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Factual Media Space: Intimacy, Participation and Therapy

Introduction

Jermaine Peters, contributing to a web-based media forum offering responses to the film *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005, US), tells us:

I've never had a boyfriend, and the film makes me think that this is the way my life might be. I may eventually find someone, but we will be kept apart by society. That hurts, really deep down. I dreamt of having a husband/life partner/... and having a normal life where we both work, take holidays together, and sit and talk. Is that so much to ask? (Members of the Ultimate Brokeback Forum, 2007: 34)

As part of the Ultimate Brokeback Forum (discussed below), Jermaine's contribution reveals a personal intimacy in expressing possible life chances in contemporary online media forums. Expectations and shifts towards democracy are foregrounded by ordinary members of the public in the possibility of open access media spaces. Gay identity is presented as a normative social profile, representing shifts beyond the manufacture of non-heterosexual stereotypical forms produced historically within the media (Clum, 2000; Dyer, 2000; Russo, 1987).

This chapter focuses on gay identity within factual media forms, foregrounding potential within the talk show, documentary, reality television and online new media space. Focusing on case studies, an exploration is presented which traces the emergence of gay identity. This reveals factual media space as a prime opportunity for the exhibition of new gay and lesbian identity ideals. I argue that representational histories are challenged, largely by the efforts of ordinary citizens not necessarily in control of media production. This, I suggest, is enabled by a 'transformation in intimacy' (Giddens, 1995), where intimate storytelling
offers contemporary potential to change social worlds. Furthermore, this reveals therapeutic benefits in the opportunity to work through identity issues. This, I argue, is relevant to the framework of the oppositional public sphere, contexts of intimacy and emotion, and Carl Rogers’ (1983) idea of ‘whole person learning’. Through these potentials (discussed below), social actors engage in political agency showcasing their work within various media forms. Despite their fragmented discursive potential, I argue that they are connected through the potential of ‘performative space’ (Pullen, 2007a) within factual media. This is evident within the following case studies, where performers and producers offer new stories of engagement.

I examine the impact of talk show host Russell Harty in the United Kingdom, with a particular focus on his interview with Dirk Bogarde (also discussed in Chapter 3). Whilst Harty was not openly gay (to the general audience), he was an iconic performer expressing a subliminal sexual diversity to the masses, enabling a certain connectivity which stimulated progressive ideas. Furthermore, in progressing the diversity of factual media space, I discuss the work of Peter Adair in *Word is Out: Stories of Our Lives* (1977, US), *The AIDS Show* (1986, US) and *Absolutely Positive* (1991, US) within the documentary genre. Adair encouraged gay and lesbian social actors to express their personal, community and relationship desires, foregrounding the context of AIDS. In addition I explore the impact of Pedro Zamora whose contribution to the reality series *The Real World* (Bunim-Murray for MTV, 1992–present, US) and the documentary *In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS* (Jeanne Blake, 1995, US), offered powerful political discourse, coalescing his political work as an AIDS activist. Finally, in extending factual media to reveal the agency of the audience, I examine the impact of the film *Brokeback Mountain* with relation to the Ultimate Brokeback (web) Forum (briefly discussed above). Within this audience media producers express personal visions of connectivity to the film and its iconic meanings, extending the potential of the original text.

I will begin by contextualising these discursive possibilities, framing them within the context of the talk show. I argue that the talk show may be used as a model for what I term as ‘factual media space’ where intimate dialogue has foregrounded new stories connected to gay and lesbian lives.

**Factual media space: Joshua Gamson, the talk show and vulnerability**

Factual media space may largely be considered as ‘talk show-like’ in its propensity to offer discussion forums within various media. This is