

My Research Story

All great stories have a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Or so I thought. My UW20 research story, detailing my great collegiate research adventure, does have a distinct beginning. It has plot twists, great surprises, and road blocks. It does not, however, have an end. Although the course itself ended and my 15-page paper has returned to me, marked and graded, it turns out the research process never ends. There will always be more statistics to report, more scholarly articles to tear apart, and more primary documents to analyze. What I learned, however, is that at some point you just have to sit down and write. That is the hardest part, but it is also where everything comes together. If you do it just right, something good can happen. The paper attached to this project is only the final product (although I use the word “final” cautiously) of a semester-long journey. The story of how I got there is much more interesting.

My research topic came easily to me, thanks to the focus of our class, Public and Private. In the class, we looked at definitions of what is private and what is public, and what happens when the lines are blurred. I immediately connected this with reality television and the show that started it all, *The Real World*. I began wanting to examine how reality television turns viewers into voyeurs and thought I was on the right track when I found Clay Calvert’s book, *Voyeur Nation*. While reading *Voyeur Nation*, I was in heaven. He had found the words to express what I was thinking but could not articulate. He and I were on the same wavelength. Then two things happened. First, I realized that Calvert had already written everything I wanted to write about reality television. Second, I read some psychological and consumer studies that demonstrated that voyeurism does not motivate viewers to watch reality television. It did say, however, that self-discovery

motivates viewers to watch reality shows instead. I had a new topic: reality television and self-discovery.

What happened next was, in quick succession, a rapid topic-change. After researching reality television and self-discovery, I realized that self-discovery is hard qualify. Although I made some attempt – seven pages worth – to figure out what I was trying to argue, I deleted everything. This was the height of my frustration. I wanted to explain how reality television causes change, but I had no idea with what words or resources I could articulate what I knew inherently to be true. Something had gone wrong somewhere in my research process, but I could not tell where. I turned to Professor Levine, who asked if I had actually watched *The Real World* instead of reading about it? Oops. After I sat down and watched episodes (and by episodes, I mean seasons) of *The Real World*, not only was I enjoying my research much more, I had something to say. I had arrived at what turned out to be my final topic, which you can read about in my final paper.

Of course, while I played the main character in this research story, I could not have completed my research journey without my faithful sidekicks, librarian Bill Gillis and professor Andrea Levine. Bill taught me how to effectively use the library's tools to find the most useful information. Because my topic was so new, there were few books to add to my research. The article databases, instead, were key. He taught me how to differentiate among JSTOR, LexisNexis, and Academic Search Premier. He showed me the quirks of each system and how to use certain operators to get what I want. When something was not available on JSTOR, Bill showed me how to access it on different databases. He was always available, even in a pinch. In the final days (or, let's be honest,

hours) of my project, I needed access to polling data. Bill walked me through how to login and search through iPoll – not an easy task! After some digging, I found what I needed and was able to insert it onto page nine of my paper.

While Bill showed *how* to research, Professor Levine played a crucial role in helping me develop *what* to research. I came to her with at least four drafts, each topped with a letter to her, all of which could be summarized as “I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I’M DOING!!!! HELP!!!!” Thankfully, Professor Levine was the Yoda to my Skywalker. She gently corrected my course when I found myself fixated on tangents. When I rambled, she, through her writing professor magic, found five words for my fifty. Her greatest piece of research wisdom will stick with me for endeavors to come: “Do not be afraid of letting your research become complicated. Nuance is good” (Levine, paraphrased). She also reminded me, when I came to her with piles of research and ideas, that there is always more research to do, but you have to let yourself sit down and write imperfect paragraphs. The research process is not linear. You do not research and then write a perfect paper. It just does not happen that way.

Thus, what is called my “final” paper is not final at all. When I turned it in, I still had ideas I wanted to explore and articles I wanted to read. I wanted to refine my language and bring it up to the caliber of the scholarly articles I had been reading. Unfortunately, I had a deadline. Fortunately, that deadline forced me to write everything I had down. While writing my paper I learned a lot about *The Real World*, I learned even more about how research works. Something tells me the latter will prove a bit more useful in the future.

The Real World: Opening a social dialogue through stereotypical casting

In 1992, co-producers Mary-Ellis Bunim and Jon Murray pitched an idea to MTV: *The Real World*. Their pitch was simple, yet unprecedented: take seven young people, strangers from different parts of the country, stick them together in a New York loft, and see what happens. The result? A cultural phenomenon. Seventeen years later, *The Real World* is in its twenty-first season with *The Real World: Brooklyn* and already has its twenty-second, *The Real World: Cancun* in the works for later in 2009 (MTV.com). Despite its success, it has come under fire by critics for casting “one-dimensional personalities” and repeatedly casting stereotypes – “the angry black one”, “the gay one” – to create drama (Klosterman 34). Furthermore, critics use the same argument to enforce the notion that *The Real World* bears little resemblance to reality at all. While the critical argument about *The Real World*'s lack of reality and contrivance tends to cast the show in a negative light, this paper argues that the manufactured premise of *The Real World*, the stereotypical cast members in particular, is actually essential to creating the social dialogues that give the show depth. To do this, I will examine two seasons of *The Real World: San Francisco*, which aired in 1994, and *Brooklyn*, which aired in 2009.

Why *The Real World*?

Aside from bringing the reality television genre to the pop-cultural forefront in the 1990s, *The Real World* is an exemplary program for a case study on reality television. *The Real World* is reality television without the frills. Unlike other shows that sprung up after it like *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, and *The Bachelor*, the only competition *The Real*

World features is an unspoken social one. Its contestants do not vie for cash prizes or love. Instead, over 500,000 people – 14,000 to 15,000 per year – have auditioned for *The Real World* to simply have their lives taped and displayed on MTV (Calvert 29). Thus, contestants appearing on *The Real World* have no clearly established motive driving them to do so, differentiating them from contestants on other competition-based shows.

While *The Real World* does offer free housing, pocket money, a \$1300 stipend and some degree of fame, its premise also sets it apart from its competition-based competitors (Calvert 29). In its opening sequence, the show declares, “This is the story of seven strangers picked to live in a house and have their lives taped to find out what happens when people stop being polite and start getting real.” The show purposefully takes on the burden of its promise. Perhaps the most resonant explanation of *The Real World* comes from the producers themselves. In every season, the house features a fish tank with seven different fish: no doubt a direct metaphor for *The Real World* cast member’s fishbowl life. They are filmed 24/7. The producers rarely intervene¹ except in the case of real emergency². The crew has set up cameras in cars, infrared cameras in bedrooms and microphones in the showers. Privacy ceases. It is this 24-hour lack of privacy that forces the cast members to deal with their private, personal issues in a public setting and allows *The Real World* to proclaim they are “one of the last true reality shows” (“TRW: Secrets Revealed”).

¹ In the first season, *The Real World: New York*, the producers felt the cast was too boring to generate interest so they placed cast member and model Eric Nie’s book of nudes on the coffee table. The cast revolted and the producers since learned their lesson (“TRW: Secrets Revealed”).

² See Ruthie’s drunk driving and Joey’s alcoholism in *The Real World: Hawaii* and *The Real World: Hollywood*, respectively (“TRW: Secrets Revealed”).

The Real World: Criticism

However, the show has come under fire from critics proclaiming that *The Real World* is not very real at all. George Bagley, an American Studies and Film Theory scholar, sums up television critics' complaints about the "reality" of *The Real World* in an article entitled, "A Mixed Bag: Negotiating Claims in MTV's *The Real World*," published in 2001. In his article, he criticizes *The Real World's* supposed reality due to the act of filming itself. "The ever-present cameras," he writes, "don't simply record but also generate action... Life before the camera has now been altered... the tenuous thread that's supposed to exist between natural reality and its recording is now compromised by the reality's alteration" (Bagley 65-66). In addition to his critique that the presence of cameras alters *The Real World's* reality, Bagley also questions how *The Real World* can claim to be real when many of its cast members pursue careers in entertainment. He writes,

How, for instance, can [*The Real World*] be *real* given that participants and settings are carefully selected, or that to a large extent these are not the kind of 'ordinary' people they are often implied to be? After all, many of *The Real World's* 45 different cast members since the show's debut in 1992 have aspired to careers, in one form or another, in the entertainment field...Is this then a ruse, some kind of chicanery masquerading as natural, unscripted reality to deliver audience ratings...? (Bagley 62).

Bagley's claim that *The Real World's* lack of reality stems from casting participants pursuing careers in entertainment has one fatal flaw. He assumes that "ordinary" people

do not aspire for entertainment careers. He leaves out his definition of “ordinary,” but from his critique we can assume that no “ordinary” person would ever dare become a musician, actor, writer, or comedian. Furthermore, he neglects the fact that the *The Real World*’s cast members rarely reach celebrity status. If they remain in the public arena after the show finishes airing, they usually do so as a “Reality TV Star” on talk shows or other reality television shows (Aurthur). The fame pay-off, if any, restricts itself to the reality entertainment realm. Nonetheless, even if the motivations of the cast members may be to gain public exposure, the result is still the same: seven strangers, living in a house, having their lives taped.

These criticisms of *The Real World*’s reality are valid. *The Real World* is indeed not a perfect, unscripted display of what happens to “ordinary people” when they live together. The cast members are picked deliberately; the scenes are cut with a purpose. There is no doubt the show has an agenda: to be successful, whether that means to make money or generate critical acclaim. However, the “reality” discussion among *The Real World* critics, does not matter to viewers as much as the critics claim. Studies have shown that reality television viewers generally accept the fact that any form of television is in some way contrived or manipulated (“Emotional and Cognitive Predictors”; “Reality-Based Television Programming”; Papcharissi and Mendelson). Viewer pleasure is not derived from the pure “reality” aspect of the shows, but rather based on “other characteristics, like suspense or drama, that are associated with good storytelling” (“Reality-Based Television Programming”, 422).

In addition to the critique about *The Real World*'s reality, pop culture critic and self-proclaimed "amateur *Real World* scholar"³ Chuck Klosterman analyzes *The Real World* producers' casting decisions and explains how *The Real World* has proliferated a generation of one-dimensional people. He writes,

...this is the ultimate accomplishment of *The Real World*: It has validated the merits of having a one-dimensional personality... If you believe *Real World* producers Mary-Ellis Bunim and Jon Murray, they don't look for troublemakers when they make casting decisions. They insist they simply cast for 'diversity'. But this is only true in a macro sense – that they want *obvious* diversity. They want physical diversity, or sexual diversity, or economic diversity. What they have no use for is intellectual diversity. You need to be able to deduce who a given *Real Worlder* represents socially before the second commercial break of the very first episode (34).

Klosterman further argues that *The Real World*'s exhibition of cast members with one-dimensional personalities has led to the public adopting *The Real World* one-dimensional personalities because "other one-dimensional personalities can more easily understand [them]" (34). In essence, Klosterman asserts that *The Real World* is causing a mass decline in multi-faceted people and that soon, everybody will become one of *The Real World*'s stereotypes.

³ Klosterman explains his self-designation, writing, "amateur' because I've done no actual university study on the subject, but I still say 'scholar' because I've stopped watching the show as entertainment" (28).

However, Klosterman overlooks the merits of *The Real World* casting – or at least portraying its cast members as – one-dimensional characters. Although critics scorn *The Real World*'s unreality as its major downfall, the contrived nature of the show is what makes it successful. By purposefully casting conflicting stereotypes, the producers have the ability to create a social dialogue that leads to a greater social awareness among viewers. While *The Real World* makes a faithful effort to address social issues such as race awareness, alcoholism, and eating disorders in every season, the relationship between conflicting one-dimensional personalities and a heightened social dialogue is particularly evident in seasons three and twenty-one of *The Real World*, San Francisco and Brooklyn, respectively.

The Real World: San Francisco

The Real World: San Francisco, which aired in 1994, is a notable season for several reasons. As one of the original seasons, the show focuses less on the sexual and alcohol-related exploits of the roommates as the post-*Vegas* (2002-2003) seasons do and more on roommate relationships and individual careers. Furthermore, the producers' decision to revolve most of the season around the story of Pedro Zamora, an HIV-positive Cuban-American gay AIDS educator, added an element to the show that could not be ignored ("TRW: Secrets Revealed"). Airing only a year after Tom Hanks won an Academy Award for his portraying a homosexual lawyer fired during one of the first AIDS discrimination cases in *Philadelphia*, *The Real World: San Francisco* took on a pertinent, controversial issue by casting Pedro. However, *The Real World* took it one step further than simply casting a man with AIDS; they cast people who would act as a critical voice about AIDS and homosexuality ("TRW: Secrets Revealed"). Although four of the

other cast members⁴ ostensibly had no issue accepting Pedro's homosexuality and disease, Republican Rachel Campos' opposing views provided for conflict with the liberal cast mates.

In the first episode of the season, Pedro comes out to the roommates both as a homosexual and a person living with AIDS. While the other cast members pour over Pedro's scrapbook of accomplishments as an AIDS educator, Rachel walks away to The Confessional⁵ to express her concerns about living with someone with AIDS. She says, "I wanted to ask some hardcore questions about how it affects him, how it affects me as his roommate. None of those things were discussed. Everybody else was so much in adoration of his accomplishments that me asking a question at that point would have made me, you know, the bitch" ("Planes Trains and Paddywagons"). Rachel, at that moment, is the only one with outright concerns about Pedro living in the house. The tangible conflict grows well into the next episode, when Pedro finally confronts Rachel. Around the kitchen table, with both Judd and fellow cast member Puck Rainey there as well, Pedro and Rachel engage in a heated conversation about the night before when Rachel left the table to go to the confessional:

Pedro: Knowing that you are Catholic and that you are Republican, it was like, okay... automatically that influenced my opinion of you.

⁴ Including the self-described "bed-wetting liberal" Judd Winick who later wrote a graphic novel about his experience called Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss and What I Learned (Amazon.com).

⁵ A room with a camera where the cast members are encouraged to "confess" what they are thinking privately – that is, until the show airs.

Rachel: Were you afraid I would be confrontational with you? Were you afraid I would just not like you? What were you afraid of?

P: What I was afraid of was rejection. The day that you sat down and five minutes later you got up, that was to me a formal rejection (“Love Stinks”).

Here, Pedro does not respond to Rachel’s behavior as the primary cause for dispute. Instead, he mentions Rachel leaving the table secondarily to her role in the house as a Catholic and a Republican. Even before Rachel “rejected” Pedro, Pedro had a problem with her Catholicism and political affiliation. By casting Rachel as an opposing force to Pedro, it spurred dialogue based first on her categorization as a conservative and second on her actions. Rachel’s one-dimensionality, followed by her actions which stem from her conservative roots, allowed for discussion about a controversial subject to happen. While Pedro and Rachel’s conflict subsides later in the season, this conversation opened the dialogue about AIDS to the MTV generation. *The Real World* brought concerns and questions about AIDS to the front line, gave it a face, and let the cast members speak openly about it. The producers facilitated this dialogue by casting Rachel as the vocal conservative one because she would be the most likely to have that conversation with Pedro that the public could not.

The other cast members also furthered the social dialogue around Pedro’s AIDS by adding their own commentary to it. Cory, the naïve one and also Pedro’s closest friend in the house, asked Pedro about the difference between HIV and AIDS. Although now that distinction has been made clear by an increase of AIDS education throughout the country, in 1994, many people still had no idea what HIV and AIDS meant in a clinical

and personal setting. A CBS New/New York Times Poll taken in 1993, the year before *The Real World: San Francisco* aired revealed that 55% of the people sampled did not know “a lot” about AIDS. The same poll revealed that 15% surveyed – 202 people surveyed out of a 1,537 sample – falsely believed that someone could get AIDS by kissing someone. The poll also revealed statistics about the public’s opinion toward people with AIDS. When asked, “How concerned should a parent be about their child getting infected with the HIV virus by playing with another child who has the HIV virus?” 56% replied either “very” or “somewhat concerned”. Fifty-three percent of respondents were “very” or “somewhat concerned” about a health care worker infecting them with AIDS (*Survey by CBS News/New York Times, June 1-June 3, 1993*). Cory, by asking Pedro about the difference between HIV and AIDS, allowed Pedro to educate not only the housemates, but the viewers as well, about his disease.

Even cast members who knew about AIDS opened up an avenue for people without the disease to speak about it. After learning that roommate Pedro is HIV-positive, liberal Judd said, “He’s my roommate and I have no fear of getting AIDS”. Mohammed, the only black cast member and San Francisco native brings to light the AIDS situation in San Francisco by saying, “I was pretty familiar with the disease. Living in San Francisco, you have to be” (“Planes, Trains, and Paddywagons”). Each cast member, although clearly with one-dimensional personalities, added to the dialogue, allowing *The Real World* to bring the AIDS conversation to television. The cast members, each with their unique yet stereotypical perspectives, had the conversations the viewers could not have with Pedro about his disease and his life.

As *The Real World: San Francisco* aired, the social dialogue surrounding AIDS seeped out from the MTV Generation and into the mainstream media, creating a greater social awareness about the United States' AIDS crisis. When Pedro was in the hospital due to AIDS-related complications, then-President Bill Clinton telephoned Pedro to thank him for his AIDS advocacy. He also aided the emigration of Pedro's family from Cuba to Miami ("Bill Clinton Remembers Pedro's Influence"). *The Wall Street Journal* reported a young woman from South Carolina who wrote to Pedro, saying, "I never thought anyone could change my opinion on homosexuals and AIDS... Because of you, I've seen the human side of something that once seemed so unreal to me" (Morgenthaler). Not only did Pedro educate the public about his disease on *The Real World*, he changed the public's perception about people with HIV/AIDS.

Pedro passed away on November 11, 1994, ironically one day after the last episode of *The Real World: San Francisco* aired. *People* magazine, just one of the major publications that responded to Pedro's death, featured a profile on Pedro and his life's work as an AIDS advocate, saying Pedro "put a human and unforgettable face on the [AIDS] epidemic" (Israel). A *New York Times* feature chronicled his AIDS education at his high school alma mater, Hialeah High School (Navarro). Needless to say, the response to Pedro's death spread beyond 1994. In 2009, as *The Real World: Brooklyn* aired, MTV also aired *Pedro: The Movie*, a biopic about Pedro's life on and off *The Real World*. MTV also aired *The Real World: San Francisco* for free online at the same time *Pedro: The Movie* came out allowing viewers to compare the movie with the show (MTV.com).

The Real World: Brooklyn

The Real World: Brooklyn's involvement with *Pedro: the movie* is only the starting point for comparisons between *The Real World: Brooklyn* and *San Francisco*. Although *The Real World: Brooklyn* was the first cast ever to have eight members instead of seven, the producers decided to bring back the storytelling style of *The Real World: San Francisco* and to “distinguish ‘Brooklyn’ from the crazier stuff in *The Real World*,” as co-producer Jon Murray said in an interview with *The Los Angeles Times* (Sicha). In addition to casting a gay Cuban-American man, J.D., who is from Miami Beach, Florida like Pedro, they cast a post-operation transgendered woman named Katelynn. Like Pedro was to the AIDS community, Katelynn is to the LGBTQ⁶ community. As in *The Real World: San Francisco*, producers cast *Brooklyn* with a variety of perspectives and people who would question J.D. and Katelynn. Thus, *The Real World: Brooklyn* makes for a perfect season to compare to *San Francisco* and for studying how *The Real World* has developed over the course of fifteen years in generating social dialogue among the cast members and the nation.

In the first episode of *The Real World: Brooklyn*, before both Katelynn and J.D. come out to the rest of the house, conservative Iraq war veteran Ryan expresses concerns that both of them are hiding something. When J.D. asks Katelynn to dinner so they can talk, it only raises Ryan's concerns. Ryan openly expresses his discomfort to his Mormon – and frat boy – roommate, Chet, before finally sitting down with J.D. to discuss his and Katelynn's sexuality toward the end of the episode. In the beginning of the conversation, both Ryan and J.D. skirt around calling Katelynn transgendered until J.D. finally says, “I

⁶ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning.

have friends who are transgendered.” Ryan then immediately asks J.D. if he is gay, opening the door for the following dialogue:

J.D.: Am I gay? Yes. I am.

Ryan: Okay. That’s why I think you’re dragging her along.

J.D.: It’s because we are different from everyone else in [the cast] family.

Ryan: That’s fine.

J.D.: You know? I feel that I can be an outreach to her.

Ryan: Now I know. I knew you were gay. I was waiting for you to tell me and I wasn’t going to ask you. Though I did, technically. When you said yes, then everything made sense and we were totally on the same page. Because then I can say, “Okay, now I know why he’s taking ‘it’ out to dinner”

J.D.: Well it’s not “it”. It’s “she”.

Ryan: I know, but I don’t know what she goes by. I’m not trying to sound ignorant, but I am ignorant.

Ryan, as a young Iraq war veteran from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania who later admits has seen very few transgendered people in his life, plays the role that Rachel does in *The Real World: San Francisco* when talking to J.D. about Katelynn’s sexuality. Although Ryan is fine with the fact that J.D. is gay, he openly admits he is “ignorant” about transgendered people and what to call them. In this scene, Ryan initiates the conversation that the audience cannot about the transgendered community (“Brooklyn Bridging”). In doing so,

he opens an honest social dialogue and brings light to the lack of LGBTQ education in the United States. One poll, performed by the Human Rights Campaign, a gay advocacy group based out of Washington, D.C., while positively finding that seven out of ten people surveyed understand the word “transgendered,” very little other information and public opinion polls exist about the transgendered community, which serves as an unfortunate example of how essential dialogue about transgendered men and women is (Dahir). Social awareness and activism regarding transgendered persons has proliferated on college campuses in the form of LGBTQ resources recently, just as AIDS dialogue picked up around the airing of *The Real World: San Francisco* (Quart). However, MTV, as a powerful social force, enhances the dialogue around transgendered persons through its one-dimensional casting.

As in *The Real World: San Francisco*, other cast members in the *Brooklyn* season complement and contrast Katelynn’s one-dimensional role as “the transgendered one”. Sarah, vaguely bisexual and tattooed is analogous to Judd in *The Real World: San Francisco* as “the liberal one”. Like Judd and Pedro, Sarah and Katelynn bond right away. When Katelynn comes out to Sarah, the first person after J.D., Sarah responds in the Confessional, “Katelynn tells me that she’s transgendered. To me, it’s no big deal. I don’t think being transgendered defines her as a person... Katelynn, no matter what she was before, it doesn’t matter. She is a woman now.” (“The Outs and Ins of Brooklyn”). Sarah, as “the liberal one,” provides a comfortable personality for Katelynn to open up to her insecurities as a transgendered woman. Katelynn tells Sarah, “I really hate it because there are a lot of people who think what I’m doing is unnatural and wrong,” to which Sarah responds, “I don’t. It’s biological! What you were doing is fixing what was wrong”

(“The Outs and Ins of Brooklyn”). Just as Ryan provides the perspective of someone who is uncomfortable with Katelynn’s sexuality, Sarah provides an affirmative voice in the house. Baya, on the other hand, a dancer from Salt Lake City, acts like Cory does in *San Francisco* as “the naïve one”. When Katelynn comes out to her, Baya asks questions, allowing Katelynn to explain to her and the viewers about what it means to be transgendered.

In addition to opening the social dialogue through one-dimensional casting, MTV generated social dialogue around the LGBTQ community when cast members J.D., who is gay, Katelynn, who is transgendered, and Sarah, who is bisexual but in a heterosexual relationship for the first time, find internships at a LGBTQ community resource center (GayCenter.Org). As a result of *The Real Worlders* working at the center, it gained not only valuable MTV airtime but press as well. *The Advocate*, an award-winning print and online publication devoted to the LGBTQ community, ran a story on *The Real World: Brooklyn* ran a feature on J.D., Katelynn, and Sarah (Avery). Even publications like *The New York Times* ran stories about the *Brooklyn* season primarily focusing on the LGBTQ dialogue in the season (Bellafante). Although the season wrapped only recently on April 1, 2009, with articles and press galore, the show clearly made waves and increased the social dialogue and awareness around the LGBTQ community (MTV.com).

The Real World’s social potency

The Real World is not just entertainment; it never was. It began as a social experiment, sticking seven diverse twentysomethings in a house together in order to film them. Since it premiered, *The Real World* has made good on its promissory premise: “To

find out what happens when people stop being polite and start getting real”. While critics have contested the “reality” of *The Real World* and scorned its “one-dimensional” casting practices, they have overlooked *The Real World*’s power in bringing attention to greater social issues. The very contrivance the critics disparaged facilitated *The Real World*’s social dialogue. *The Real World: San Francisco*, by casting Republican Rachel opposite Pedro, who had AIDS, allowed conversations to be held on the show that its viewers could not have. Rachel asked the tough questions about AIDS, allowing Pedro to educate the public. Similarly, Iraq war veteran Ryan played opposite transsexual Katelynn, opening up a social dialogue about the LGBTQ experience. While *The Real World* may initially come across as a show devoted to chronicling one-dimensional twentysomethings’ drunken exploits and arguments, it has become something greater. The show has become a social commentary for the MTV generation. In its twenty-one seasons, *The Real World* has jettisoned itself from a bizarre social experiment to a potent social force, inspiring social dialogue and promoting awareness about controversial issues.

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