that, ja.

HP: And the articles that you read, did it change your perception or what you thought about the contestants?

RD: No not really. 'Cause what was written there was basically exactly how the contestant was on camera or on stage, you know, in the house. So it was just like their background and you could see they are like that.

GS: And they didn't give like silly bits of information that I didn't know at first, like Linidwe, her baby. It's like people just or I thought okay they had nothing to do, they got their jobs and they gave it up and they're gonna be able to get other jobs whatever. Lindiwe had a baby and she was like struggling and everything so she actually gave up the sound of her baby to follow her dream. And I felt... and I related with her not that I have a baby [laughter] but I admired her for going out there you know. I mean I don't know if I would have the strength to do that, but she did. Because she wants to follow her dream. So I have a lot of respect for her.

DR: Ja like background information. Stuff that you don't find out about them on the show. That's nice.

HP: Next question. What did you enjoy most about *Project Fame*, the whole experience?

LV: The singing on a Sunday night.

AN: Ja.

DR: Yes.

LV: The performances like the Gala show where they danced and...

HP: And the evictions?

GS: No.

LV: No. You kind of feel sorry for them.

DR: Even if you don't like the person it's just sad to see them leave.

RD: Ja.

HP: And RD, you also said that you enjoyed watching them during the day, keeping track of them. Was that a highlight for you?



RD: Not like hectically. Like if I didn't have anything to do I would go and watch them you know what they're doing. If I had time to do it. But I preferred watching the show itself, the performances.

HP: Did any of you get emotionally involved with the contestants?

DR: Yes.

GS: Yes.

RD: Yes. I cried with them, I laughed with them, I'm like ... Ja, some of them when they got evicted I was crying. I'm like no, this is unfair.

AN: Ja when Robin got voted out. That was sad. 'Cause Jonathan was so upset. So ja I felt sorry for them.

LV: I didn't. But I think it's the difference between you guys watching during the day and me not watching during the day. In that if you watch during the day you got to know them as people not just entertainers.

HP: So you were never sad or happy?

LV: Ag well I did feel sorry for them, but I wasn't like that upset to see anyone go. And I wasn't that happy when Lindiwe won and Jonathan didn't, or that sad. I watched the show but I don't think I was as involved as everyone else.

HP: And GS, you said that you also got very emotionally involved.

GS: Yes I did. It is like when Robin and Bodea had something and just watching them during the day seeing how they reacted towards each other and him having to leave. That was very sad for me. Extremely sad.

HP: DR? Did you get emotionally involved?

DR: Hmm, ja especially with the people that I liked. Like Johan and Jonathan. Especially Johan cause he was so like sweet and you... no I didn't feel sorry for him. You just felt that you had to like him and then like if people were ugly to him you felt sad 'cause he was just so likeable. Like ja, the likeable people. I got attached to them.

AN: I didn't like Johan. I was glad he left.

DR: He was so cute.

LV: I don't think he was very good.

AN: He was such a loser.

DR: Shame!

LV: And that's why I think you liked him. I think you pity him. I don't think you realise, but I think everyone liked him because they felt sorry for him. Because he was like the loser.

RD: He can't entertain an audience.

LV: I also didn't really like him.

DR: I think I just felt sorry for him.

LV: Ja.

DR: And because I felt sorry for him, I liked him.

LV: I think that's why he lasted so long.

AN: Hmm.

GS: He was different. I mean looking at Jonathan and Steve and Monica and those people, they were like okay if you had to dress them up and put them there they would portray the image of we want to be superstars. But then again Jonathan and I say Lindiwe as well, they were...you were looking at them and if they were standing over there right now they're different they're normal and they are people I can relate to. And that's who I felt more attached to. I liked Jonathan cause he was quite fun and his performances were quite different.

RD: You mean Johan?

GS: Johan, sorry.

DR: And also he struggled. I think probably with his dancing especially.

(All: ja)

LV: He tried.

DR: Ja, he tried. That was nice.

HP: Do you feel like you know the contestants personally?

GS: No I don't think so. I think I know something of them because they obviously revealed a little bit about themselves, but I don't think they revealed all of themselves. Because I wouldn't go on a TV show and show, be myself, cause I'd be scared that people will pick up things from me that they don't like. I wouldn't like to show myself to everybody. So I keep some stuff hidden away. So that's what I think they did as well. I wouldn't know for sure.

HP: So you know a little bit about them but you don't feel like you know them personally?

GS: No.

HP: Do the rest of you agree?

[LV nods head affirmatively]

RD: I felt...

HP: You felt?

RD: I felt like I knew them. 'Cause I was always watching constantly and I was like... You know you listen like ... when they go to a room... It's like they're talking to you. You I don't know you just get like a connection with them.

DR: I felt like I knew them on the show. But now like if I see like an advert or anything with them it's like okay, they're so and so from *Project Fame* but I don't feel like I used to feel. 'Cause there you would like see them everyday even though you're not really seeing them it's like ...

RD: Now you like forget about them.

LV: Ja I mean I can't even remember some of their names.

HP: Did you comment in your mind on things that happened in the show? Would you comment on any situation?

LV: What do you mean?

HP: If something happened that you agreed with or not agreed with or if someone, one of the contestants was saying something bad about the other one.

LV: Oh definitely.

GS: Yes. I couldn't stand Dare.

LV: He was so arrogant.

AN: Which one was that?

LV: The big guy. He was from Nigeria.

RD: I didn't like him. He was a good singer but he wasn't a nice person.

LV: Ja, ja. Now see there's like your conflict, do you vote for him because he's a good singer or do you not vote for him because he's a horrible person? Now you must like decide what's the purpose?

GS: I don't think we actually know them as people.

RD: Exactly, never.

GS: You enjoy their music and vote for them.

RD: Exactly.

DR: But knowing that he's not a nice person somehow does influence it.

GS: Even if you were to like take your favourite artists let's take for instance Britney Spears. Everybody knows everything about her and she's still like famous and that stuff. But I don't know if I would feel the same way about Dare, he's got a great voice but if I knew him as a person would that affect my buying his album? I don't know.

RD: I read an article about Jennifer Lopez and I love her and I love her music, everything about her. I read that she's like so like if she goes to a hotel she's very arrogant. But it doesn't affect me as long as she's singing and making music I don't care.

GS: Ja, you're listening to her music.

LV: Did any of you watch any interviews done with Avril Lavigne while she was in SA?

(All: no)

LV: She wouldn't like anybody in the face. She yawned in the middle of interviews. She wasn't interested she would give yes no answers, things like that. Now I'm sorry, I don't care how many albums you've sold, I don't care how huge or how big a star you are. If you come to a country and everyone's really excited for you to come and it was so disappointing. She was like totally not interested. She couldn't have given a damn. And the one interview was done like half an hour before her Jo'burg concert was about to start so you think that she would be kind of excited – she yawned. She actually yawned in the middle of the interview. I don't know that affects my idea of her. I won't ever support her again. I won't buy any of her CD's or listen to any of her music.

RD: I don't like her anyway.

LV: I wasn't a huge fan of her anyway but I mean I still kind of listened to a few songs. Now if I like hear her name I think ja whatever. I think that... I understand that that they are also human and they have bad days, but you've gotta understand that it's also about the whole package. People are gonna look at the way you act. Like J-Lo.

AN: And also like in the *Project Fame* house and whatever now, if you heard or you saw something bad about them, then you saw it. It was there for TV. About Jennifer Lopez, Britney Spears and whatever, they have publicists and people to cover everything up. You don't ever know the real person like you would know the real person on *Project Fame*. Even if they are hmm acting in front of the camera...

LV: It's more true.

AN: You still seem them like 24/7 if you watch that much. You get to know them.

HP: Did you ever talk to the screen?

DR: Yes.

GS: Yes.

DR: I shouted at it.

RD: Yes.

DR: You get very, like I don't know... especially when... I don't know it's just like I think because you watch them so much you feel more involved and...

GS: You feel like you're there.

DR: Ja.

GS: Like you're sitting in the house with them around you and they're talking about things or saying things that like you think is completely wrong and you're like what did you say? Always!

LV: I think once again it comes down to how heavily involved you were with them and that depends on how well you know the people, if you got emotionally involved. I didn't feel that way at all.

AN: I never got that involved.

RD: I shouted at the screen. I ja...

HP: Such as? Give me an example.

RD: Like hmm I think they were doing the exercising and I think Johan he was like so tired and he just walked out and he was like no I can't do this and then the two people, I can't remember their names...

HP: Hayley and her partner?

GS: Cheslyn.

RD: Yes, she started shouting at him. She's like no you're not working hard enough. Then he started crying and he's like no you know. And I'm like jiss, what's wrong with you woman? Let the guy relax you know. I was cross. And also like on the performances if a contestant would be evicted or something I'm like NO! that's not right and I'd get up and walk out.

GS: The only time I was like really upset was when Jid'dah said that she wants to go home.

LV: Was she princess of some sort?

GS: Ja. And I just felt that it was so unfair. Cause if she had chosen to go home that spot that was hers, somebody else could've taken it. I mean the person that would've been maybe better than Lindiwe that could've won, could've been in her place. And they didn't have that chance because she was there and she didn't care what happened.

LV: Ja.

GS: It was just fun for her.

HP: Did you girls ever play matchmaker?

LV: No.

HP: So you never fixed couples up in your mind and did you ever get upset about romance in the house?

DR: I did. Cause I was a huge Jonathan fan so...

LV: You felt sorry for him when Robin dissed him.

DR: Ja but also I was like why do you like her? You can have me what do you want to have her for? (Laugh). So ja, not matchmaker, kind of the opposite.

LV: I think Robin and Bodea did it for publicity. I don't know, I can't see like a relationship, a true relationship form in that type of situation. Because there's just like so much other stress and I think it's stupid because the purpose of you being there should be to make a career for yourself. You shouldn't be thinking about other things. You shouldn't be thinking about love. I reckon they did it... I would love to know if they're actually together today.

GS: I read an article and they're not.

LV: Ja see they're not.

DR: Like I also thought like you can't form a proper relationship in a situation like that. But you know Nazneen and Jacques from *Idols*, they're still together now. And they say that their relationship works because they're both in the same careers. They know what the other one is going through.

RD: They relate to each other.

LV: Isn't it different because they weren't in the house together like a *Big Brother* situation?

DR: But they kind of saw each other like I'd say almost everyday.

LV: But I think they kind of they didn't get publicity on being together while the competition was happening because people didn't know that they were together. You know what I mean. They only got together after *Idols* finished and I think Robin and Bodea knew that people would watch them in the house if they you know just flirted with each other and that people would be interested. They were clever.

RD: I don't think... I think they were just like, you get bored in the house sometimes and free time and they like Bodea used to give her a lot of advice cause she was often feeling down and stuff and she'd go and speak to him and then she felt like he was her comfort zone he's protecting her and all of this. But you know so they like became good friends and then started falling in love. I don't know how it happened but you know I find that also, I mean you need a companion inside the house like someone to talk to. Because it's a big competition and I know you're competing against that person but you know you're away from your family and stuff so I think she just needed like someone to...

HP: Fill the gap?

RD: Ja.

LV: I think she was clever. I think she knew what she was doing. I don't know...

RD: Ja I don't think she was like in love with him.

LV: I understand like her wanting a companion and all that but I mean why take it to that other level; why not just keep it at friendship? Ag it's...

HP: Did it ever upset you when people said negative things or when other contestants said negative things about your favourite?

DR & GS: Ja.

HP: How would you react?

DR: I'd defend them. Well not defend them as such but tell them what I thought of them and why I thought that they were good and why I thought they were wrong. So ja...

RD: You get upset when you see someone talking about the person you like.

AN: I just think that everyone has their own opinion. If you don't like them then fine that's your opinion.

HP: Did you ever try and persuade someone to vote for a specific contestant?

DR: Yes.

GS: Yes, I tried but it didn't work.

HP: What did you do? Was it talking, did you send SMS's vote for this one or what did you do?

DR: I tried to convince my brother to vote for Johan. (Laughter). He liked Monica, was it Monica with the red hair?

AN: My boyfriend also liked Monica.

DR: He said she was the best thing in the world, beautiful and she sings so nice. I said please don't vote for her, vote for Johan, he's the one.

HP: And GS? You also said yes but it didn't work?

GS: No it didn't work because people at my high school weren't into watching *Project Fame* at all. So I tried to convince my family to vote for other people but no, they're too strong.

DR: It's like you said everyone has their own opinion. They're gonna vote for who they want to vote.

RD: Like my mom just wanted to vote for Dare the whole time. She was and I was SMS'ing for Jonathan so we were like fighting in the house about that. Jis, she was always arguing, he's got such a good voice, I'm like no Jonathan as well and he's a better entertainer and she's like no. But at least I got my best friend to vote for Jonathan as well. We're like at school and we used to say ja are you gonna watch tonight whatever. You know we both used to vote.

HP: AN did you ever try to talk people into voting?

AN: No my friends all liked the same...Jonathan, like I liked him and everything and hmm, ja we always voted but I never really persuaded.

HP: With whom did you usually discuss *Project Fame*?

AN: Friends.

RD: Ja, and my mom. She was watching it with me all the way.

GS: My whole family watched it. My gran sat in front of the TV all day everyday (laughing) just watching *Project Fame*.

AN: No I watched with my sister, but Monday morning when we get to school, everyone's like aahh did you see that, what was she wearing? That was our thing, but I mean like ja we didn't talk about it the whole week it was just like on a Monday we would discuss it ja.

HP: So it was usually at school with friends and then during the show with family?

(All: Ja)

AN: Ja just my sister.

HP: Generally, did you watch *Project Fame* with family or friends or alone?

(All: family)

HP: Now think back to when it first started. Did you change your daily routine to be able to watch *Project Fame*?

DR: I was usually watching TV anyway, now I just watched *Project Fame*.

RD: Usually like it would change when I got home from school, I'd go and watch you know to give me a break from starting homework straight away or whatever. So I'd watch straight after school but then I'd sit there till like five o'clock or something.

DR: Ja.

HP: But you didn't change your activities to fit in with *Project Fame*?

RD: No.

HP: Did it ever make you feel like you forget about your problems when you're watching?

RD: Yes

DR: Yes

GS: Yes, I'd get lost in it.

LV: Yes it is an escape. Any TV is an escape.

RD: Especially like reality TV. 'Cause you like get so involved you're like sometimes my mom would say get away from the TV, you're like glued to that TV. And you're like inside the house you feel like you're there. You forget about everything else that is going on around you and it's nice. I like it.

LV: I think it's scary that people can get so involved. I just remembered my boyfriend's mom actually e-mailed *Project Fame* because something happened, something was unfair, I can't exactly remember what happened, but like, someone had done something wrong. I think it was something to do with the singing teacher, that guy RJ, he did something, I don't know. Something happened which was wrong and he let one of the other contestants talk on the phone which they're not allowed to do or something. She got on that e-mail and she wrote this long e-mail, she doesn't appreciate this, they must do something about it and she sent it off. Now I don't know like that's how involved she was. She sat and watched it all day. So I think some people get like hectically involved in it, it becomes like a major escape.

HP: Would you go and watch it when you feel depressed?

RD: Ja.

AN: No. I had like certain times when I was still at school, I had certain times when I watched TV and if it's on then I watched it. If it wasn't it wasn't.

LV: Ja.

HP: Did it ever feel to you that you were spying on the contestants? Being able to watch them all the time, did it feel like you were spying on them?

LV: I think that's what people liked about it. That you could watch someone, almost like a peeping Tom.

DR: I don't think you can call it spying 'cause they knew we were watching them.

GS: Ja.

DR: So.

AN: And I think maybe like on the first *Big Brother* or the first reality programme you were like oh my goodness. It was like all exciting and new but now you're so used to looking in on someone else's life that it just feels like you're watching TV.

HP: We know RD enjoyed watching them but did you enjoy watching the mundane things?

GS: Not at all.

LV: I didn't enjoy them in the house at all. I don't wanna see them brush their teeth and put their make-up on. You know what I mean, and when someone is depressed and they sat on their bed and sulk. But I didn't enjoy *Big Brother* either. It's just not my thing.

HP: And DR did you enjoy it?

DR: Hmm, ja. It's ... I don't know why. I can't explain it, I like watching them. I think it's cause I got emotionally involved or attached to certain contestants that I enjoyed watching it so much.

LV: It's like human nature. It's like you wanna just watch other people.

AN: Ja because you wonder like I wonder if people do the same things I do.

(All: Ja, ja)

AN: Like ja, and then you watch and you're like aahh, they're just like... they're normal, I'm normal then.

RD: But you catch like the little things they do like some of them would like have pillow fights or say something funny and you sit there and you're there to watch it and you know it's nice.

HP: Did you ever feel like swapping places with them and be a contestant yourself?

GS: Yes.

LV: No. I can't see that.

AN: Me neither.

GS: Every time they're on stage then it was like, aahh I wanna be there.

DR: I didn't wanna do the singing part, 'cause I'm not a singer but I enjoyed... I would've liked to be in the house.

LV: I would like never enter *Big Brother*. Never.

DR: I couldn't have people watching me all the time. But just it looked fun.

RD: Ja I would like to go into the house and be there you know. But to go and sing.

AN: Ja I could do *Big Brother* but not *Project Fame*.

GS: I wouldn't want to be in the house. I would try to hide myself. It's kind of impossible if you know certain things about yourself in you know that you're gonna do that you can stop yourself. But I don't think I'll be able to do that. So I wouldn't do the house part.

HP: Did any of you go for the auditions?

[All: no]

RD: My friend did. And she didn't get past the first stage.

HP: Did they show her?

RD: No. She phoned me and she was like ahhh.

AN: My friend went to the audition for *Project Fame* and for both *Idols*. She hasn't gotten in yet. She's going again now.

HP: What do you think about the instant fame thing? Because you're famous for two or three months and then like you guys say, you're gone, you don't hear from anyone.

GS: Everybody wants their 15 minutes of fame.

LV: They're like pseudo celebs, they're not real celebs. I mean Jonathan is on *Isidingo* which isn't actually singing, so it's actually ironic that he's on *Isidingo* cause it's not what he wanted to do. You know what I mean, I mean good for him that he's doing something, but he's not singing. I mean you don't hear that he's doing very well on radio or he's brought out a brilliant song or whatever. And for the rest of them... where's Robin? Who else from SA was in there?

RD: But like Lindiwe you never hear about her. She's from where?

HP: Isn't she from...

GS: Botswana?

RD: But well, she's obviously gone back to her roots.

HP: But do you think that they enter it for the fame or to actually get somewhere in their careers?

LV: I think it's a platform. I think... ja I don't think they think about it that I wanna be famous, it's just to try and get yourself in to the industry cause it's difficult.

AN: Like Monica, she wanted to be on *Egoli* so badly and she like got on it and whatever, but you never hear of her singing.

LV: Ja but she's not even on *Egoli* anymore.

AN: Ja she was there for a little while.

LV: Ja, so I mean what have they really done?

AN: Not much.

HP: So do you think they can actually do a bit more with the fame or do you think that's part of the reality TV thing?

DR: I think reality TV makes you famous in the beginning but you have to carry it on afterwards. You have to make yourself famous afterwards.

GS: People can't be responsible...

AN: Like Bianca from *Idols*, she's like always on *Heat*. She's like everywhere. She's made herself famous from that platform. She's gone out.

LV: I also think the SA audience is not the same as the American audience. We're not fanatical, it's not an obsession. In America people are like heavily obsessed with celebrities. We don't have like paparazzi, I know the *Heat* magazine like to pretend they're the paparazzi, but they're not really. I mean they're all set up. The shoot is all set up, you know what I mean, it's not like they were waiting in the bushes for people. So I think our culture is just different. You don't... I think they can't get to that level of fame because we don't ever get them there. I mean you don't hear about Lindiwe, but you're not gonna try and find out where she is. You don't really care. I mean we don't hear from Robin but are you really gonna try and see what she's doing.

AN: Like Ferdi as well. He was like really famous and whatever, but he had his little fame and now he's got his normal life.

LV: And no one is really wondering about him. No one really cares what he's doing.

HP: That is pretty much it. Thank you very much for your time and your participation. This study would not be possible without your help.

**Focus Group 3**  
**Wednesday 25 May 13h00- 14h00**  
**Composition: 2 black males, 3 black females**

HP: What do you guys think of reality television in itself?

NC: I love it.

DK: Yeah it's cool.

TT: It's addictive I think.

KT: At first... I don't think it's... I think it's crazy but it's addictive you know. But then we love it.

HP: Why do you love it, why do you think it's addictive?

TT: Cause you see real people being themselves.

KT: Ja.

DK: It's no more, no more... You know before we used to watch *Oprah's* and soaps and you know just boring television. Now it's brought some excitement to television.

HP: Do the rest of you agree?

(All: ja)

NC: The fact that you can see someone having a good day they're happy sad, you see them grow. With *Project Fame* you see someone like Didge I mean, they used to say he didn't project enough and then you see him grow. All that stuff I enjoy that. It's like you're with them and you're watching them the whole time you see them grow. It's awesome.

HP: And what do you think about *Project Fame*?

KT: I think it was just another *Big Brother*. I think, I think it was I don't know, I didn't enjoy it at all.

DK: It was quite a disappointment for me 'cause we have programmes like *Pop Stars* growing from *Idols* and then we have *Project Fame* and then you know. They're all the same.

PS: Ja, I just think the fact that the cameras are there all the time unlike with *Pop Stars*, you can watch them all the time going through the dancing and emotional pain, missing home. It made it very real.

TT: Ja it was different.

PS: Ja you could actually relate to that feeling of being away from home and being tired not wanting to wake up, not really feeling like doing whatever. I enjoyed that.

NC: The same. I thought it was a combination of *Big Brother* and *Idols* which was brilliant. Cause in *Idols* you just see them sing and oh wow she's good and then she goes away and you don't see her again.

PS: Ja you don't know what happens.

NC: Ja in *Project Fame* you saw them struggling, you saw Jid'dah and how she was as a person. Maybe you would've seen Jid'dah sing and would've just voted aahh, she's a good singer but we saw all the drama that came with it so we said oh no way we're not voting for her anyway. So I liked the fact that it was reality and you could see behind the scenes as well.

DK: But don't you think that compared to *Idols* it's not fair to judge the contestants on their voids because it's a singing contest.

KT: Exactly.

DK: Rather than what you saw.

KT: Like it took it away from the whole point. Because people now voted on ag I don't like her she's got an attitude, forget that she's got a good voice. I don't like... I mean all musicians we don't know what they're like but then we still love them you know. So I don't think she got a fair chance. I mean she could've been a brilliant singer but because she's got an attitude and because she got on your nerves, and they knew her like that, you judge her on personality, not on her singing ability.

DK: So that could be a counter point for...

NC: Well I want to know that you're a good person. That when you're singing a song, you're singing about something, then you can say ja, she does have those qualities. Jid'dah singing about I'm a real person and this and this, then I say aahh Jid'dah no ways, I've seen you behind the scenes, you're not like that.

DK: So it was more than a singing contest.

PS: I think it's about the whole package. Being a good singer and a good person.

NC: That's why I thought Jonathan, he was really good. Jonathan and Tebogo were my favourites. Those two.

TT: Ja.

HP: Okay, tell me, think back to the first time you heard *Project Fame* was going to be on TV and you had no idea what it was going to be, what did you expect the programme to be?

DK: *Idols*.

TT: Ja. I expected *Big Brother* or something, I didn't think it was gonna be about singing.

NC: I wasn't excited for it at all.

[All: ja, laughter]

DK: I just knew they were going to make it in the same genre as the other reality shows but I didn't expect much.

KT: I didn't think it got enough exposure to begin with. I mean I heard *Project Fame* but I never cared enough to find out what it's about and then I saw it on TV on Sunday and I was like oh, okay that's it. So I don't know.

HP: When you finally watched the programme was it better than you expected or worse?

PS: I think better in the sense that it was different from anything we've actually seen on TV. So I enjoyed that it was different.

HP: What was different?

PS: Unlike *Pop Stars*, you know you watch them like I said, you know you watch them all the time and it's not just about the singing it's about the kind of person they are and the abilities, whether they can dance, the way they relate to other people. Ja.

NC: Initially I was the show's biggest critic. When I first saw the first audition when they came onto stage and they sing, I thought this is very like, I don't know, you've got a small budget or something [laughter]. It just seemed so cheap. And then I watched the first day like when they first came into the house and I was like man this is good and the more I watched it, I couldn't stop watching.

DK: I thought there was a budget cut. The set was quite disappointing with a few audience members only you know. It was like a small thing you know. And I guess that was like the down side of it.

HP: And for you KT? Was it better or worse than you expected?

KT: I didn't expect anything so I suppose... Well for me it was a let down because I thought it was just a rip off of *Big Brother* and then *Idols*. And then personally, the first episode I watched I thought all those people can't sing, but then you get addicted to it anyway 'cause you wanna see what they're going to prove in the end. So I thought they couldn't sing and then I kept watching and watching and watching.

HP: Did it get better?

KT: Ja. Eventually I thought wow she can sing, he can sing, he's not bad. But then the next week it's like he can't sing. I don't know it was very confusing but in the end I mean I thought that Lindiwe deserved to win because she could sing I thought. And that other guy, I don't know his name, the one from Nigeria?

TT: Dare.

KT: Dare, I thought he could sing. And at first it was like he was closed in, I didn't even notice he was there and then towards the end he just came out and it was nice. I grew with him or something I don't know, it was nice.

HP: Do you guys enjoy using technology such as the Internet and cellphones.

(All: yes)

DK: Of course.

HP: What do you enjoy most?

PS: Games I'd say. That's why I'm not into computers and the Internet. Actually I know very little about it. The only technology I actually use, I'd say is my cellphone. Ja I enjoy it.

TT: Same here.

DK: And you know how advancing technology has become. Cause now there's this new thing called QQ on the Internet where you can chat to a person for free as long as you want. And you can just download it for free. Ja it's so... Technology is making life easier for us.

PS: Ja I think most of the times we don't use it as much as we should.

KT: Yes we do. I think our lives are made of technology like I can't imagine a world without technology.

PS: Yes but considering. I mean we've been here for... it's now the beginning of June and I haven't been on the Internet.

KT: We are linked in on Edulink.

PS: But then you should go into the web and make an effort of actually knowing how to log on. I don't know such things. So personally there are some things I don't take advantage of.

HP: But you don't feel intimidated, you're not scared to try out new technology?

(All:no)

HP: Based on that, what interactive feature of *Project Fame* did you enjoy most. You could vote by SMS, by calling, you could go onto the Internet, check out the website, you could go to public appearances, you could send an SMS for display, you can go onto DSTV and access the guide, with all those options they gave you, what did you enjoy most?

NC & KT: Going onto DSTV.

DK: Ja cause it's quicker.

NC: And if I was at school and I didn't know what happened during the day, I would check what happened and read up oh this is what happened today. And check up on the popularity poll. I used to do all of that.

KT: Ja me too.

TT: Ja.



HP: Do you agree TT?  
 TT: Ja.  
 KT: I enjoyed reading the SMS's you know. The people... like at the bottom of the screen, it was quite hilarious. I mean sometimes it didn't have anything to do with the show [laughter] but you just sit there and you watch all these people. And then this one will send a message and the next one will just reply to it. It was hilarious.  
 HP: Did you send SMS's?  
 KT: No. I didn't.  
 HP: And you PS?  
 PS: No, I didn't.  
 HP: Which interactive feature did you enjoy most?  
 PS: I didn't really use any of them that often I just watched. I wasn't that big of a fan.  
 NC: I was upset cause I sent SMS's millions of times and they never came up so.  
 HP: How many are millions of times?  
 NC: Must be maybe over 20.  
 HP: And nothing showed?  
 NC: No I never saw it.  
 HP: So did you do it all at one go?  
 NC: No, no, no I tried and then I'll try again and again but it never showed.  
 HP: So you kept trying but it never happened?  
 NC: Yes.  
 HP: Okay what interactive feature would you avoid using, which of those things sucked?  
 KT: I think the SMS's to use. Like he said you sent it and there's no guarantee that it's going to show on TV. And the chance are if it does you're probably gone up to the kitchen or... and then people call you and say, I saw your message, and you're like ahhh, I missed it, you know. I don't know the SMS I don't think... I wouldn't do it. People are crazy. I mean what are the chances if I sent 5 a message and I say hey 5 whatever, whatever, what are the chances she is watching? I have to call her now and say listen watch *Project Fame*. And then it doesn't even show up. I don't know how that works. I don't know how they can do it. I mean so many people send messages and what are the chances you'll see yours? That was such a... It was I mean it's a money making you know... but for us...  
 HP: And you DK? What do you think?  
 DK: The SMS thing is quite disappointing. Basically ja.  
 HP: Anyone else?  
 [Silence]  
 HP: Why did you participate in the interactive activities?  
 NC: Cause you get emotionally involved. Ja I used to get upset when they would like say Bodea is useless, I'm like no. Yes, he can't sing that well, but he's a good person at heart, then I think, no I'll vote for him. And even if I know that maybe Steve sang better than him then I still say no, okay. So if someone attacked him I'd also SMS and say no...  
 KT: See that's what I mean he couldn't sing but you're like ag shame he's a nice person so let's vote him in. What was *Project Fame* about? Was it about the singing or the personality? That's what I didn't understand to begin with. Because it was about the dance but in the end someone gets a recording contract not a dancing contract. So it didn't make sense, like they could've called it Project Singing, so we know what they want. Cause *Project Fame*? And then they have like a dancing class but in the end you don't get a dancing contract you get to sing.  
 NC: But you have to be an all rounder.  
 KT: Ja, sure I understand. But with *Pop Idols* also they've got dancing classes. They were taught to dance, but then you say Bodea couldn't sing.  
 HP: KT did you vote for any of them?  
 KT: No.  
 DK: You know you can be the worst singer but the nicest person and then you win. And then we have to buy your CD you know.  
 KT: And in the end you're not gonna buy Bodea's CD just because he's nice.  
 NC: I would buy it.  
 KT & DK: Because he's nice?  
 NC: Because also I just liked Bodea. You know sometimes you just like someone that you like even you overlook the imperfections?  
 KT: You see.

NC: So, I didn't think... I heard people saying Lindiwe deserved to win but I think she just had a good voice. I think Tebogo had a good voice and he was producing all those songs they made in the studio – that he made and Dare. I thought he was the most all round, and Jonathan could play. Lindiwe couldn't even play an instrument.  
(Laughter)

PS: I guess it makes the whole woman based on votes thing unfair. The SMS's, I guess people can say if I had a big family and I was there then chances are I would make it through based on everyone from wherever you stay, they voted for me cause they know me. And I guess it's about hoping that people will vote for the right reasons. But personally I didn't vote. I guess I didn't get attached to that... The way I felt, vote for whoever.

DK: So I guess all the contestants were basically winners but at the end there had to be one you know based on the votes.

HP: Did you vote?

DK: No I never voted.

HP: TT did you vote?

TT: I did.

HP: Why did you vote?

TT: Cause I felt he was a good performer all rounder, but like people didn't actually recognise him. I felt that people didn't actually give him exposure that he deserved.

KT: Okay, you know why I didn't vote? Okay I didn't vote, but if I did, I wouldn't vote for Tebogo, because if we look at it. Sure he was good, I wouldn't say he wasn't good, but I feel like Tebogo already has a leg in the music industry. I mean his uncle, what's his name?

NC: Hotstix.

KT: Ja, his uncle Hotstix Mabuza is already into the music business and he's already done a song previously with a guy called WHB – he sang along with him and they had a video, they made it big and stuff. So he's already linked into it. I just felt it was unfair if we were gonna vote for him. I mean he's good I won't take that away from him. But I mean if we're all into, ag he's nice, Bodea is nice I'll vote for Bodea, you might as well vote for somebody who's gonna like Lindiwe, she's not linked into it already, but she's got a good voice and she deserves a break. Tebogo can get the break. You know what, Tebogo is gonna get the break somewhere. He's already got enough exposure and it works that Hotstix Mabuza is his uncle. So.

HP: Did you read any articles about the show?

KT: Ja a few. That's how I knew he was related to Hotstix.

DK: Just the gossip like in *People* magazine or something.

HP: And the articles that you read, did it change the way you thought about the contestants?

DK: Not really. They were always there on the interactive channel, so it's...you watch more than you read and...

NC: Ja, cause I think to myself, no ways how can he say this, cause I watch it 24/7 so no ways I see this person all the time. I had my own theories in my head. I'd hear what you have to say and if my theories are in line with yours but if you write in the paper and I think no, that's not right.

TT: I agree.

HP: TT you also didn't change your mind after reading articles?

TT: No. 'Cause you look at the show you see the person and you read an article talking something different than what you saw, it didn't change my views...

HP: Did you ever buy magazines or search the Internet specifically to read up on the contestants or the show?

KT: No.

PS: No. They're on the set 24 hours and...

KT: You can just go on and watch it.

PS: Ja.

HP: So if you happen to buy a magazine and there was an article you would read it...

PS: Ja, but not go and buy the actual magazine for the article.

HP: What did you enjoy most about *Project Fame*?

PS: I enjoyed on Sundays the singing.

DK: The main show.

PS: Ja, that's what it's all about at the end of the day. So that's what I enjoyed.

NC: I also enjoyed those other people, when they get the guests in as well. Like I enjoyed that just to see them, they get so happy just to see someone from the outside world coming in as well. I enjoyed that as well.

HP: And did you get emotionally involved with the contestants?

NC: Oh ja.

KT: Yes.

TT: Yip you do.

HP: Describe to me.

NC: Robin and Bodea. I remember that one night and they're like oh and they'd always speak in riddles. And I was just thinking, you two like each other just confess.

KT: Ja, it's so irritating.

NC: Ja.

KT: I was like grow up.

NC: And then I feel like sorry for Jonathan if he walked into the room and they were in there and I'm like, don't walk in Jonathan don't!

KT: Don't go in!

NC: So it's like a soapie but you're involved you kow. Ja, I loved it. I really got emotionally involved. Even when the show ended I was very upset, I was like, what am I going to watch now?

KT: But then you get over it so quickly.

NC: No but I want a second one.

KT: Really?

NC: Ja.

KT: I got over it so quickly. I don't wanna see them again. That's how bad it is, I'm like okay.

DK: I wasn't that attached either.

KT: Ja it's not like *Big Brother*. I was really attached to things like Idols and stuff. But this one didn't quite...

HP: But you did get emotionally involved?

KT: Ja, no for sure. At times you were like ag shame, especially with the whole Bodea and that girl, what's her name?

TT: Robin.

KT: Robin and Jonathan situation. I was like why don't you just go out with Jonathan? You know you're more free with him. I'm sure you like him more. And then wham bam she loves the other one Bodea.

NC: And then I remember the one time Johan sang and he was unhappy about a song and then I felt sorry for him. It was always like I felt for somebody else. When Didge was sick, I'd feel ag shame Didge is sick.

HP: Does it feel like you're on an emotional roller coaster?

(All: ja)

PS: It's hard not to. With all the pain and happiness they go through. And when one is happy you become happy and you can't help when they give a great performance to go aahh yeah! I think it's impossible not to get some emotion from them. Ja.

HP: Especially if you watch them 24 hours a day.

PS: Ja.

HP: Do you feel like you know the contestants personally?

NC: Ja.

PS: Ja I think so. I think you do. I mean you say what makes them cry, what makes them happy. So to some extent you do know them. I mean seeing that it was on all the time for them there's no way that they could be acting all the time. They were themselves, so the little you do see, you do know them.

NC: You can only act for so long.

KT: Ja. In the first week they were acting. They were pretty too happy, they were like too happy too see each other, they were like, hey baby. Ag it was pathetic. But the second week people started to come out. Ja and the first one to come out that girl, what's her name?

NC: Jid'dah.

KT: Jid'dah, ooh!

(Laughter)

KT: She couldn't act. Ja she couldn't act. I felt like I knew her.

NC: With Monica as well. You learn like the different personalities. Monica is like very straight forward and then you get like Claudia and she'd be more reserved. So ja you learn different characters.

HP: And you DK? Do you feel like you know any of them personally?

DK: For me, only for the screen time. But it's not to the point that I really know the person you know. Just when I'm watching ja, basically.

TT: I would say the same. If you only feel... hmmm.

HP: You feel like you know them personally?

TT: No not really. Only when you're watching them you feel like oh I know you personally but...

DK: But that's so complex you know. They change every time like you just don't keep up. So you don't get really into their mindset.

KT: Ja they don't give it all away.

DK: Ja.

NC: I think I got to the stage where if Dare sang if Jonathan or Steve, particularly Steve he was singing and his shoulders were tense, and afterwards they criticise him, I'd know okay he's upset. I knew how...if this and this happens to so and so, this is how he'd react. Maybe not exactly but he'll react something like that. I think I know them quite well.

HP: Did you comment on things that happened in the show. So you'd watch television and then something happens that you agree or disagree with, and then would you talk to the television set?

PS: Ja I mean sometimes you would be frustrated.

(Laughter)

HP: Like NC you mentioned, oh Jonathan don't go in there.

(Laughter)

TT: Ja you do. You go oh no, you did not and then you know you get frustrated, you get happy.

NC: Fiona used to irritate me. Like she'd say the same point, like she'd say okay, so and so when you're singing you're doing this and this and then she's saying it to all the contestants. Then I'd go, Fiona, you said that. Stop repeating yourself. I would do that quite a lot. And with the contestants as well.

HP: So usually when you're happy or sad or both?

NC: Usually when like the one time Mr Terry took away Tracey's phone I was like, no you can't do that. Ja so most of the time it was like when I was upset.

KT: Ja it's never when you're happy. When you're happy you just sit back and relax and smile. Ja but when something bad is about to happen and you knew about it you're like no, no don't do it. And then he does it and it's like jis. You just wanna switch it off or whatever.

DK: It just comes naturally.

NC: Sometimes it would be I'd say if I was happy as well. Like I remember the one time Bodea walked in and Monica was playing the piano and Robin was singing for him and I was like yes, yes, good.

(Laughter)

PS: You were quite a fan.

(Laughter)

NC: I live in front of the TV screen.

KT: Ja I don't remember those parts.

HP: Well you have mentioned Robin and Bodea and we know the Jonathan love triangle there, so did you ever play the role of matchmaker? This one belongs with this one, these two should hit it off?

TT: Ja.

KT: Ja. I actually thought she should hook up with Jonathan.

TT: Ja, I thought Bodea belonged to Kaz, so. No, Kaz and Tebogo.

(All: Yes)

KT: That was just too much. Didn't they end up going out?

NC: No.

KT: So they never dated?

TT: No.

NC: I was always for Robin and Bodea.

PS: Ja I wanted that to happen.

DK: But there's a couple that dated after the show.

NC: Not Robin and Bodea.

HP: And did you ever try and break up people? Instead of playing matchmaker thinking in your mind, no these two should not get together?

PS: Ja with Robin and Bodea. They were just ag bored. Ja I just thought they were over their heads, I just thought ag. For me they didn't look together from the start.

KT: Ja she was so different. When she's with Johan, ag Jonathan, she was so different and free and happy and then she's with Bodea and she's all reserved.

NC: But is that not because she's intimidated. Because she likes him so much it's hard for her to be...

KT: Ja, but why do you wanna be with someone if you can't be yourself around them you know?

NC: Because he makes your heart jump.

(Laughter)

PS: You see they're stuck in this small house so they've seen the worst side. There's no reason for her to feel...

NC: Robin was crazy about Bodea. She loved him.

KT: I didn't think she was as crazy about him. I think he just went out with her because he realised how crazy she is about him. Like I didn't feel he liked her as much as she liked him. I don't know.

NC: I just think if he knew like how much... he was representing the whole of Tanzania, that he was here for singing and he realised that and time and time again he'd tell her the people back home I've got to represent them. And then he didn't wanna waste or he didn't wanna jeopardize that. So he just had to focus on the music.

DK: It's like she said. It's a matter of chance you know. Seeing that they're in such a small house together, the chances of them dating are very high especially since Robin was so crazy about him you know. Basically that's why.

HP: Because of circumstances?

PS: Ja we're here together we might as well.

(All: ja)

KT: I mean they broke up now, so it was quite right to think that. I mean it's ridiculous. Tanzania and SA?

NC: Isn't that what's so wonderful about it.

PS: No I think they both knew as soon as we get out...

KT: Yes.

HP: Okay, do you think that your vote made a difference in the outcome of the show?

NC: Yes and no because for every person that votes ja, it all adds up. But I like to vote for the underdog. I voted for like Tebogo and I voted for Bodea, and I voted for Didge and they all went out somewhere along the line. So my votes didn't help but for sure the people who were voting for Lindiwe they all added up so that one vote plus that one plus another one, all added up to a big vote, so ja. It does count.

TT: Ja it does.

KT: Ja I think so too. It might not always be in your favour but it count.

TT: Like a little thing. That little SMS you... it did count.

HP: You do believe it made a difference?

TT: Ja.

KT: It may not be right but...

DK: It may not be big too, but it counts.

KT: It counts.

HP: Did it upset you when people or the contestants on the show said negative things about your favourite?

NC: I got very upset. At school they used to call it Project Lame. I used to get very upset. I said don't even talk to me if you're gonna say things like that. They'd say Bodey this and sometimes I'd have to keep quiet and say okay well say what you want, you don't know. So you do get, I mean I got very upset.

PS: Personally I find people's different views interesting. How we can watch the same show and see totally different things. I'd be watching and think you're totally lame and then

TT: you say how can you say things like that.

PS: well like I said, personally I wasn't attached so I just found it interesting when here you're at school with your friends and then one would be saying the total opposite and you're thinking okay well we're watching the same person. How come I didn't see that? I just found it interesting. I didn't get upset or anything.

DK: From where I come from *Project Fame* wasn't such a big thing as other reality shows. Like she said it didn't receive much exposure. And no one really talked about it or anything. So like I can't say much for that.

NC: It's like I remember when Monica even when the contestants use to speak about..., she said something about Dumi, and I used to like Dumi, I liked his energy, and she said something like aahh his voice is higher than mine.

TT: Aahh, oh!

NC: She was like I will sing the man's part and Dumi will sing the girl's part. I was like no Monica, okay I'm voting you out next. I got very upset with her.

KT: Personally I didn't like Monica. I just felt that she always had something bad to say about other people. She was always commenting on everybody else and it just sometimes was uncalled for. I didn't like her.

HP: Now TT you also said sometimes you got upset? Give me an example.

TT: Ja, the same example as Monica saying that Dumi has... it's not nice to say that to a person. And when she actually fought with Jid'dah she said some things and you feel that you're not suppose to say things like that.

PS: Ja I guess things they said about each other influenced you know how people felt about them. Us hearing TT saying if Monica says whatever about Dumi, then our views about her would change, despite if she sings nicely, it doesn't matter. So what they said about each other, influenced the way we saw them.

TT: Ja.

HP: Did you ever try and persuade other people to vote for a specific contestant?

NC: Oh ja. My brother's just as big a fan as I am. So he'd have his favourites and I'd be come on come on we've got to see so and so... and we tried to convince each other. At school I use to try and get the guys to help me vote Bodea in but it didn't work so ja, definitely.

KT: No I didn't get that attached.

PS: Same here. I didn't vote so there was no reason for me to try...

KT: The only time was when my dad, the first time he watched it he saw Lindiwe singing a Tina Turner track I think and she was good, but then the next week she sang something else and he thought she wasn't good anymore. He was like ag, she must always sing Tina Turner songs. That means she can't sing, she can mimic people. You know he's like ja she can't sing her own way she can only mimic someone. So I found myself defending her. I was like she can sing give her a chance, but in the end it worked out because he liked her, ja I suppose in that sense I kind of got attached in a sense. But not to a point where I said come on daddy vote for her, no.

HP: And TT you said that you tried to persuade people?

TT: Ja you do. You look at the person and think you know, please vote for him, he's good. But people have their own opinions you know. You try.

HP: When you watch *Project Fame*, who did you usually watch it with?

DK: Family, we all watched it together.

TT: My sister

KT: My mom and my little sister.

NC: My sister, brother. I remember I was on a rugby tour as well and we were practising very hard and you hardly had any time for TV but I got the guys to come and watch with me. They were all like no it sucks and everything. Eventually I got them to watch and they were like ja they're actually pretty good. So I watched with some of rugby team mates as well.

HP: So it was kind of a social activity, you wouldn't watch it by yourself?

(KT, DK, PS, TT: no)

NC: I'd watch it by myself. If the contestants were still up and my brother and the rest of my family were asleep I'd sleep the same time as the contestants. So I wouldn't be scared to watch on my own no.

HP: And with whom did you usually discuss *Project Fame*?

TT: Brother, sister.

DK: Family again.

KT: usually the people you watch it with.

DK: And during the show you know you get interactive. You talk about... and it's amazing.. cause *Project Fame* brought out so many opinions. My mom thinks just how mesmerised she was by Bodea's voice or something and I'd think ag no, I don't like it you know. So ja basically it was a social thing like you said and we interacted during the shows.

HP: And after the shows, like at school with friends?

NC: Ja, ja definitely.

DK: I never could.

PS: Ja not about *Project Fame*.

NC: Am I just crazy or what?

(Laughter)

NC: Ja I definitely at school talk about it, what about this. Our friends would actually SMS each other to like during the show while we're watching, like at 11 o'clock are you watching this? Ja I'm watching this. Why doesn't so and so... So ja we discussed it.

HP: Sounds like me when I watch *Survivor*.

DK: Ja some programmes you really do talk about outside of the time slot actually and others...

KT: But *Project Fame*?

DK: It was for entertainment it was good and we enjoyed it, but it was not something we went out and talked about with your friends you know.

HP: And TT, where you come from, did you discuss it outside the programme?

TT: No not really.

HP: Okay, now think back to the first time when you really started watching *Project Fame*. Did you change your daily routine to be able to watch the programme?

PS: Ja I did. On Sundays usually is when I do my homework but I stopped for like...

KT: six to seven

PS: Ja you're just glued to the screen you know. I guess I did change. And some programmes you'd sacrifice whatever.

DK: For me it was always in my time slot cause like every Sunday afternoon I'd watch M-Net and it was very interesting, so ja.

NC: I used to do my homework about 8 till about 10 but then I ended up doing it at 6. If they had a task or something then I'll have to adjust, then I'll do it at a certain time and then afterwards maybe I have to do it in the morning while they were sleeping and then I'll watch at night. I'm not a looser I was just very...(laughter). So I kind of... my life was, if they had a task then I couldn't do work I had to do it at another time, I'll reschedule.

TT: I rescheduled my sleeping a lot.  
 HP: Around *Project Fame*?  
 TT: Ja I'd watch until 2 o'clock in the morning.  
 NC: Ja that's true.  
 KT: Never. We watched on Sundays. Or if I find out they have a task like something interesting today I'd watch. But everyday?  
 DK: Sometimes you are doing your homework later and you just wanna take a break and then you go to the TV and watch *Project Fame* and you end up watching...  
 TT: The whole night.  
 DK: Ja. You know.  
 KT: And you find that they're not actually doing anything. They just sit on the couch (all:ja) but you still watch.  
 NC: But sometimes I'd say okay they're just chatting now shall I go? But what if I miss something? (laughter). Then I miss out and then, then what? Oh no?  
 HP: DK? Did you change your activities?  
 DK: Like I said, on Sunday afternoons it was basically my schedule cause I watch a lot of M-Net on Sundays you know. So I guess it's a fixed schedule so I never really changed, but if I did take a break, like I said then I'd end up watching most of the time.  
 HP: Do you find yourself saying I will only watch five minutes and then you end up watching for hours on end?  
 (All: ja)  
 NC: It's addictive.  
 HP: Did you enjoy watching the mundane things? Watching them sitting on the couch, brushing their teeth, eating?  
 TT: I would watch it. Just sitting on the couch chatting and ja.  
 KT: Ja, I'd watch Bodea and the girlfriend. Cause then you know they're gonna talk about something interesting whatever. But if it's just like Jonathan and what's the girls name? Bodea's girlfriend?  
 TT: Robin.  
 KT: Ja Robin. When they're just sitting by the pool then you're like, no I'm not gonna watch this, they're just gonna be talking in general. So. And I wanna hear something. That's why I used to watch the Monday nights on M-Net. They used to play at half past six and then they show the interesting highlights. Then you'd catch that but as for 24 hours I don't know.  
 NC: To me very little was mundane to me. Cause whatever was happening was a build up to something. So even if they were just chatting about something small. Did you see this, and then something would come of it, there was always something that would come out of it.  
 (Laughter)  
 HP: Did watching *Project Fame* make you forget about your problems?  
 KT: Yeah, cause you get engrossed in other people's problems for a minute. So you kind of forget what you're about. If you come home and you had a bad day at school and then like I watched the Monday night shows, you just kind of forget. Or you just had a fight with you mother, you just sit there in front of the TV and all of a sudden it's all about Bodea and you know. It's not about you anymore and you leave the couch and you're like you wanna tell somebody what happened and then you're just over it. What... ja... it kinda works...  
 PS: Ja I agree with KT. Watching other people going through their problems.  
 KT: Especially if it's worse than yours.  
 PS: Ja.  
 HP: Did you think that their problems were worse than what you were going through?  
 KT: Ja.  
 PS: Sometimes you knew what was going on and the person doesn't know it, you feel like okay if I was there I would help, but I can't.  
 KT: And you're like, ahhh, you should've done this.  
 PS: Ja.  
 HP: And DK? Do you agree?  
 DK: I agree.  
 HP: Did you ever feel like you were spying on the contestants? Because you were able to watch them do all these everyday things? Did it feel like you were spying on them?  
 PS: No, I just feel like a part of it. Like a small part of it. Like you know what was going on.  
 KT: And they knew we were watching.  
 PS: Ja.  
 KT: So how could you be spying?  
 DK: Because you'd be thinking they put themselves through this you know. Why should you feel you're spying you know?

KT: They want us to watch them so.

DK: Ja.

NC: The only time I'd feel like I was spying was when they would check for the cameras and turn around. And then Mr Terry would come and be like no your microphones or something like that. That's the only time I'd feel like I was spying, but otherwise like no.

HP: Did it feel like you were there with them in the house when you were watching?

(All: no)

HP: Did you ever feel like swapping with them and be a contestant yourself?

[All:ja]

KT: Always. You just want to be there.

DK: Ja sometimes you want to be there you know.

PS: Especially with the knowledge you have. Knowing whoever is planning whatever. I'm here, I know what he's planning, so if I was there I would do things differently from the person.

KT: Ja and then you watch the Sunday's show and somebody sings the wrong note or whatever, I'm like why'd you do that? I would've done it right. Ja you find yourself just wanting to be there and doing it right, because they're doing it wrong – or so you think.

(Laughter)

NC: Or sometimes you hear like Fiona or Mr Terry say something to someone and you think someone's gotta speak up for them, come on someone. And then you go oh maybe if I was there I would've said something to Mr Terry you know.

(Laughter)

HP: If you were to be appointed as the producer for *Project Fame 2* what would you change about the programme? You have free range, you can do whatever you want to do.

DK: Like he said first time we watched it it looked like a low budget thing you know. I'd actually bring more like some... I don't know, excitement to the stage or you know.

PS: The only thing I'd change is the Sunday shows, I'd give them the option of choosing their own songs. The songs they feel they'd be comfortable doing. You know, rather than the songs be chosen for them. I'd give them the freedom to choose their own songs. I think that's the only thing I'd change.

DK: I think I'd change the voting system. It should rather count 50% of the whole outcome than like 100%

KT: Or at first then don't have a voting system. If they come in as – how many do they come in? Like twelve?

Have the voting system for the first six to come out and then when it gets to the serious singers, I mean the judges vote first and then when it comes to the good six, then people can start interacting. Cause at first you might be loosing good singers just because they had a bad personality. So I think at first it should be judged on voice only or whatever they're looking for by the judges and then open it to the public when they've chosen the six they think are good. And then just see how people react to it. Because in the end people are gonna buy you know so. Then it do matter but at first I think people just they don't know. I mean they vote because he's nice or ag let's vote her out cause she's got an attitude but there could be something there. There's a lot of good in everybody you may just always be seeing the bad side. Ja so giving them a chance at first and then letting the public in.

DK: Ja let the voices speak first.

KT: Ja, cause that's what it's all about. The voice. I mean they didn't say let's have Project Personality. It's about voice and then...

HP: Don't you think it's about fame? Just being famous for the sake of being famous?

KT: I wish I knew what it was about. I don't know what it was about. I though it was about singing at first. And then you just realise that.

DK: And then another thing. For the second time or the consecutive time it should be taken to other countries in Africa, not just SA.

HP: So they should have the house and live in another country/

DK: Ja.

KT: Ja it's not fair. They have to keep shipping them here, obviously if I'm from SA I'm gonna feel more comfortable here. And I might have more votes cause it's here. So why not experiment and see what happens if SA goes to Tanzania.

NC: It doesn't matter because each country has a collective amount.

KT: Ja but what are the chances that if you're in your country and it's in your country, you're not gonna get more votes? I mean if I'm in Tanzania with Bodea for instance, do you think if it was in Tanzania he wouldn't have gotten more votes?

NC: It wouldn't have made a difference because South Africans and the other people voted.

KT: I don't know. Let's just see. If that's the case then why not test it.

DK: But do the other countries have the resources to do it in their countries.



KT: We don't know that.  
DK: We shouldn't be stereotypical but they're like 3<sup>rd</sup> World countries...  
KT: We're all 3<sup>rd</sup> World.  
DK: Or developed or something. We should just try.  
KT: It's not like our *Project Fame* was that diverse. We didn't have that much...  
DK: And it's not like you're gonna be thrown in a mud house in Uganda.  
KT: There's nice places. Tanzania is nice.  
DK: Just to make it interesting.  
HP: What would you change NC?  
NC: I don't know. I haven't really thought about it. I'd definitely keep it in SA. (Laughter)  
It's like even... I like seeing South Africans. Maybe that's bad of me, but I like seeing South Africans.  
HP: So you think that maybe they should only make it South African and not let the rest of the world, the rest of Africa be part of it?  
NC: Exactly. Like *Big Brother*. It makes for an even bigger fan than *Project Fame* And the *Big Brother Africa*, I watched it but it wasn't the same. I like watching people that I can put myself... that I can say, relate to.  
Obviously I know that's unfair because Africa wants to get involved as well.  
DK: It shouldn't be discriminating. Cause you're discriminating against the rest of Africa.  
NC: But I don't know what I would've changed.  
HP: But they didn't have any Egyptians here, or any Moroccans?  
DK: Yeah, yeah.  
HP: TT, what would you change?  
TT: Hmmm, I don't really.  
DK: Oh ja and the marketing, make it bigger. The exposure. Bring people more into it than before, because it wasn't very popular to start off.  
KT: I didn't even know where they performed every Sunday. I would've like to go once or... but I didn't feel like it was publicised enough. You have to go on-line to find it and stuff. You didn't really get it from listening to the radio or watching TV or driving around and seeing it on billboards. Nothing.  
DK: And by doing so you obviously get a bigger audience in the Studio.  
HP: And if they bring out the second *Project Fame* will you watch it?  
KT: Ja to see if they improved it.  
NC: I might have to drop out of varsity!  
(Laughter)  
NC: Ja, no, definitely. I know what I'd change. I'd change the presenters.  
HP: Yes I have to agree with you on that one.  
NC: Vusi and James Alexander.  
(All: ja)  
NC: The chit chat just doesn't do it for me. Sometimes I think okay just let them sing.  
KT: Ja I didn't understand, two guys presenting a show? It doesn't make sense I mean. It didn't balance out. Ja that part of the show was something else. But the singing was worth it.  
HP: Well, that it all I need from you guys. Thank you very much.

**Focus Group 4**  
**Thursday 26 May 11h30 – 12h30**  
**Composition: 1 black male, 1 white male, 2 white females, 1 black female**

HP: The first question I want to ask you is what do you think about reality television shows?  
GE: I don't think it's real sometimes.  
KH: No it is.  
BF: Most of the times I think it sucks.  
KH: No.  
BF: Okay, every emotion they have, everything they do, you exploit it. Think of it, if *Project Fame* say, what's that coloured girl?  
LJ: Robin.  
BF: Ja, she cried and they exploited her on that. Aahh, she's such a sissy. And aah this and aah that.  
WS: But it doesn't mean that she didn't feel like crying.  
BF: But still.  
WS: Like maybe the producers or whatever exploit it but that's how she feels, so it's real.  
KH: I agree.  
BF: It's real but the show exploits her to its advantage. What if she didn't want them to see if she cried? There's not exactly a corner where she can sit on her own where no one can see her. There's cameras.  
KH: But if she didn't want that she wouldn't have gone on the show.  
WS: Ja.  
BF: Yes but it's human emotion of course you're gonna show everything, but still, where do you hide something? You can't hide anymore.  
HP: But you girls said that you do like reality TV?  
LJ: Love it.  
KH: Me too.  
HP: Why?  
LJ: Ag, it's so entertaining, really.  
KH: Ja, you get involved with the people.  
LJ: Yes, you do actually feel like you know them at the end.  
WS: And there's always something that's gonna keep you watching and stuff. Something that's about to happen. Cause the thing about it is like like with the scripted stuff you think like oh it's happening and everything will be resolved. But with reality TV people can interact and you have your difference of opinion and if you don't like someone you say so.  
KH: Ja and that's real so you want to get to know them as real people. Like with *Pop Idols*, I wanna marry Will Young. Even though he's gay now [laughter], I will still marry him.  
HP: GE you said?  
GE: No. Well what I feel is that most of the time when they portray them it seems as if it's real but I don't think it is. Cause there was this like *Pop Idols*, there was this interview with mmm... I forgot his name but he said well the emotions that they portrayed there, some of them are not shown cause well for the audience sake. Like the thing is, as much as they say it's reality for me it's not. Cause if it was they would have shown like basically everything not just pick pieces from it and let not show this. So...  
WS: But they also gotta think what's...  
GE: But if it's reality, reality is like real. That's why it's called reality, so it has to be like this not just pieces of it.  
LJ: It's like semi-reality. That's like *Idols*, but *Big Brother* isn't. You get it 24 hours live you know. But *Pop Idols* it is true, they pick... and mostly what you see is when they are performing. Ja it's not totally real.  
KH: But it is them. Being real. You still get to see the whole...  
BF: Well basically at the beginning everybody acts nice and was like all cuddly and aah I think you're a brilliant person. Give it two weeks, I hate you.  
WS: Ja but you wait for the conflict.  
BF: Ja but still the first week is...still fiction.  
KH: But it's like that in everything. Like even if you go into a new class. You're gonna be... like suck up to everyone at first. You're still trying to make a better impression of yourself.  
LJ: That's life. You not gonna like everyone you meet and not everyone that meets you is gonna like you. So it creates conflict and it makes it interesting to watch.  
HP: And what do you think about *Project Fame*?  
KH: That wasn't one of my favourite programmes.

LJ: Ja, I also, not mine.

HP: Why not?

KH: It was interesting to an extend but when they sang, none of them were really that good.

LJ: I found the same thing. I also thought that none of them were..

KH: But I don't know, I just... I think like *Big Brother* was also not one of my favourites. I think maybe they show it too much, like having the everyday episodes. It might have gotten a bit monotonous to watch them everyday. Where as like when you get *The Block* which is like an hour episode, then you get their whole week crammed into an hour. It's more interesting. So I don't know if that might be the reason. But it wasn't...

LJ: Ja I also find that I wasn't hooked on it. I could go a few days without it you know. But also I just found some things were totally unnecessary with the *Project Fame* idea. I didn't find that they had to like live in one house, I mean I didn't see the point in that. I didn't see the point that they all had to you know... But hmmm I also didn't find it that interesting, it was okay. It was interesting if there's nothing else to watch.

HP: And you guys?

WS: I liked it. I don't know I just liked it. You know three o'clock in the morning you switch on the TV watching them sleep that kind of thing.

(Laughter)

WS: But then I guess I was comparing it to *Big Brother*. So like *Big Brother* at the beginning that was nice, it was interesting. So I guess I did watch to see how it compare.

KH: You see I was comparing it to the British version, *Fame Academy*, and that was much better.

HP: BF?

BF: I didn't like it a lot. I started watching it for a very bias reason, but then I started getting into it. So I started watching for a bias reason but it got interesting to see what else is happening. And it was more real for me than *Big Brother*. Because they actually had a chance to get out of that... even if it to go to a club or to go to rehearsals, they saw more than just those four walls. They saw trees and whatever on their way.

LJ: And that did make it more interesting actually.

BF: It did ja.

LJ: Because they'd come back from their experiences and they were like you know what happened and this girl had a T-shirt for me and da-da-da-da. And that's what I found interesting.

BF: The last five they each had something different to do.

KH: Yes.

BF: Dare and someone else went to watch Phantom of the Opera...

LJ: Ja.

BF: So it made it more real for me cause they got out of that house, that yard, that swimming pool.

KH: Ja, no I agree with that.

HP: And GE, what was your opinion about *Project Fame*?

GE: For me basically I really didn't enjoy it. It really seemed like they were acting. But when it came to what they had to do and the performing, I felt like they actually showed themselves you know, how they really are. Instead of portraying other people's perspectives or actually living up to expectations of other people. So I felt that it was more of when they performed it showed that this person is not as much as people think they are, especially this guy what's his name, B something?

KH: Bodea.

GE: Ja, Bodea. For me as much as he's not that good but he's shown some character you know.

HP: Now think back to the first time that you heard *Project Fame* was going to be on television. What did you expect it to be? You haven't seen it before, what did you expect it was going to be like?

GE: I thought it was gonna be exciting. Aahh, what can you say? Exciting that's all I can think of. People probably acting real. You know, acting in a sense. But it wasn't that disappointing

WS: I sort of expected it to be the way it was. I thought it was better because they were there for a purpose they weren't just sitting around and ja, the *Big Brother* type of deal, doing whatever you know. It was like they were there doing something. I could appreciate the fact that they wanted to express themselves and ja.

BF: I thought ag no, more people trying to sing.

(Laughter)

BF: Why why why?

KH: I also wasn't very excited.

LJ: Ja I also didn't get like oh my gosh this is the one I have to see – no. I was just flipping through the channels and I was like oh I forgot about that.

KH: Ja and then I started watching.

BF: No I really felt ag please another *Idols* something look alike, why why? What's wrong with the people? Don't they have an original idea? Ja, then my friend came up.

KH: Who was your friend?

BF: Jonathan.

KH: Oh, I loved Jonathan.

LJ: Ja so did I.

KH: Oh, he was cute.

HP: And then when the show started, was it better or worse than you expected?

WS: Probably worse.

BF: Better.

KH: Well I didn't expect much so it wasn't good but then... Cause I watched the first episode, but then I didn't watch for a while until they got into the house. And then I started watching and then it was much better.

GE: I had high expectations. It wasn't that disappointing. Cause they way they portray it on television was like wow, okay, it's something new, fantastic. But it wasn't that disappointing.

WS: I think it got worse as time went on. You know, I just liked it when they got into the house and see who's gonna speak to who and what type of people they are, just when they get in. Cause like from the moment you step into the house you're not gonna be acting. You're gonna be just you and ja I liked that.

HP: If you were to produce *Project Fame*, the next one coming up, what would you change about the programme?

BF: The songs.

LJ: That is a good point actually.

BF: Assigning some songs to certain contestants you can hear from the beginning what really isn't gonna work for you. I would change the songs.

WS: I think maybe they should let them choose. Cause they probably know, I mean they know what things they can do as well. As much as you get the experts telling them okay, this is your voice. But they've been singing and they also know what type of songs they like and they wanted to sing.

HP: LJ?

LJ: I don't know, except for the songs.

BF: Other than that I feel sometimes that they deliberately choose a song to someone to challenge them and say I know for a fact that you're gonna fail so I know you're gonna be voted off.

KH: Ja.

LJ: Ja.

KH: I'd probably change the beginning. That whole process of selecting it, cause some of the people were really not that good.

HP: You don't like people making fools of themselves?

KH: No I like, there needs to be good people.

LJ: Ja I also think so.

KH: There's nothing special. So they must find another way of getting better singers. I don't know how they can do it. Like maybe a different way of judging or not so many to choose from, maybe only a couple?

BF: Like all the contestants come and in the judgement round they get rid of those who are really bad and then start at one part of it where it is actually interesting and then show them. This is how we're gonna judge these and them and so.

KH: Ja, I don't know I just think that better people could've entered.

WS: But as well, they said they didn't want it. They thought they could like teach the people.

LJ: But if it it's not there, it's not there. Like with anything else. That's what it comes down to, like you said you could teach them too, which was the whole point, but it didn't work for some.

KH: No like I mean Robin. She's very sweet but she was terrible.

LJ: I heard one performance and I was shocked.

KH: No she was okay.

HP: Do you enjoy using technology such as the latest cellphones, the Internet?

LJ: Ja for sure.

HP: What do you enjoy most?

KH: Being able to go onto the Internet and see who won *American Idols*.

WS: I think like everything that keep you informed. Anything you want you can get it.

LJ: Ja with the touch of a button.

BF: Using the remote. You don't have to get up and go to it, you just sit back and relax.

KH: My remote has been pushed too many times. It's not working.

HP: So it's basically the convenience?

(All: ja)

LJ: Ja definitely and even if like as an example of *Project Fame* or whatever, even if you like missed the day before you go onto the Internet and it has exactly what happened the day before, so you don't have to like aah, what happened? So that's why I wasn't always watching, because I was more or less keeping up and my brother

and then you go the next day and you watch again.  
HP: and you don't feel intimidated by technology and new things that come out?  
BF: That depends.  
KH: Ja.  
BF: How difficult it is  
WS: Ja some things are a bit like over the top.  
BF: Ja. There are some things where you really need the instruction manual. Follow this, follow this. So it really depends on what technology it is.  
KH: Ja like when you first get a cellphone. Like the very first time. But like now you've used the cellphone and you kind of know what it do.  
LJ: I think it comes down to how badly you want it, how much effort you put into it.  
(Laughter)  
HP: What interactive feature of *Project Fame* did you enjoy most. You could vote via SMS, call, the Internet, access the website, attend appearances, send SMS for display?  
WS: I liked that.  
HP: The SMS?  
WS: Ja cause it gave you a better view of what other people thought and it was a way of you know that everyone's a fan, that's why your all kind of like SMS-ing. And ja, I like that.  
HP: Did you send SMS?  
WS: I did, but it never showed up.  
HP: Everyone that's been here that sent SMS said it never showed.  
LJ: My SMS also didn't show. I didn't send it to *Project Fame*, I send it to *Big Brother* but I'm just saying in general.  
HP: What did you enjoy most LJ?  
LJ: I liked the Internet. Go to the website, checking out the profiles, how they're doing you know things like that. I enjoyed that.  
KH: I just liked watching the polls and how they were doing. The SMS were stupid to me, because people would send I love you Katie and you don't know Katie.  
LJ: Ja you're like who's Katie?  
KH: Ja, they should take out the messages that aren't about *Project Fame*.  
GE: For me it was the SMS because you got a point of view that people actually saw or what people actually felt in the sense of they give their ideas of what is actually happening. They're also interacting, so you probably saw something and then you feel something like I hate that person you know. And maybe an SMS would show the same thing, ag please, so somebody sympathise with me especially with the person I don't really like, or maybe shouldn't be there or should you know... That's the one thing I liked about the SMS.  
LJ: Ja sometimes you think like what are they thinking? What's the hype you know. That person can't sing or whatever.  
(Laughter)  
GE: Sometimes you feel alone and you look around and the SMS will show okay I'm not alone at least.  
WS: Until someone disagrees.  
GE: Ja you're like what the hell are you talking about?  
BF: I just voted, I didn't use any other features.  
HP: SMS?  
BF: Ja SMS, I think you should be out, you should be in.  
HP: Did you send a lot of SMS?  
BF: Not that much no.  
LJ: Good friend you are!  
(Laughter)  
BF: It depends who's been voted off. I think both deserve to be voted off I didn't vote. If I think one should stay, I voted. So it depends on who was staying there.  
KH: Ja that's true. If you don't care you're not gonna bother.  
HP: And what interactive feature didn't you like?  
GE: Well I found the camera angles pointless cause they were like this big [indicate small] and there was no audio. So you could only hear the main screen so to me that was just pointless. Because you know they don't do things that you can see what they're doing in the other angles. You can just see someone sitting outside or sitting in the lounge and you don't know what they're talking about.

WS: Ja sometimes you want to listen to the conversation and you're watching and it's like you're okay, why don't they change the screen, cause when you watch the small thing you can see what's happening outside and you want to hear what they say. And that takes forever.

BF: Ja it was just very very small and with the conversations they sometimes put the subtitles there so you can read but it's not the same. If you wanna spy on somebody, do it properly.

HP: Why did you participate in the interactive activities?

KH: Well I'm tired of no-one that I like not winning.

LJ: I'm very intimidated by him sitting here [points to BF]. I don't feel like I can express what I want to say (laugh)

HP: Why?

KH: Because you liked Jonathan.

LJ: Ja I did, that's the thing. I thought he was great, I was voting for him all the way.

KH: Ja I also liked Jonathan.

LJ: He was a nice guy and he was generally... he wasn't like causing trouble or whatever. He was like very down to earth.

KH: Ja I don't know why he liked Robin so much.

LJ: I missed that.

KH: No he was like madly in love with Robin, and you know how Robin is. I just don't understand why he liked her. It was so sweet though

HP: WS, why did you participate?

WS: In the interactive stuff?

HP: Yes.

WS: Because it made me feel like more part of the whole thing. I don't know there's sometimes like when you missed stuff you like want to find out more. You know that you always want to keep up to date.

HP: Okay, did you read any articles about the show?

BF: Yes

LJ: Yes, there were tons in the *Heat*.

KH: Ja.

LJ: Every week I was going through that *Heat*, I promise you, just to see what's going on and what I missed and what the people said and things like that. Ja I did.

WS: Cause you couldn't really avoid it. So it was like everywhere, if I had a magazine I will just read it.

HP: So did you buy the magazines to read about it or if it's there...

KH: No.

LJ: Ja, if it's there I'd read it. I didn't like go out of my way but ja definitely.

HP: And the articles that you read, did it change your mind or what you thought about the participants?

LJ: No.

WS: It did change my mind, cause some of the articles I read, they sort of pick on certain people in the house. And then they have a one sided view about it. They either hate the person or love them. So that also made you feel...

HP: But it didn't influence your opinion LJ?

LJ: No.

HP: And did any of you access the Internet specifically to read up about the show?

[All shook heads negatively accept LJ]

LJ: Yes. Ja I did it. Ja I went and checked the profiles as I said earlier, to see what's happening.

HP: And keep up to date?

LJ: Ja.

HP: And you GE, did you?

GE: No.

HP: Did you ever comment on things that happened on the show, so while you're watching did you actually talk to the screen?

WS: Ja.

LJ: So many times. You're like oh no! And you're like don't do that, why are you saying that – that type of thing. You like scream at the TV.

GE: It's almost like they can hear you.

LJ: Ja but they can't, but it's because you see so much of what's going on in their lives you feel like you're there and they can hear you. And if they go on, and then the judge says something badly, you're like ag, you suck or whatever. You like get cross and happy for them you know. You feel very much in there.

WS: Ja like sometimes I'd wake up in the morning cause I think they give you a thing on what the day's gonna be like so I'd work it out that when they have breakfast, I have breakfast and then you like listen to the conversation.

HP: Having breakfast with the house?

WS: Ja.

(Laughter)

BF: I agree with you on that one. Sometimes with the judges you think, ag please just get out of that TV so I can kick you. Please come out.

KH: Especially with Mark Gilman.

LJ: Yes!

KH: He was horrible. And they weren't even that bad that night.

BF: Nataniel was sometimes unfair.

KH: Ja. He was as well.

BF: He was very bias, he just, for those he didn't like he would say bad comments especially Lindiwe.

LJ: Who was that?

BF: Nataniel.

LJ: Oh.

BF: He's this gay..

LJ: Ja I know him.

BF: He really put Lindiwe on this pedestal. Everybody was beneath.

WS: And Jonathan as well.

BF: And Jonathan ja. It was really I don't know...

HP: Did you ever comment on things that happened in the show GE?

GE: I wasn't actually into it that much – sorry to say that.

HP: Hey, that's the honest truth, that's fine.

GE: Cause every time the judges said something, like you said, you're like, ag couldn't you say something better or something. Just to encourage the people. Instead of being harsh. Just encourage them of some sort.

BF: You criticize them and by the end, you're like okay you did try.

GE: Do something like that you know, instead of breaking their spirit.

KH: Ja I hate it when they do that.

WS: Sometimes is not constructive criticism, they just criticise them.

HP: Did you get emotionally involved with the contestants?

KH: Yes.

LJ: I had a big crush on Jonathan. I think I still do.

(Laughter)

LJ: No I thought he was great. That was my emotionally involved moment. He was even nice, it wasn't just about the looks or anything.

KH: Ja, and he's funny.

LJ: He was nice ja. I mean ja with the contestants when they were all performing everyone goes aahh, you did so well and you go ag please and that was also emotion.

KH: Ja it was only really with Jonathan. And then with like Robin and Bodea. I thought ag shame.

WS: Ja after Bodea left I thought aahh.

BF: I just felt like sorry for Karin or Karien? When she sang a song about her brother who died. I just felt sorry for her.

KH: Hmm.

BF: They each had a chance to sing their own written songs...

LJ: That was right at the beginning?

BF: Right at the end.

WS: I think it was Monica.

BF: Oh was it Monica, sorry. Sorry wrong name. I felt sorry for her for her brother.

WS: Ja. So you did kind of get emotionally involved.

KH: No I felt sorry for her when they cut her hair.

(Laughter)

WS: And when her skin broke out.

KH: Ag shame.

HP: Did you ever play the role of matchmaker? Like think these two should get together or these two should just stay away from each other?

(WS and LJ: Ja, ja)

WS: Ja the whole Jonathan and Robin thing. Ja I was like, I really like both guys and I didn't like her much so I didn't care, but I wanted them to be happy.

HP: So you were in a catch twenty two. You just could not win?

WS: Ja.

HP: LJ?

LJ: No, I only saw right at the beginning when they were like picking the contestants so I missed the whole love triangle thing. I only read about it in the papers and magazines. So when I started watching I didn't see any love interests going on there.

HP: And you didn't pair them together?

LJ: No, no. Just Jonathan with me.

(Laughter)

HP: And you're still working on it?

(Laughter)

LJ: No, I'm just joking.

KH: That's good.

HP: And KH what about you?

KH: Hmm, only when they actually started. Like I didn't really say this one with this one. It was more like when Robin and Bodea started and all the things, then I was like happy. And then when Jonathan liked her I wasn't so happy cause it was better with Bodea and Robin. Not Jonathan.

HP: And the two guys in the group?

BF: I was hoping that Johan and Monica would get together cause they were very comfortable with each other.

KH: I forgot about Johan.

LJ: Me too.

BF: They were very comfortable with each other so I was aiming that they'd get together.

KH: But he had a girlfriend.

BF: I didn't know that.

KH: And he loved her.

BF: I didn't know that until right at the end.

KH: But he was always talking about his girlfriend.

HP: And you GE?

GE: No not that much.

HP: You weren't interested in the love issues?

GE: No.

WS: I think ...

HP: Do you feel like you know the contestants personally?

(All: ja)

WS: To a certain extend.

BF: Only some of them.

GE: Ja some of the personalities.

WS: Ja the people that you connected to.

KH: And the ones that were in there for longer.

WS: Ja.

KH: Not with the ones that left like early.

LJ: Yes.

BF: I know Jonathan cause we were in class together, so in that sense yes. The others were like ja some of them.

LJ: Ja with some people you thought ag you know, that person will be such a cool friend to have.

WS: Ja

LJ: And with other people you go like ag, I don't wanna be friends with that person you know, cause of this, this, this and whatever. But ja, that's about it.

HP: GE do you feel like you know them personally?

GE: Ja just the ones that you related to. Especially when they talk to the camera, you get to know them better, it was almost like he was talking to me.

HP: Now when you voted for the contestants, do you belief that your vote made a difference in the outcome of the show?

(LJ, KH, GE: No)

BF: Yes.

GE: It was the person that I voted for that didn't win, so.

LJ: I don't think so. I mean it also depends on how many times you voted.

KH: Ja.



LJ: Cause I mean I voted once in the final you know, so I was like, ja big difference this is gonna make. But I don't think so, I think it has to be a huge amount of SMS' going through to make a difference.

BF: No I think it did. I voted a few times and even though it didn't swing the way I wanted it to it still helped. They will say jis the voting is very close. And I'm like, I know I voted, I know that, I hope it close.

KH: Ja I also, I don't vote much so. The one I did vote for was *World Idol*. And I was very upset. I was convinced that I was gonna make Will Young win. Cause I voted so many times.

BF: Jiss, that song sucked.

WS: What song did he sing?

LJ: Light my fire.

BF: Ja, Light my fire. He could've done better.

KH: Ja but I was just convinced that he was gonna win because of me. And he did. In the SA poles he actually came second, but in the others he was really low. So I helped him.

WS: Ja.

KH: But other than that, if you don't vote a lot, then you don't.

WS: Ja, one vote I really don't think make a difference.

HP: But did you vote?

WS: Ja I did like a couple of times when I thought it was necessary.

LJ: Hmm.

WS: When I felt that this person needs me.

LJ: Ja, they need your help.

HP: So you would vote but you don't believe that it's necessarily going to change the outcome?

KH: I voted a few times but nothing changed, you know.

WS: Cause there are some people who vote like a lot. And I think they change it.

HP: Did it upset you when people said negative things about your favourite contestant?

(LJ, KH, BF: Yes)

HP: Give me examples.

BF: For Monica, they criticised her sometimes a lot for no apparent reason and I was like, dude back off.

(Laughter)

BF: A little bit stressed in front of the camera, back off. Someone's gonna meet you in a very dark corner.

[Laughter]

BF: No I was a bit uncomfortable sometimes, when they criticise people for no apparent reason.

LJ: Ja but sometimes people – their favourite aren't your favourite. You're like ahh mines this and this and yours blah blah blah. I don't know, you know it creates...

WS: Ja I would like argue with my friends, it's all like good fun type of thing. I'd still be like no, trying to convince them of your point of view.

KH: Ja it was mostly guys because the girls liked Jonathan you know.

LJ: Ja my brother teased me, jislaaik.

BF: What's this Jonathan thing?

KH: But he's so cute. Didn't you see his dinosaur thing?

(Laughter)

LJ: His pants?

KH: No, he acted like a dinosaur.

LJ: Oh! I thought you were talking about his pants.

KH: No, he acted like a dinosaur. It was very funny that day.

HP: And if you get upset when people say things, how would you react?

BF: Sarcastically shout.

LJ: I just used to laugh it off.

KH: Ja.

BF: No, sarcasm works for me. I don't know if it helps me or not.

KH: You like smile and say something but you're actually serious. Like don't talk about him! No, really don't!

HP: Did you try and persuade people to vote for a specific contestant?

KH: Yes.

LJ: No, I don't think.

WS: No everyone has their opinions, so they could vote for who they wanted for.

LJ: A lot of my friends weren't even watching *Project Fame* so. It was mostly with like my siblings and that. No, but their like no, and I'm like I like this one whatever. But it wasn't like a group effort, like oh guys you know, who're we gonna vote for. It wasn't like that at all. So it was not like vote for him or don't vote for her or whatever.

HP: You had KH?

KH: Ja. I used to steal my boyfriend's phone, cause like I wanted to vote for Johan the one week and then he kept on pretending to vote for someone else. So I used to steal his phone and vote.  
(Laughter)

KH: Not too many. Enough to just...

HP: Make a point?

KH: Ja, make a point.

HP: And you GE?

GE: No.

HP: No, you didn't try and persuade anyone?

GE: No.

HP: BF?

BF: No. Ek het dit maar gelos. I left it. If you wanna vote, vote if you don't wanna vote it's on your conscience.  
(Laughter)

HP: With whom did you usually discuss *Project Fame*?

WS: My sister. We sat up like half the night and discussed *Project Fame*. Cause like in the beginning when they didn't really sleep, after a while they just got tired and they went to sleep, but in the beginning I'd discuss it with my sister.

BF: Just friends. No one specifically.

KH: With LJ. Cause I pick her up everyday. And on the way here it was always a *Project Fame* discussion from the night before. And then the next day was the same thing. And then if we didn't come in, we'd had two days of catching up so.

HP: And you LJ?

LJ: Basically my brother and my sister in law, cause they also used to watch it so. They were the ones I used to discuss it. Like did you see what happened? But ja.

HP: GE, you said your friends?

GE: Ja,

HP: Friends from school?

GE: Ja and my brother as well. We used to sit together and actually watch it. We always – well it wasn't that much, but we used to like – I like that one, especially Monica. I'm like okay, ja.

WS: I didn't like Monica.

KH: She was okay.

WS: No I don't know.

HP: And then who did you usually watch with?

LJ: By myself.

BF: With everyone who was in the room with me.

WS: On Sundays when it was the whole Gala event thing I'd get the whole family, and say let's all sit down and watch. But during the week I watched by myself.

KH: Ja, I watched with my mom.

GE: My brother and friends. Sometimes I'd call my friends and say you wanna come over and watch, if you've got time.

HP: Think back to when *Project Fame* first started. Did you change your daily routine and activities to be able to watch *Project Fame*?

LJ: No.

KH: Yes.

WS: Ja, I did. Cause at night it was more interesting, like if they went out like during the day, cause I didn't watch during the day, only when they got back.

KH: Ja, I wouldn't go... I used to go to movies on a Sunday, so I stopped going to movies and like when I was studying, my study break was half past six to watch...

HP: The highlights?

KH: Ja to watch the highlights.

BF: No I tried to avoid it as much as possible until I saw Jonathan coming in and then let's adjust a bit here and a bit there.

WS: I used to watch I think at eight there was something. I don't know if they gave out songs on Tuesdays, I used to watch at that time.

HP: Did watching *Project Fame* made you forget about your problems?

BF: Ja.

LJ: Ja. It did actually.

KH: Ja.

LJ: I used to watch it late at night when they were all telling their stories. And you like get involved, you feel like you're sitting on the bed with them watching and listening to the story. Ja I was like completely engrossed in that.

KH: Ja.

BF: And sometimes looking at their problems, thinking mine is such nothing compared to theirs. I'd rather watch theirs.

KH: Oh no, my problems are worse. They're not studying, they're just sitting there.

HP: But for the time that you watched you felt like you could just forget about your problems.

KH: Ag it depends.

LJ: It's just distracting basically. Cause you listen to the stories and what happened to them. And it's like you're sitting with a group of friends, that's how it felt at the end of the day. You don't talk about your issues, you talk about jokes and funny incidents and you get like distracted by that. So that was cool.

HP: Okay, but you two disagree?

GE: No it didn't make me forget, cause though you got inside into their problems, it still didn't make me forget. It made me feel like I was thinking of my own problems that I still had to face.

HP: Do you enjoy or did you enjoy watching these contestants doing mundane things, everyday things like brushing their teeth?

WS: Ja, it made them more human. Like ja, like when they wake up and they look bad and they need to eat, they're stressed out and that type of stuff.

LJ: No I didn't.

KH: I don't care if they eat or not. They could eat if they want, it just made me hungry. And when their sleeping, I'm like can't you be awake.

(All: ja)

KH: It's not nice.

WS: Especially if they like sleep in the afternoon, then you feel you might sleep as well.

KH: And they don't move the camera.

LJ: Ja that's the irritating thing.

KH: And also when they had like guest speakers and they just sat there and listened to this person for long.

WS: But some of them were interesting.

KH: Ja I suppose, but like film our lectures, no ones going to watch that. People won't really know, you know what we're talking about. So I didn't enjoy that.

LJ: What I loved was watching the dance practices. When they were like doing the dancing. Jiss that was funny.

KH: Because Jonathan and Johan couldn't dance.

WS: But somehow they always managed to pull it off. I never used to watch them practice it cause I always just wanted to see the final.

HP: Did it ever feel like you were spying on them?

KH: No.

BF: Ja. Depending on where the camera angle is. If it's very high, then peek a boo. I think ja sometimes.

KH: No.

WS: No. I felt I had a right to be there.

LJ: I don't know.

BF: But sometimes they would whisper so soft make sure you won't hear and I'm like, I can still see you, you're doing something.

WS: Ja.

LJ: I just felt that I was sitting in the corner watching everything you know. I don't know, but I didn't feel like I was spying.

GE: It was like you were in control when you're watching them.

HP: Did you ever wish that you could swap places with them and be a contestant yourself?

(LJ & KH: Yes)

WS: Not because of the singing thing cause I can't sing.

KH: Ja me neither.

WS: But just to be there.

LJ: Ja in the house.

WS: Just to like tell what I think and stuff.

KH: Ja something different. A change from your normal...some excitement. And then you become famous which is nice.

BF: No that's fine. If I want to make a fool of myself I'd do it in the corner, not in front of the TV. That's okay.

HP: Did any of you go for the auditions?

(All: no)

KH: No I can't sing.  
HP: Would you do the *Big Brother* thing?  
WS: No.  
KH: No it's too personal.  
LJ: No it puts me off.  
HP: So in your mind you'd swap places with them but in reality you won't?  
LJ: Ja you know what you just wanna be like the choreographers, be there with them and enjoying the laughter da-da-da-da. You know they were there but they weren't part of the action thing you know.  
KH: Ja, just think how much they show. Like with *Big Brother* you don't want to be seen showering. But with *Project Fame* they didn't actually show that. Like I tried to enter *The Block* but I was too young. I would've loved to do that. That's like my dream – winning that.  
HP: And you GE? Do you want to swap with them?  
GE: Yeah, yeah. Sometimes cause I just wanted to be a contestant.  
WS: Sometimes it looks like they're having so much fun.  
LJ: Ja. Especially when they do their appearances.  
HP: What did you enjoy most about *Project Fame*?  
BF: The Sunday night viewings, to see how they progress. How they actually grow from being ah-ah, to actually being better.  
WS: Ja also comparing the one that lasted till the end, comparing them.  
BF: Ja from previous weeks.  
HP: And you ladies? What did you enjoy most?  
KH: I actually think I enjoyed the in the house part more.  
LJ: Yes!  
KH: Like the singing, they didn't do a good job.  
HP: So you liked the interaction?  
KH: Ja I liked to watch Jonathan playing with the little kids when they went to the party. Ja I just liked watching them doing their thing. And be funny, they were very funny people.  
LJ: I liked the late night discussions and the dance practices. That was my like, ja I could miss the Sundays I was all right with that you know, I just caught a glimpse but the interaction was nice.  
HP: GE, what was yours?  
GE: It was about them growing from who they were, in a sense perfecting their skills.  
HP: Okay, that's all I need. Thank you very much.

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