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## Gender Stereotyping and the *Jersey Shore*: A Content Analysis

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**Abstract:** Reality television is a highly popular genre, with a growing body of scholarly research. Unlike scripted programming, which offers fictional storylines, reality television relies heavily on cast member's reactions to carefully crafted situations. This study examined the relationship between *reality television* and *gender role stereotyping* in a seminal reality television show, MTV's *Jersey Shore*. Content analysis was used to conduct an in-depth examination of the first season of *Jersey Shore*, investigating three gendered issues: physical appearance, social roles and behavioral traits.

Findings demonstrated the carefully manufactured relationship between gender role stereotyping and reality television programming in *Jersey Shore*, and illustrate the development of the female reality show character as related to sexualized behavior and social/emotional gender stereotypes. The depiction of female reality show characters seems to have increased its level of sensationalism, while continuing to be clichéd and conventional, while depiction of male characters is beginning to push the boundaries of being typecast in regards to their physical appearance and role in performing domestic tasks. Additionally, physical alterations on screen were many, warranting further investigation of this behavior.

**Keywords:** gender stereotyping, gender roles, MTV's *Jersey Shore*, reality television, women and television programming, content analysis

### Gender Stereotyping and the *Jersey Shore*: A Content Analysis

Television has become a fixture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century home. It provides us with breaking news from around the world, educates us, and most of all entertains us. Today the television has become a ubiquitous household appliance and a primary source of entertainment (Signorielli & Baeue, 1999). While television as a medium has been comprehensively studied for decades, studies of genre TV are relatively new. A growing body of academic scholarship has

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begun to address reality TV, but the topic bears further study, given the popularity of the genre. This study focuses on the genre of reality television, focusing on gender stereotyping.

## Literature Review

The concept of reality television as a medium is rather broad, so we will begin by delineating our understanding of the genre. In this study we follow Cato & Carpentier's (2010) definition of reality television as a medium that captures many different types of programming. Reality television is a hybrid genre, encompassing many other programming formats including game show, documentary, sports, health and fitness, cooking, home improvement and nature. Reality television is programming in which participants are real people (not actors) who interact with each other in an unscripted manner in order to provide a performance highly influenced by manipulations by the production team (Watson & Hill, 2003).

The reality television genre spans many decades and has become increasingly popular. With the growth of the genre has come a greater public demand for this type of entertainment. As Poniewozik (2010, p. 92) notes, "In 1992, reality TV was a novelty. In 2000, it was a fad. In 2010, it's a way of life." Reality television's presence on both broadcast and cable networks has steadily increased over the years (Lauzen, Dozier & Cleveland, 2006). Since the 2002-2003 season, reality television has "consistently captured the largest percentage of the audience watching the top 10 broadcast programs" (Nielsen, 2011). Possible explanations for the genres' popularity include inexpensive production costs and popularity with audiences.

The current popularity of reality TV can be seen in the creation of a new Academy Award category to honor the medium. The genre has gone from a few shows to occupying a majority of programming hours on both broadcast and cable TV networks, in part because of the audience perception that reality television is more "real" than traditional scripted programming (Lauzen, Dozier & Cleveland, 2006). While undoubtedly popular, it should be noted that the genre is not without its share of criticisms. "Countless critics have lambasted the reality genre for its simplistic storylines and often outrageous treatment of situations and participants" (Lauzen, Dozier & Cleveland, 2006, p. 445). The popularity of this genre, for good or bad, justifies further study of the medium.

Growing scholarly attention to reality TV is evidenced in some recent scholarship, with book's (such as Webner's 2014 *Reality Gendervision: Sexuality and Gender on Transatlantic Reality Television*) and journal issues (such as the 2009 special issue on "Reality/TV" in the *Canadian Journal of Communication* and the 2013 special issue on "Gender and Reality TV" in *Television and New Media*) devoted to different aspects of reality TV. While such scholarly attention to the genre is encouraging, it is interesting to note that the increase in the popularity of reality TV among viewers has been concomitant with an overall decrease in gender-related television research. Considerable research was conducted in the late 1980's through the 1990's on issues of gender in TV, but patterns of research indicate that studies on gender and television diminished at the start of the new millennium, showing a need for increased current research on gender issues in television.

Academic research is important as studying cultural behaviors and norms can be helpful in examining the progression of beliefs and opinions in a culture. Television programming can impact current societal issues, trends and attitudes, as Gerbner's cultivation theory observes (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986). Television "cultivates" and the repetitive pattern of television's mass-produced messages and images forms the mainstream of a common symbolic environment. Further analysis of reality TV in general, and gender issues in particular, could prove beneficial for advancement in the social sciences in general, and the discipline of Communication in particular. Some recent research has found that reality TV

shows often encourage the idea of women as sex objects, as well as playing up traditional feminine virtues (Cato & Carpentier, 2010).

Previous research on gender in television bears out the importance of study. Historically, research on television programming has shown that male and female television “characters” are frequently typecast into specific gender driven roles. For example, Glascock (2001) examined demographics of gender roles from prime time shows, children’s programming, and the comparison of female and male characters within various sociological and economic classes, and concluded that while there have been improvements in the representation of females on television, women are still grossly underrepresented. In a similar vein, much early research examined gender in regards to the amount of screen time and number of lead characters for males versus females on television. Several studies utilized content analysis and found that that women have been grossly underrepresented as characters on television, through factors such as screen time and the amount of lead roles for females [Downs, 1981; Davis, 1990; Glascock, 2003; Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Lauzen & Dozier, 2002; Lauzen, Dozier & Hicks, 2001; Lauzen, Dozier & Cleveland, 2006; McNeil, 1975; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999].

Limited representation of women on TV is well established in the research and appears to be a continuing trend. Signorielli & Bacue (1999) feel that it is “not surprising that gender images and representation during prime time have been remarkably stable during the past 30 years” (p. 540). As well, various qualitative studies have established the prevalence of gender stereotyping on television [Cox, 2012; Downs, 1981; Elasmr, Hasegawa & Brain, 1999; Greenberg & Collette, 1997; Lauzen & Dozier, 2002; Lauzen & Dozier, 2004; Lauzen & Dozier, 2008; McNeil, 1975; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Sung, 2013].

The reality TV genre seems particularly susceptible to the influence of societal issues, trends and attitudes. The highly contrived nature of reality programs suggests that there is influence from people behind-the-scenes who help to guide plots and dialogue (Lauzen, Dozier & Cleveland, 2006). Several studies by Martha Lauzen and colleagues (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; 2002; 2004; 2008 and Lauzen, Dozier & Cleveland, 2006) examine women in behind-the-scenes roles and the effects their employment has on gender stereotypes. Lauzen and Dozier (1999) and Glascock (2001) found that males outnumber females in behind-the-scenes jobs. Lauzen, Dozier and Horan (2008) and Lauzen, Dozier and Hicks (2001) concluded that programming which employs at least one woman writer or storyteller will be more likely than all male teams to portray female characters as having dynamic relationships in all aspects of their lives, rather than just around the home. Davis (1990) hypothesized that because men are more prevalent than women in behind-the-scenes jobs, they write and produce shows from their inherently masculine perspective. Since male executives so heavily dominate the media industry, it seems that men may intrinsically project gender bias on female characters. This body of research demonstrates that becoming a mainstream entertainment medium has not significantly impacted gender stereotyping on reality TV.

### **Reality TV, Gender and Audience Perception**

Despite the emerging scholarship about the prevalence of gender stereotyping in the representation of females on television, further research is needed on gender role stereotyping on television, particularly in regards to audience perception and impact. The research that does exist highlights the importance of gender in terms of audience perception and impact. For example, Leone, Peek and Bissell (2006) found that reality television programming portrays many unfavorable human characteristics, yet people continue to watch the programming for entertainment purposes. Atwood, Zahn and Webber (1986) concluded that

not everyone perceives gender stereotypes in the same way; rather they tend to construct their own meanings. This suggests that viewers do form their own individual opinions about character portrayal rather than just accepting a generalized depiction.

Greenberg and Colette's (1997) textual analysis of three decades of TV, through an analysis of *TV Guide Fall Preview Issues* from 1966-1992 offers comparative analysis across several decades, with one conclusion that "stereotyping of characters has been a familiar means for coping with risk" for programmers (p. 5). This research indicates that the world of television is socially constructed, relying on a decades old formulaic approach to programming.

While public opinions are generally scrutinized within the context of sociology, psychological factors should also be considered. Reiss & Wiltz (2004)'s research proposes that people watch other people engaging in "real life" situations to feel both relatable and important. In contrast, Boylorn (2008) uses an oppositional gaze in an autoethnographic study on race and gender in reality television to conclude that while she can identify with some aspects of black female characters on reality programming, none offer an authentic representation of her as a female or an African American woman. More studies of reality television from an autoethnographic perspective could help to challenge the media's current limitations of the genre.

Analysis of specific character portrayals, including speaking time, marital status, occupation, age and appearance also provide insight into gender stereotyping on TV. Lauzen and Dozier (2004) conclude that male characters on television sitcoms are "significantly more likely to have occupational power, engage in goal directed behaviors, and enact leadership roles than female characters" (p. 496). Lauzen, Dozier and Hicks (2001) found that many female characters are defined by their marital status, while men were defined by their occupational status. Glascock's (2003) study found that females were dressed more provocatively, and held jobs with less occupational status than men. Glascock (2003) also concluded that women were overall portrayed as younger than their male counterparts on television shows. Evaluation of the reality programming genre shows that female "characters" overall receive less recognition and respect than men (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999).

These broad historical findings on gender are supported by three recent qualitative studies on gender in reality TV. Sung's (2013) textual analysis of *The Apprentice* examines gender bias toward female contestants in leadership positions on the show. While the female contestants are shown as leaders, Sung's analysis argues that a masculine discourse style of leadership is still preferred. The bias is also reinforced by Davis' (2008) research where participants identified female contestants of *Survivor* as masculine if they were unattractive, older or muscular. Overall it appears that men have more flexibility in gender identification than women (Davis, 2008). Tyree (2011) found consistent stereotypical representations of females and African Americans in reality programming, which has a major role in shaping present-day pop culture. Cox's (2012) textual analysis of *Police Women of Broward County* showed language, clothing and subject matter that objectifies the female police officers depicted on the show. Cox's (2012) study demonstrates that females are objectified even in inherently masculine professions.

The findings from the aforementioned studies should come as no surprise, as they do not contradict societal attitudes towards gender. While there has been some change in the portrayal of women on TV, overall the industry has been reluctant to make any great strides in gender role stereotyping. This is significant, given that TV can cultivate viewers' perceptions of the world (Gerbner, 1986).

## Research Question

Based on the above literature and the authors' interests, this paper proposes the following research question:

*R1: What is the relationship between reality television and gender role stereotyping?*

Here, reality television is defined as programming in which participants are real people (not actors) who interact with each other in an unscripted manner in order to provide an entertainment or performance, which is highly influenced by manipulations by the production team throughout the course of the show (Watson & Hill, 2003).

Gender is defined as a cultural term in which an individual responds to behaviors, attitudes and beliefs of a particular sex-related to the societal norms of that sex role (Watson & Hill, 2003). The appropriate behaviors for male, female and transgendered individuals are relative to the particular culture that is being examined. Lauzen, Dozier and Cleveland (2006) further describe the term by stating, "Gender stereotypes reflect the consistent use of narrowly defined set of traits" (p. 445-446).

Based on the literature review, it was expected that there would be widespread gender stereotyping in *Jersey Shore*, with expectations that cast members' behaviors, clothing, and verbal interactions would exemplify stereotyping of males and females in society.

## Methodology

### Research Design

A content analysis was chosen for this study because it offers a qualitative opportunity to "describe and analyze the content of written, spoken or pictorial communication..." (Reinard, 2007, p. 302). A content analysis is an excellent method for examining gender stereotyping because it can offer a comprehensive summary of "broad themes, reoccurring phrases, semantics or concepts" (Reinard, 2007, p. 302). This can be seen in the utilization of this method in many previous studies of gender and TV [Davis, 1990; Downs, 1981; Glascock, 2001; Glascock, 2003; Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Lauzen & Dozier, 2002; Lauzen, Dozier, & Hicks, 2001; Lauzen, Dozier & Cleveland, 2006; McNeil, 1975; and Signorielli & Bacue, 1999]. As well, the research question posed in this study invites content analysis as a research method.

Advantages to a content analysis are that it can help to find patterns or trends within a large body of content, it is highly versatile, and it can help to encourage description as well as explanation of the topic in question. Disadvantages are that it is unable to draw cause-and-effect conclusions, data gathering can be tedious, and research cannot be generalized across other content categories.

### Sample

The first season of MTV's *Jersey Shore* was selected as the sample for analysis. *Jersey Shore* is a seminal reality TV show made up of eight cast members (four males and four females) who come together for the summer to live and work in Seaside Heights, NJ (MTV, 2013a). "It took just nine episodes to earn MTV record-breaking ratings (4.8 million viewers watched the Jan. 21 finale) and to insinuate itself into popular culture so completely that President Obama referred to the cast during May's White House Correspondents' Dinner" (Stack, 2010,

p. 40). The show spanned six seasons, airing from December 3, 2009 through December 20, 2012. Season one of the show is set in a coastal vacation town in southern New Jersey. Subsequent seasons are set in Miami FL, Italy and then back in Seaside Heights, New Jersey. Season one was selected for several reasons. First, examining the debut season of the show establishes reality “characters” which remain throughout the duration of the series. Second, looking at the first season gives an opportunity to explore gender related issues in relatively authentic setting, since the show was filmed before any of the participants rose to fame or the show had a chance to be marketed to the American public. Exploration of the first season shows the participants’ actions, language and overall communication in a (comparatively) genuine way. Appendix B provides a guide to the episodes of season one.

### Coding and Analysis

Thematic coding was used to identify gendered behavioral roles and social patterns within the TV series. Three content categories were established: physical appearance, gendered social roles, and behavioral traits. Physical appearance was measured by examining the show for references to, and demonstrations of, beauty/ugliness, sexualized/non-sexualized clothing and performance of domestic tasks. Gendered social roles were measured by examining the show for the social roles of leader/follower, victim/hero, and an “other” sub-category. Behavioral traits were measured by examining the show for behaviors of dependence/independence, anger, sorrow (crying), happiness, and “other.” The “other” category provided an opportunity for themes that may have been neglected in the construction of the data coding categories. Table 1 provides definitions of the coding categories.

*Table 1. Definitions of Coding Categories*

Category	Definition
<b>Physical Appearance</b>	
Looks (Beautiful/handsome)	Told by another person that an individual looks attractive/declares attractiveness about oneself
Ugliness	Told by another person that an individual looks unattractive /declares unattractiveness about oneself
Sexualized clothing	Wearing clothing that exposes a lot of skin, breasts and legs, and is tight fitting and or sheer
Non-sexualized clothing	Clothing that covers up the skin and is baggy and not form-fitting
<b>Gendered social roles</b>	
Leader	Someone who takes charge in a situation
Follower	Someone who goes along with another person’s idea in a decision making situation
Victim	Someone who has been emotionally or physically attacked by another individual
Hero	Someone who stands up for themselves or another individual to do what they believe is “right” for the given situation
<b>Behavioral Traits</b>	
Dependence	Physically or emotionally reliant on someone else
Independence	Not relying on someone else physically or emotionally

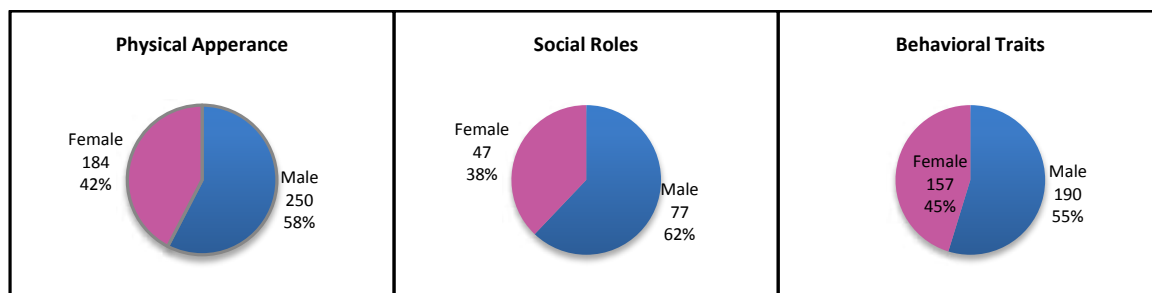
Anger	Loss of temper
Sorrow (crying)	Visible physical upset, often resulting in tears
Happiness	Elation, including laughter and smiling
Other (Fight)	Physical altercation between individuals

Gender stereotyping was coded by cast member and episode (see Appendices B and C for details). Episodes were viewed and notated for the key scenes regarding gender, building on the literature review. The episodes were initially viewed, then notated scenes were reexamined and categorized. Reoccurring gender themes were analyzed thematically.

## Results and Discussion

A content analysis of the first season of the *Jersey Shore* found both expected and unexpected results. For example, it was found as expected that female characters were portrayed as more emotionally and socially helpless as compared to male characters, but were presented in a less sexualized manner than the males. Summary results follow. For detailed analysis of physical appearance, social roles and behavioral traits by episode (see Appendix A\_).

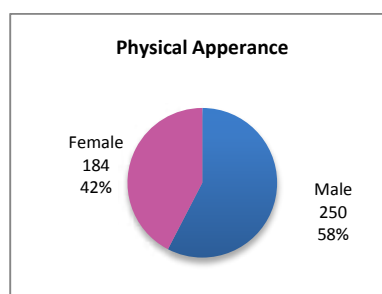
*Figure 1: Cumulative Results*



## Physical appearance

Physical appearance was measured by examining the show for references to beauty/ugliness, sexualized/non-sexualized clothing and performance of domestic tasks. Overall, physical appearance was found to be more focused on the males (58%), with only 42% of references to physical appearance being made to female characters

*Figure 2: Physical Appearance*



Slightly more references within the show were made to male appearance (“Beautiful/Handsome”), with 57% references to male looks and 43% to female. For example, throughout the episodes, the female Sammi Sweetheart consistently comes up for discussion among the cast as being beautiful, and part of episode four’s plot line involves an emphasis on physical appearance, when Sammi Sweetheart takes an extraordinarily long time to get ready to go out to lunch/meet Ronnie’s parents for the first time.

Far more references to ugliness involved females (69%) than males (31%). “Ugly” as a subject was not a prevailing theme within the series. Physical traits were discussed, but the term “Ugly” was generally only used in conjunction with some sort of verbal or physical fight.

Males wore more “Non-Sexualized Clothing” (71% male). A good example of “Wearing Non-Sexual Clothing” occurs in episode two, where Vinny has pinkeye and wears loungewear until he feels better. Both sexes wore “Sexualized Clothing” evenly, at 50% for males and females. The entire cast, including both genders, wears very sexualized clothing when going out, lounging around the house, or going to work. The male cast members often appear shirtless throughout the series, and the women frequently wear bathing suits, low cut tops and very small shorts. While the females own and wear many revealing outfits, the women tended to display their sexual clothing when going out drinking, while the males tend to reveal more skin around the house. In episode nine, the cast lays out at the beach, which produces the illustrative sexual clothing scenario for both genders.

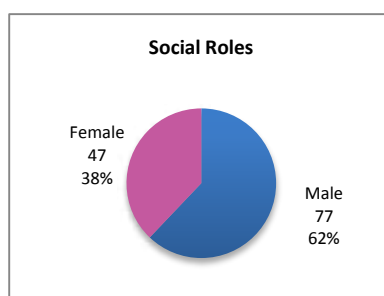
Overall, it was found that female characters were presented in a less sexualized manner than males. These overall results were interesting in light of prior research (Davis, 1990; Glascock, 2001), which positions female characters as presented in a more sexualized manner by the media, and with a greater focus on physical appearance.

These findings are noteworthy as they suggest that the gap in gender stereotyping in reality TV, at least as pertaining to physical appearance, may have narrowed. As discussed in the Literature Review, over the decades much importance has been placed on the physical appearance and clothing of women. The first season of *Jersey Shore* suggests that the emphasis on physical appearance may now extend equally to males’ (sexualized) clothing choices. The influence of setting is also of interest, as when the male characters were in more casual settings they tended to wear *more* sexualized clothing than the women, and vice versa. Perhaps societal convention plays a role here, as males are expected to play less sexualized roles in public (Kraft, 1987).

Is clothing within and without the home really important in terms of gender stereotyping? We feel it is, because, as Bresler (2006) notes, “Dress reflects many things about ourselves and our culture. It tells us about standards, deportment, pride, and character (p. 21).

## **Gendered Social Roles**

“Gendered Social Roles” were measured by examining *Jersey Shore* for the social roles of leader/follower, victim/hero, performance of domestic tasks, and an “other” sub-category. Overall gendered social roles were found overall to be controlled by the male characters, with 62% male gendered social roles and 38% female, as can be seen in Figure 2.

*Figure 3: Social Roles*

The role of “Leader” was largely demonstrated by males (68%). Although far less in scope, some important leadership moments were demonstrated by females. For example, in episode three Angelina took charge of her life and packed up and left the show after her relationship with her boyfriend began to deteriorate. Episode nine showed Snooki displaying leadership when she stood her ground while being bothered by a group of rowdy admirers.

Interestingly, “Follower” behaviors were also demonstrated mostly by males, at 77%. One example is when DJ Pauly D willingly agrees to The Situation’s plan to bring a woman back to the house for sex.

Victim/Hero behaviors illustrated societal norms, with “Victim” roles being female dominated at 68%, and “hero” behaviors male dominated at 60%. An example can be seen in episode seven when Snooki exhibits both “Victim” and “Hero” traits. The Situation calls Snooki fat, in front of the entire cast, during dinner. Snooki becomes visibly upset and leaves the table, but later stands up for herself and says that she used to have an eating disorder and is sensitive to comments about her appearance. In episode eight, The Situation is a “Victim” of J-Woww, who slapped him in a fit of drunken anger (further discussed under the “Other: Fight” sub-category). Vinny is the “Hero” during this confrontation, stepping in to try and prevent any additional violence. As can be seen, these examples reflect societal gendered norms.

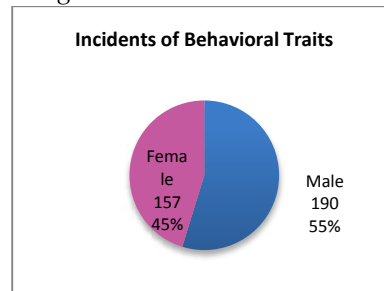
Another social role in the show that *seemingly* goes against societal stereotypes was “Performing Domestic Task,” where 75% of domestic tasks were performed by males. Most of the male-performed domestic tasks were in the kitchen, and starred The Situation cooking for the other housemates. Episode five offers a good illustration of this. The Situation takes it upon himself to cook a “family” dinner for the house, with minimal help from the rest of the cast. During the on-camera interviews, The Situation even acknowledges the gender divide.

The *Jersey Shore* was set in a beach house, so there was ample opportunity for all characters to perform domestic tasks. Yet results in this category were surprising because one male character was the *only* member of the house to consistently participate in a domestic behavior; specifically, the preparation of food. In the average American household, cooking is seen as a female task, but cooking is glamorized on TV. The professional culinary world is inherently male dominated, making women the minority in this field (Hsuan, 2014). The Situation’s choice to cook for the house enforces gender role stereotypes in performance of domestic tasks, as he picked what society would deem as the most masculine of behaviors. This suggests that males continue to be confident and self-assured in their masculinity, as well in their social roles.

## Behavioral Traits

The category “Behavioral Traits” was measured by examining the show for behaviors of dependence/independence, anger, sorrow (crying), happiness, and “other.” Interestingly, this category showed the least division between sexes, splitting male (55%) and female behaviors (45%) as can be seen in Figure 3. The findings are of interest as they largely, but not completely, reflect societal gender stereotyping.

*Figure 4: Behavioral Traits*



“Independent” behaviors were demonstrated slightly more by females (58%) than males (52%). Overall, this category did not produce any noteworthy data. “Dependent” behaviors demonstrated a 66% female lead, with 34% for males. For example, Snooki shows a great deal of “Dependent” behavior in episode five as a result of the aftermath of the physical altercation between her and the group of drunk men at the bar in episode four (further discussed under the “Fight” sub-category). No other substantive examples were noted.

Females (56%) showed a little more anger than males (44%). For instance, female anger behaviors in episode seven include: J-Woww getting upset at The Situation for not escorting her back to the hotel suite when she was intoxicated, Sammi getting mad at Ronnie for talking to another woman, and Snooki’s reaction to The Situation hurling insulting her during dinner.

Sorrow/crying was almost entirely female (93%) as to crying on the show. The first reported “Crying” incident is recorded in episode three when J-Woww sheds tears while disclosing her infidelity to her boyfriend. Snooki exhibits heavy crying in episode five as a result of the aftermath of the altercation at the bar in episode four (further discussed under the “Fight” sub-category). In episode six Sammi Sweetheart cries several times due to a night of emotional relationship drama with Ronnie.

“Happy” behaviors were largely male at 69%. Many “Happy” behaviors can be seen in episode two, as Ronnie and Sammi Sweetheart pursue a romantic relationship with one another. Other “Happy” behavior is exhibited in episode eight as DJ Pauly D and The Situation successfully plot lighthearted pranks aimed at Vinny and Snooki. J-Woww exhibited the least amount of “Happy” behaviors.

## Other: Fights

One additional behavior worth noting (that was not an original coding category but emerged from analysis) is fighting, which was found to be a prevalent behavior on the show. Here fighting is defined as physical altercation between individuals. Quite a lot of fighting occurred, involving both the male and female cast mates, in six of the nine season’s episodes. Overall males got into more physical altercations (65%) than females. For example, in

episode two, The Situation punches a man who he feels is disrespecting him, and DJ Pauly D joins the fight in support of his friend. In episodes four and five, almost all of the housemates were involved in a brawl at a local bar.

Females' physical altercation, though fewer in number than the males, are also of interest as they exhibit a duality of gendered behaviors. In episode seven J-Woww slaps The Situation across the face. This follows an incident where she (J-Woww) becomes too intoxicated at the club to get herself back to the hotel suite in Atlantic City, so she asks The Situation to leave the club with her and escort her to the room. He refuses J-Woww's request multiple times, so she hits him on head and gets kicked out of the club. J-Woww makes it back alone, and then plots to "punch him in the face" when he gets back. This premeditated assault shows the duality of J-Woww's gender roles; she exhibits "Dependent" behavior in asking The Situation to escort her home and then becomes violent for "getting" her kicked out of the club. This altercation shows that while J-Woww may exhibit traditional female "helpless" social and emotional behavior, she is perfectly capable of standing up for herself when necessary. When The Situation returns to the suite, J-Woww does, in fact, punch him in the face. The Situation exhibits the traditional male gender role stereotype by walking away from her rather than engaging in further physical contact with a female.

While domestic violence of any kind is not encouraged in our society, abuse of females by males is not condoned. The CDC ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) states that 2.6% of men report being beaten, compared with 11.2% of women. This data shows that females continue to be more socially and emotionally weaker than men (Priddy, 2014). The display of aggressive behavior by the female character J-Woww on the *Jersey Shore* demonstrates that female reality show characters are more likely than before to stand up for themselves, even in a physical fight. The male character, The Situation's reaction to J-Woww's attack shows that male reality show characters continue in their socially reinforced behavioral roles.

### **Summary of findings**

This content analysis of season one of the *Jersey Shore* surprisingly demonstrated a domination of all coding categories by males. It was expected that females would be more focused on such areas as "Physical Appearance". It was also interesting that all of the females exhibited such strong physical violence, as evident in the "Fight" sub-category. We consider the meaning of these findings in the following section.

The research conducted in this study illustrates the development of the female reality show character in a seminal reality TV show, as related to sexualized behavior and social/emotional gender stereotypes. The first season of *Jersey Shore* demonstrates that male reality television characters were beginning to push the boundaries of being typecast in regards to (1) physical appearance and (2) role in performing domestic tasks. The depiction of female characters in the show demonstrates an increased level of sensationalism, while yet continuing to be clichéd and conforming to societal gender stereotypes.

An unexpected finding in this first season of the *Jersey Shore* was the amount of screen time dedicated to physical fighting. Since both the male and females of the *Jersey Shore* engage in fights on numerous occasions, this behavior is not easily defined as a gender role stereotype, but the physical act of fighting does associate itself with established societal rules.

### **Conclusion**

Reality television is an area of media that merits increased academic study due to the way it has infiltrated pop culture and civilization. The greatest limitation of this study is the subjective content analysis methodology. Future research should include inter-rater reliability.

In examining reality television as a medium, it is important to consider the power of creative control in the editing room. The production of reality shows operates by shooting exhaustive footage of the cast, which is then edited together-under the watchful eye of a producer-to tell a compelling story. What we see as the finished product of reality TV is not always an accurate depiction of what really happened in a given situation. Footage is frequently compressed for time, editing out scenes that are long or prove irrelevant. Often there is some small morsel of this scrapped footage left on the cutting room floor that is important to the overall accuracy of the story. Taking creative editing into consideration, the behaviors that were discussed in this research study all did occur, but it is highly likely that the footage was edited together to depict each character in the most sensationalized way possible. This raises an important limitation of this study: it does not take into account the larger issues of what makes reality television “real.” This larger question is of real interest given the importance of reality TV today, and provides fruitful ground for further research.

A related limitation of this study, but a limitation inherent in the nature of the study, is the fact that reality TV is unscripted, but carefully directed, and characters on reality TV are, essentially, not “real.” Characters on reality television programming are essentially caricatures of their authentic selves, a satirical depiction of their inherent stereotypical traits. Demby (2014) summarizes the concept of stereotypes by saying, “once they become fixed and widely accepted, it becomes difficult not to use them as explanations for everything”. Stereotypes exist as a result of observations that appear to be true. Over time, stereotypes transform from observations of patterns into rules, and eventually into self-reflexive explanations for those rules. Stereotypes become self-reinforcing... eventually, they actually blind us to the complex mix of sociological, economic and historic circumstances that undergird those patterns. (Demby, 2014, no page). The increase in the depiction of stereotypical behaviors and characters in reality programming heightens the chance of solidifying these representations in both television and society.

In conclusion, the results of this study show that there is a carefully crafted relationship between reality television programming and gender role stereotyping. With the sustained success of the genre, it is clear to see that the reality medium will remain an important aspect of the television programming spectrum. Continued study of the medium within the academic community is clearly necessary, and this empirical study contributes in a small way.

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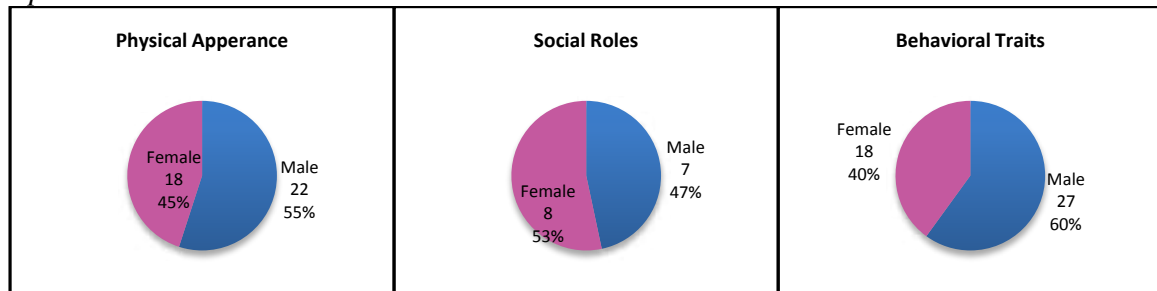
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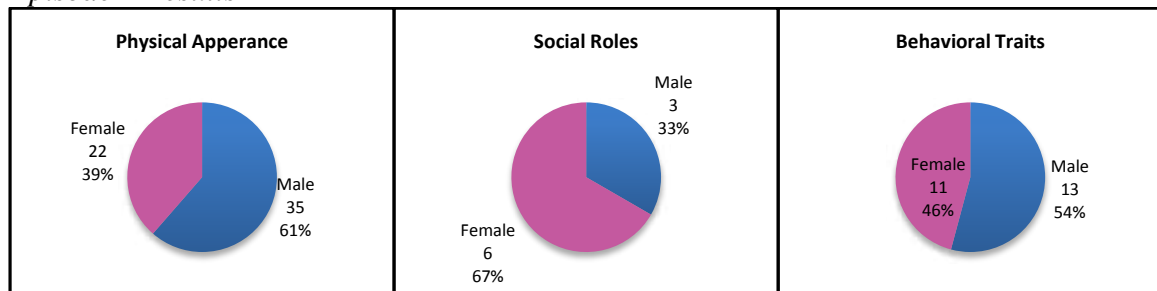
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**Appendix A: Coding by Episode**

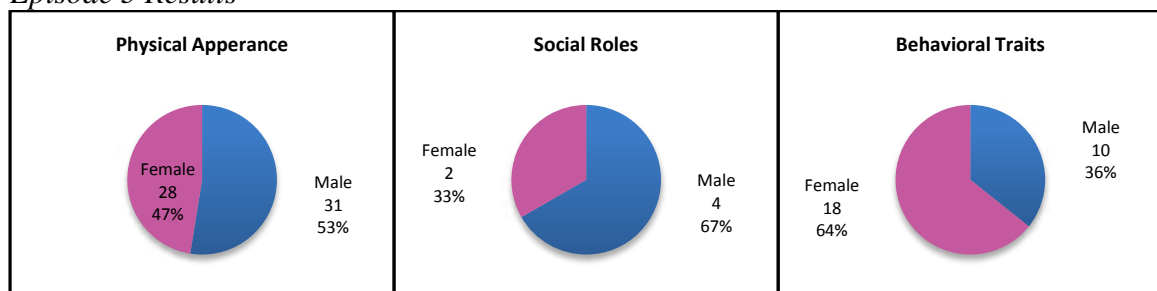
*Episode 1 Results*



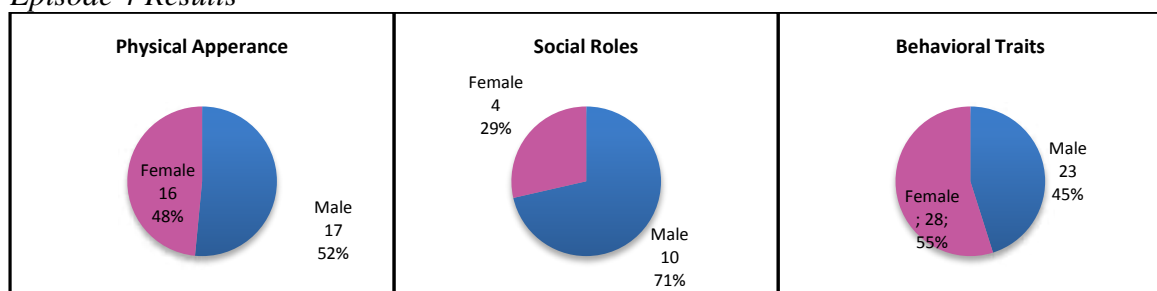
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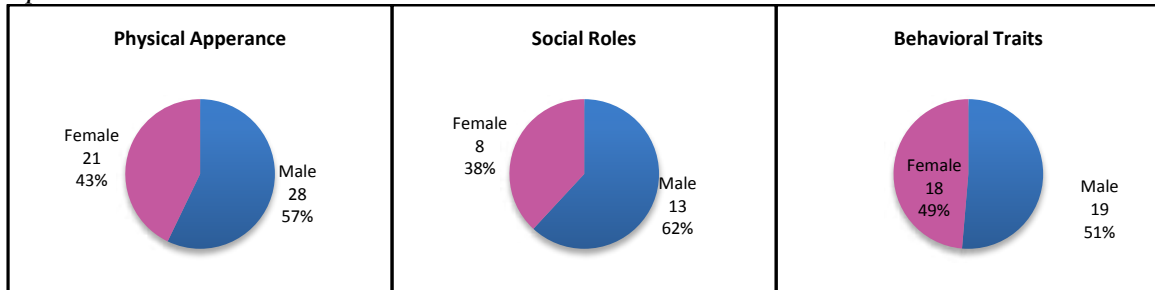
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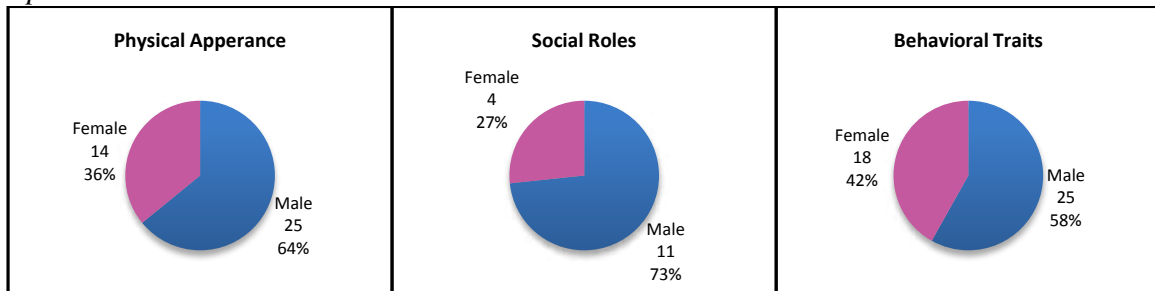
*Episode 4 Results*



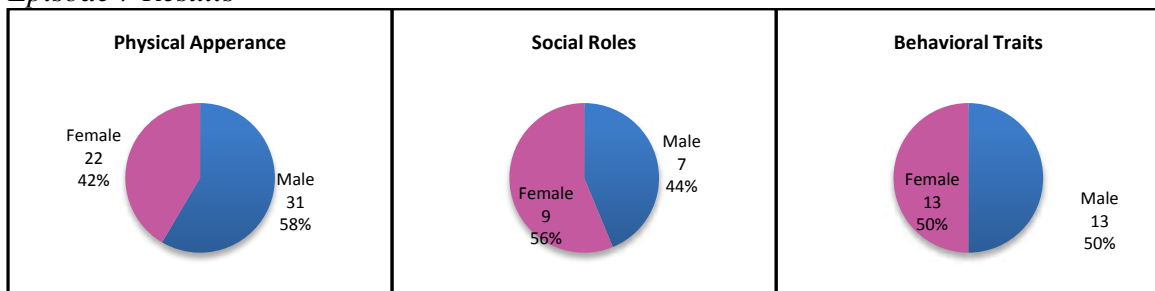
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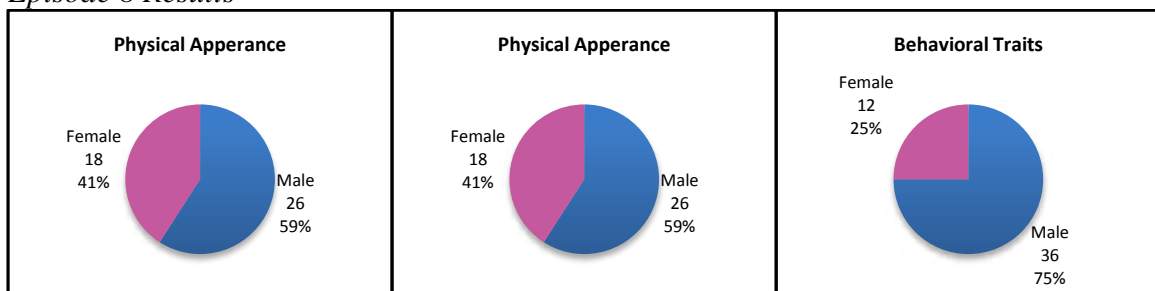
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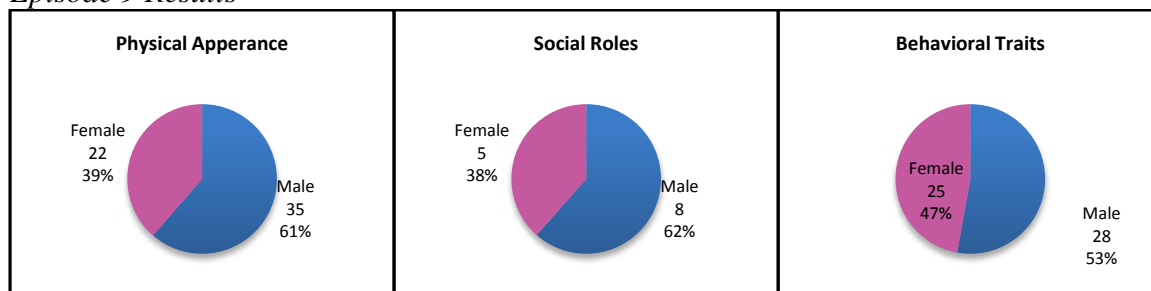


*Episode 7 Results*



*Episode 8 Results*



*Episode 9 Results***Appendix B***Jersey Shore Season 1 Cast Guide*

Name, Age & Hometown	Nickname	Bio
Angelina, 22 Staten Island, NY	N/A	If Angelina has something on her mind, it'll be out of her mouth before you know it. She always has something to say and doesn't care what anyone else thinks. The question is, how long will her housemates put up with it? She has a new boyfriend and intends on staying faithful--but who knows what the summer will bring.
Jenni, 23 Franklin Square, NY	J-Woww	When Jenni walks into a bar, the guys yell "J-WOWW!" She may have a boyfriend, but down at the Jersey Shore all bets are off. Impulsive and spontaneous, Jenni is a party girl with zero self-control. Wherever she goes, drama is sure to follow. But under her tough exterior there is a softer side, which makes her the resident big sister.
Mike, 27 Staten Island, NY	The Situation	Mike may have a sensitive side, but he has plenty of game to go with it. He knows what he wants from his summer at the Jersey Shore and is not going to let anything stop him from getting it--even his roommates. The way he sees it, he has the situation under control.
Nicole, 21 Marlboro, NY	Snooki	Nicole is looking to meet the man of her dreams. When she goes to the gym, she goes in full makeup, hoping to make a splash with all the toned men. Her height has been as much of a strength as it has been an obstacle, and it will color her summer at the Shore in a big way.
Paul, 28 Johnston, RI	DJ Pauly D	Pauly D is Rhode Island's most well known DJ and keeps a tanning bed in his house. He orders gel by the case and does his hair twice a day--once in the morning and once before hitting the town. For Pauly D, cleanliness is close to godliness, so he is not sure how he's going to handle living with roommates.
Ronnie, 23 Bronx, NY	N/A	Ronnie might find himself in a brawl or two, but he is a lover who just wants to have a good time. He comes into the house with one rule: Don't fall in love at the Jersey Shore. But as the summer goes on, he finds rules are meant to be broken.
Sammi, 22	Sammi	Sammi has been a serial dater all her life, but she's now single

Hazlet, NJ	Sweetheart	and loves every minute of it. Her friends call her a sweetheart, but when it comes to guys she is a heartbreaker. Just ask Mike and Ronnie.
Vinny, 21 Staten Island, NY	N/A	Vinny is a self-confessed mama's boy and natural entertainer. He knows how to get a laugh from everyone he meets. Having just turned 21, Vinny has been waiting for this summer his whole life and is ready for a wild time with no boundaries.
(MTV, 2013c)		

### Appendix C

#### *Jersey Shore* Season 1 Episode Guide

Episode	Title	Original Airdate	Synopsis
101	A New Family	12/03/2009	Summer at the Jersey Shore kicks off when eight soon-to-be roommates move into their summer share. Romance heats up between Sammy and Mike, but all might be lost when the guys invite three random girls to join them in the hot tub. Meanwhile, Snooki comes on way too strong, and finds herself the outcast. She can only hope that first impressions won't be lasting impressions.
102	The Tanned Triangle	12/03/2009	Still feeling like the outcast, Snooki tells the others that she's leaving the Shore. And the roommates' first night out at the club gets flirty, proving that the boyfriends back home might, in fact, have something to worry about. And what started with Mike and Sammy turns into a love triangle that threatens to divide the house.
103	Good Riddance	12/10/2009	The love triangle gets even more intense when Ronnie catches Sammy giving her number to another guy. And a housemate chooses to leave the Shore for good.
104	Fade To Black	12/18/2009	After a night at the clubs, Pauly D and Mike have to juggle multiple groups of girls. And mayhem breaks out when a fight erupts at a bar, and one of the housemates goes down.
105	Just Another Day At The Shore	01/01/2010	The roommates rally around Snooki, and the unexpected result of the brutal punch is that it actually brings the house closer. Sam meets Ronnie's parents.
106	Boardwalk Blowups	01/07/2010	When Mike invites girls back to the house, the situation gets out of control, and Snooki gets into her second fight of the summer. Meanwhile Ronnie gets into a brawl of his own, leaving Sammi questioning their relationship.
107	What Happens In AC	01/14/2010	The roommates head to Atlantic City where fun turn to fury when Mike manages to antagonize both Snooki and J-WOWW. And one roommate reveals that she used to have an eating disorder.

108	One Shot	01/14/2010	The summer's winding down, but the drama doesn't stop. Pauly's got a stalker and a fight lands another roommate in jail.
109	That's How The Shore Goes	01/21/2010	Ronnie is released from his night in the slammer and the guys comfort Snooki after she has a bad encounter with her ex-boyfriend. The housemates wrap things up at the Shore as summer draws to a close, but not before one final house hot tub hook up.
(MTV, 2013b) & (MTV, 2013d)			