Screen Lives:

What the experiences of documentary contributors tell us about the media

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Declaration of Authorship

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the politics of contemporary media production from the viewpoint of the ordinary people it represents. In an era of accelerated digitalisation, commercialisation, and deregulation, scholars have focused on the everyday realities of the creative labourers who work behind the scenes in the cultural industries, but little attention has been paid to the experiences of the participants who appear in front of the cameras. In the academic scholarship and public discourse alike, media contributors are frequently depicted as 'vulnerable victims' or exploited subjects of capitalist forms of media production, which prioritise profits above people. However, we have insufficient knowledge about the complexities of their motivations, the values they ascribe to participation, and whether they ultimately get from it what they desire.

Drawing upon in-depth interviews conducted over the last four years, and informed by my own professional experiences of working as a television producer/ director for the preceding sixteen, this research project examines how documentary contributors feel about participating in the media and the ways they're portrayed, considering how their experiences take shape within the structural context of the media industries.

Through an examination of a diverse range of topics - such as the casting and editing processes, the nature of relationships between documentary-makers and their subjects, issues of consent, and duty of care - I argue that the wellbeing of contributors, creative workers, and the production environment are all intrinsically connected, and as a result, ordinary participants have been profoundly affected by the changing values of the media.

Contents

1. Introduction

The cultural industries have undergone a period of rapid expansion and transformation since the early 1980s, with the pace of change accelerating further since the turn of the millennium, creating a startlingly different media landscape within the space of a generation. Whilst the societal impact and political ramifications have been debated at length, there has been relatively little focus upon what these developments mean for the ordinary people who take part in media productions. This research is an attempt to understand what a changing media looks like through the eyes of the people it represents.

From the public discourse, we might surmise that contributing to the media is an ambivalent proposition at best. Contributors are derided as fame-hungry, greedy and narcissistic on the one hand, and vulnerable victims on the other. Concerns centre on the emotional outbursts and displays of conflict which characterize modern formats; the impact of media exposure and sudden fame upon ordinary people; abuses of power and exploitation; and inadequate levels of support offered by producers. In the furore surrounding *Benefits Street*, its contributors were described by *The Observer* as a 'set of puppets' and 'lambs to the slaughter' (Bennett, 2014). The late MP for Grimsby Austin Mitchell denounced *Skint* as 'misery telly…concentrating hatred on the least well educated and the most deprived…kicking people when they're down (and gullible)' (Williams, 2014a). *The Scotsman* questioned whether members of the public should be prevented from applying for *Love Island* for their own good, likening it to a 'Victorian freakshow' or a 'human zoo'*:*

> Like all gawking reality TV, it's rooted in the distress of others. It's human bullfighting, with the same leering, jeering and faux showmanship…Christians were fed to the lions as the crowd cheered, and here we are again. These modern-day 'penny gaffs' take advantage of people whose only crime is not being self-aware enough to know they're being exploited as entertainment (Stewart, 2021).

There is a profusion of such journalistic commentary, which tends to be equally derisive of the 'utterly reprehensible' producers as the hapless contributors searching for their '15 minutes of fame' (Cooper, 2014, Bennett, 2014). Alongside tabloid opinion pieces, even the more considered investigative pieces published by the broadsheets tend to reach similar conclusions. After witnessing behind the scenes of a production of *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, Carole Cadwalladr (2008) writes:

> The show is built around creating a spectacle out of the damaged fragments of people's lives. Every morning, there's a fresh dose of broken, awful, ugly, desperate lives serve up for our, the viewing public's, delectation.

Whilst journalistic criticisms are often muddied with judgements of class and taste, it is important to note that ethical concerns about participants transcend high/ low-culture categorisations. Joshua Oppenheimer's BAFTA-winning film *The Act of Killing* was criticised for deceiving its subjects and glorifying the crimes of the Indonesian death squads responsible for the genocide of a million people in 1965-6. Nick Fraser, editor of the BBC's documentary strand *Storyville,* wrote in *The Guardian*:

> This tasteless film teaches us nothing and merely indulges the unrepentant butchers of Indonesia (2014).

Asif Kapadia's biography of Amy Winehouse won an Academy Award, but was criticised by the singer's family, who claimed they were misled and misrepresented. Her father Mitch told *The Guardian* that Kapadia's portrayal was 'negative, spiteful' and motivated by self-interest:

> Amy will not get an Oscar though. Just Asif Kapadia. That's what this is all about…Asif. He's fooled everybody (Child, 2016).

In 2019, following a series of highly-publicised suicides of former media contributors, the UK government launched a parliamentary select committee inquiry, and subsequently, the UK media and telecommunications regulator Ofcom made changes to the Broadcasting Code. A new, stricter, duty of care protocol came into force in April 2021, applying across all factual genres. The amended rules state that contributors must be informed about potential risks, and 'due care' must be taken to mitigate them, with a particular emphasis on contributors who might be categorised as 'vulnerable' (Ofcom, 2020, p.2). Broadcasters and production companies have responded by investing in mental-health screening and psychological aftercare – developments which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

Yet despite the grim picture this paints, the truth is, we know little about what kinds of experiences media participation offers to ordinary people. Whilst a great deal of academic research talks *about* media contributors, very little has spoken *to* them. Only a handful of previous studies have revolved around the viewpoint of participants. The result is that we have an insufficient understanding of their perspective: do they inevitably feel exploited and

abused by the media, or are they getting something meaningful out of the arrangement too? The persistence of stereotypical representations of contributors as victims and dupes means that we have yet to build a convincing account of their agency, and how it is both enabled and constrained during their interactions with the media. Given the context I have outlined, there is an urgent need to know more about contributors in order to instigate effective measures to safeguard them, but furthermore, it is my contention that they have much to tell us about the politics of the media. Contributors represent a fault-line where competing tensions meet: between commercial imperatives and creative goals; intimate experience and the public right to know; personal privacy and the common good. They occupy a dual status as both insiders and outsiders; both subject and object (Palmer, 2017a, p.128). They are central to the production process, but with the objectivity of the uninitiated; well-positioned to share fascinating and valuable insights, but rarely given the opportunity to do so.

In this thesis, I examine the politics and procedures of the media from the point of view of its participants. Using their subjective experiences as the basis for my analysis, I argue that the creative output and wellbeing of producers, contributors, and the production environment are all intrinsically connected, and have been fundamentally reshaped by the neo-liberal reorganisation of the industry.

1.1 The media industries context

A discourse of concern about contributors has arisen within the context of a period of profound change, in which the cultural industries 'have moved closer to the centre of economic action' (Hesmondhalgh, 2018, p.4). Until the 1980s, a comfortable duopoly of the BBC and ITV broadcast to a captive audience, reaching tens of millions of viewers every night. Since then, the launch of the independent production sector, multi-channel television, the internet, TV on demand, and streaming services are among a multitude of advances which have led to the creation of a hyper-competitive media environment and a fragmented audience.[1] These changes have been driven by policy, which has undermined the public-service broadcasting system, as well as disruptive technological innovation, and economic

[1] Although the latest Ofcom statistics show the average person now spends 5 hours 40 minutes per day consuming audio-visual content, their viewing is more diversified than ever, split between live broadcasting, viewing on demand, subscription streaming services and online video services including YouTube and TikTok.

OFCOM 2021b. Media nations: UK 2021.

pressures upon the foregoing funding model. The market forces unleashed by these developments have favoured conglomeration, consolidation and internationalisation, with a handful of vast global corporations dominating the industry, and the cultural products they make circulating across national boundaries. Although television, film, and the documentary genre have withstood these seismic shocks, the era of platform digital media has transformed the culture and politics of twentieth century communications media in a multitude of different ways, many of which are only beginning to become apparent.

A significant body of work has focussed on the impact of these changes upon the creative workers who operate within these industries, whose working conditions have undergone a parallel transition – evolving from a stable, unionised workforce of direct employees to a deregulated environment, where freelancers work in conditions of chronic precarity and insecurity. Research has shown us how these changes are embodied in the lives of cultural workers, where the pleasures of producing creative work are offset against considerable stress and anxiety (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Risk is devolved from companies to individuals, who can only meet the unrealistic expectations of their employers by working harder and longer for fewer rewards (Lee, 2012). Recently published research by the Screen Industries Growth Network found that on average, TV workers put in an extra 14 hours work per week in excess of the general population – the equivalent of two extra working days (Swords, 2022). The consequences of challenging working conditions spill over into personal lives, hampering the ability of creative workers (and particularly female creative workers) to start families, to enjoy financial stability, to sustain their careers in the longer-term, and to progress into senior roles (Wing-Fai et al., 2015, Percival, 2020). These sacrifices are justified through a romanticised discourse of self-actualisation operating at the level of individual subjectivity, with the image of media work as 'cool, creative and egalitarian' often at odds with a more ambivalent reality (Gill, 2002). This paradox represents a significant twist in capitalist relations, whereby what might once have been considered private realms of human experience are harnessed by new modes of organisational management, breaking down distinctions between work-life and the self.

We know that pressurised and precarious working environments impact upon the workers in the creative industries, but what is underexamined is how it also affects the people *they* are working with.

The potential knock-on effect of workplace bullying and exploitative conditions is raised in an article by David Lee (2012), whose interviews with a sample of creative workers suggested that ethical behaviour towards participants becomes harder to sustain in such circumstances. Lee writes:

> The moral core of television practice is being corroded from within because of the transformed institutional, economic and political context within which it is taking place (2012, p.494).

Recently, scholars such as Helen Wood (2021) have argued that the media are encouraging forms of neo-liberal labouring practices, and that participation should be classified as a form of work. To do so, Wood argues, would enable us to consider the 'care' contributors receive within the production process, rather than restricting our focus to issues of their textual representation and consumption by the audience. The framing of the apparatus for participation conceals its economic purpose and solidifies its dismissal from forms of workplace protection, and from proper inquiry. Whilst I do not wholly subscribe to this argument (for reasons I shall return to in Chapter Two), it moves the debate in a useful direction, highlighting the fact that insufficient attention has been paid to conceptualising the functions ordinary people perform within the media. Indisputably, they are a core component to the production of many types of text, and therefore, the study of production needs to address their role.

Whilst the connection between the industrial context and the slew of worrying anecdotal experiences circulating within the public domain is alluded to in this research, it remains unsubstantiated by empirical data. Graeme Turner comments:

> While the participation of ordinary people is continually claimed as the benefit to be realised from each new [technological] development, their actual participation becomes less and less the focus of investigation and research – indeed simply less of an explicit issue – in the relevant academic debates (2010, p.5)

This is particularly true within the documentary genre, where the lack of systematic attention paid to contributors is notable (Sanders, 2016). However, this research builds upon a number of important contributions from academics asking similar questions in connection to related media genres, including print journalism (Palmer, 2017a); talk-shows (Grindstaff, 2002); and reality TV (Andrejevic, 2004). As Palmer argues, contributors are worthy of study simply because they are interesting and important in their own right, but furthermore, their

experiences are deeply revealing in terms of the media's priorities and procedures, and the politics which inform production (2017a, p.4).

1.2 Textual representations of ordinary people

Scholars have traditionally approached the issue of how ordinary people appear in the media from another angle. Over more than half a century, a vast body of vibrant and important research has engaged with the ways that different social groups are problematically represented within media texts. Indeed, issues of representation have been the dominant theme of the academic discourse surrounding ordinary people and the media.

In the late 1960s and early '70s, 'second-wave' feminist academics, activists, and critical thinkers sought to challenge sexist advertisements and 'degrading' televisual events such as the *Miss World* competition, where women were depicted in a narrow range of stereotypical roles, as 'household functionaries' or 'decorative objects' (Gill, 2007, p.10). Methodologically, this pioneering research had an emphasis on content analysis: essentially counting the number of times women appeared in comparison to men, or in domestic settings, for example, to produce quantitative statistical data. Reviewing the first decade of feminist research, Gaye Tuchman (1978) claimed these findings amounted to a 'symbolic annihilation of women in the mass media' due to a combination of absence, trivialisation and condemnatory judgement.

This paradox of visibility, where contributors are caught between 'normative absence and pathological presence', is a theme which has persisted in media research (Ann Phoenix quoted in Bassel, 2017, p.18). Joshua Gamson writes about the impact of the increased public visibility of outrageous LGBT contributors on TV talk shows; the 'misfits, monsters, trash and perverts' (1998, p.4). As a gay man, and a fan of what he terms 'trash TV', he describes the thrill of seeing people, whose life experience is 'tilted towards invisibility', getting their shot at media accreditation and pushing the edges of normality ever-outwards: 'It looks, for a moment, like you own this place' (1998, p.5). To enter media space, on whatever terms, is to stake a claim to being a legitimate member of the public - yet the price of entry is high, Gamson claims, because these formats exploit as inherently as they empower. A platform is offered to hitherto ignored and marginalised groups, but in a way which distorts, commodifies and instrumentalizes them for commercial gain:

> There is no choice between manipulative spectacle and democratic forum, only the puzzle of a situation where one cannot exist without the other (1998, p.19).

Other scholars see the space occupied by ordinary people in the media as a site of cultural struggle and class exploitation. Bev Skeggs writes about how white working-class women are held up as the limit of public morality in TV depictions which focus on their excessive eating, drinking and smoking; the loudmouth, vulgar brand of hedonism displayed in hen parties; and the benefit-claimants with too many babies, who create a burden which others in society must carry. These depictions are created for the 'titillation and disapprobation' of audiences, and represent a 'crisis in middle class authority and security, epitomized in the output of TV' (2005, p.968).

Similarly, studies of representation have been the dominant mode of engagement of research into race and the media, which has drawn attention to the narrow, negative, and damaging ways ethnic minorities appear in popular culture (Saha, 2018). Stuart Hall's *Policing the Crisis*, for example, was a seminal contribution, demonstrating the role of the news in refiguring social consciousness and enabling the state to enact draconian measures of social control (2013 [1983]). Textual analysis has so often been the starting point for studies of representation, which have gone on to make broader political and societal claims about the nature of the media, looking at how their messages circulate and are consumed by audiences, and examining their ability to shape our capacity to make sense of the world around us. Whilst this work is unquestionably worthwhile and important, it's striking how little sociological attention has been paid to the people themselves. Given the influence and significance of this body of research, it's all the more astounding that more effort hasn't been directed towards asking the people who are being represented to give their own views. The conversation *about them* has rarely *included them* at all. This research is therefore an attempt to fill this gap between the subject and their representation, in order to shed greater light upon the processes of mediation which separate the two.

1.3 Research question, definitions and objectives

This research was carried out between December 2018 and June 2022. I conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of 31 documentary contributors and producers. My approach and analysis, as well as my initial interest in the topic, is informed by the sixteen years I spent working as a producer/ director in the TV industry prior to embarking upon this project. I

reflect upon my methods and sample selection in Chapter Three, but begin by discussing my research question, definitions and objectives. The central question I seek to address is:

> *What can the experiences of documentary contributors tell us about the politics of media production?*

In order to establish the aims and boundaries of this research, I want to deconstruct the component parts of this question – firstly, by considering why *documentaries*, and what is meant by this term? Whilst this research focuses specifically on the documentary genre, it would be fair to concede that the concerns about ordinary people in the media are not similarly delimited. Since I began this research in 2018, the controversy surrounding *Benefits Street* and so-called 'poverty porn' documentaries has arguably been eclipsed in the public consciousness by the spate of reality TV suicides, which have recentred the debate onto more constructed or entertainment-based styles of programming. The recent UK Government inquiry targeted talk shows and reality TV (two already disparate genres). Despite the objections of news and current affairs producers, changes to the Broadcasting Code have been applied across all factual production. And even beyond the broader categorisation of factual programming, similar debates are taking place within fictional genres about the representation of real-life characters in drama.[2] Although the role of ordinary people within every one of these genres is worthy of study, it is beyond the scope of a single piece of research to encompass such a diversity of possible generic variations. My interest in documentaries mirrors my own professional background, but is also motivated by the greater emphasis within the genre on realism and truth-telling. Documentaries bear a heightened claim to represent 'the real', and therefore, are generally perceived as a more authoritative reflection of their subjects and the circumstances of their lives.

Notions of documentary realism have been systematically dismantled by scholars who have highlighted the processes of mediation, manipulation, and even outright fakery which are intrinsic to media production, and have been further exacerbated by the advent of digital technologies which make alterations undetectable. Thirty years ago, Brian Winston prophesised 'a profound and perhaps fatal impact on the documentary film' (1995, p.5).

[2] For example, *The Secret*, ITV's 2006 dramatization of the murder of Lesley Howell was criticized by her daughter, who claimed her mother was misrepresented as a downtrodden victim. More recently, the Gucci family claimed their portrayal in Ridley Scott's film *The House of Gucci* was 'painful and insulting' (Shoard 2022).

However, as Stella Bruzzi argues, in these debates the documentary genre has often been judged to have failed because 'it could not be decontaminated of its representational quality' (2006, p.6):

> Repeatedly invoked by documentary theory is the idealised notion, on the one hand, of the pure documentary in which the relationship between the image and the real is straightforward, and on the other, the very impossibility of this aspiration (2006, p.5).

Bruzzi argues against the naïve realism characterizing this brand of criticism, entreating scholars to:

> …simply accept that a documentary can never be the real world, that the camera can never capture life as it would have unravelled had it not interfered, and the results of this collision between apparatus and subject are what constitutes a documentary (2006, p.10).

Whilst I agree that documentaries have a value in excess of their mimetic properties, and should not be condemned for their failure to neutrally reproduce 'real life' in textual form, I want to argue that debates about realism have tended to overshadow the more complex and interesting issue of *truth.*

According to Andrew Barry, discussions of truth in non-fiction media, which have been marginal within the scholarship, should be central to conceptualisations of its role (1993, p.487). Drawing upon John Stuart Mill, Barry claims the pursuit of truth is a 'regenerative ideal' for liberal societies, facilitated by free speech which enables the accumulation of knowledge and formation of individual opinions; the production of truth, therefore, is a goal towards which democratic processes 'could and should be directed' (1993, p.478).

If documentary-makers can be absolved of the responsibility to recreate the real mimetically, an imperative persists for them to show the *truth* of what they have witnessed. Their central task remains to capture some kind of emotional truth, or general truth about human life, in order that their viewers are enabled to formulate truths of their own. An orientation towards truth rather than reality is a more ethical, aesthetic, and subjective pursuit, and one which in turn, lends greater specificity to the objectives of this thesis. Rather than using the experiences of contributors to evaluate how accurately their 'realities' were

reproduced within a text, it is instead the aim of this research to explore how ethical and aesthetic values in relation to representing 'other' people fare within the politics of a commercially-oriented system of media production. Whilst there is no singular truth for documentaries to be judged against, contributors have privileged knowledge in respect to their own stories, and are therefore able to offer an account of the politics which inform the production of truth.

Documentaries have been identified as both a cause and a casualty of a dysfunctional relationship between the media and ordinary people. In 2008, documentary-director Paul Watson used his BAFTA acceptance speech to lament the popularity of 'sneering, bullying' reality formats which seek to 'shock and gain notoriety by brutalising and denigrating [their] subjects,' who allow themselves to be belittled and exploited because 'their lives are so boring and meaningless, a fleeting appearance on the small screen is the only way they validate themselves' (Watson, 2008). According to Watson, the impact of reality TV is being felt throughout factual production, changing the way the public considers their role within the media, encouraging them to regard the prospect of participation with increasing suspicion and a heightened awareness of the processes of mediation, and therefore hampering the efforts of 'real' filmmakers to engage with 'serious' subjects (Banks-Smith, 2006, Armstrong, 2006).

Documentary scholars have displayed a similar reticence to engage with the topic. With its lineage in film studies, the scholarship's focus on feature documentaries made by auteur directors has led to a historic neglect of the organisational context and production processes, and consequently, discussions about the role of ordinary people have largely been left to scholars of reality TV and popular culture. It is, however, disingenuous to argue that documentary stands apart from these criticisms, or should be excluded from these debates. The lives of ordinary people have been a core concern of documentaries throughout their history. The curious gaze with which the filmmaker regards their subject is, for some scholars, a definitional element of the genre. For John Ellis, documentaries are 'a series of encounters' between the two (2011, p.10); for Agnieszka Piotrowska, they are 'a story of the other' (2013b, p.57).

Many, if not most, of the documentary texts within my sample contain features of hybridity, borrowing the technologies of reality TV, or styles of formatting associated with more constructed factual programming, for example. There are long-standing debates about the generic boundaries of documentary (for a recent summary, see Ellis, 2021). Whilst it isn't

my intention to attempt to resolve or concretize inherently slippery definitions within this study, they present a pragmatic difficulty in terms of sampling, which will be further discussed in Chapter Three.

It's also important to unpack what it means to be a *contributor.* One of the legacies of the realist epistemology which has historically framed the discussion of documentaries, is the lingering idea that contributors are merely being observed by the cameras and crew. More recent scholarship has challenged this misapprehension, inviting us to consider media participation as a more radical intervention in people's lives. In *New Documentary* (2006), Stella Bruzzi emphasises the social construction of documentaries, contending they are essentially performative acts – but the implications of this shift in understanding (and in particular, how it relates to documentary contributors) haven't been fully thought through: what does it mean for real people to perform themselves?

Goffman's contention is that every social situation necessitates a performance of some kind. Our behaviour is moulded to fit our interpretation of the circumstances and the expectations of others:

> I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: 'What is it that's going on here?' Whether asked explicitly, as in times of confusion and doubt, or tacitly, during occasions of usual certitude, the question is put and the answer to it is presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand (1986, p.8).

Although documentaries are not unique as sites of social performance, they do have distinctive features. As John Ellis (2011) points out, these encounters are further complicated by the fact that the interactants are navigating two social situations concurrently – the face-to-face encounter, and their performance in the resulting film, which will be broadcast to a mass audience. Negotiating the discrepancies in these performative expectations can lead to moments of what Goffman called 'flooding out', where the mask slips and the performance dissolves into fits of uncontrollable rage or laughter. According to Goffman, this is likely to occur when an individual feels 'obliged to enact a role they think is intrinsically not themselves'; their lapse generating a 'sense of the precariousness of the frame' (1986, pp.352-4).

Other scholars have written about how the performative expectations of ordinary people are placed under excessive pressure by formatted styles of production, for example, in living

history documentaries, where real people are 'sent back' to live the lives of their ancestors. For Lacey & McElroy (2010), these performances can become problematic when there is a slippage between their real contemporary selves and their reconstructed media world, crossing ideological and aesthetic boundaries. Contributors might be able to taste the same food and wear the same clothes, for example, but a different kind of performative leap is required when they are asked to listen to a wartime radio broadcast and feel the same visceral fear of those about to be bombed. Joshua Gamson writes that the performative expectations of talk shows guests require them to be 'fake real', or 'real people who act', creating a 'strikingly dishonest little world that is littered with highly charged moments of truth' (1998, p.70). But as Goffman's work suggests, there is no straightforward contrast between the fake self and the real self; therefore, any attempt to enforce the distinction between the real person and the performance would be futile (Bruzzi, 2006, p.184).

Again, there are important implications for this research. In presenting the accounts of contributors, I am not seeking to 'expose' the inherent artificiality or constructed quality of their representations, but instead, to think carefully about the nature of their performance: why ordinary people are compelled to it, what advantages it brings them, and what it can cost.

In referring to *the politics of media production*, what I want to convey first of all is an approach to studying the media which was pioneered by researchers who embedded themselves within production environments such as the BBC's newsroom (Gitlin, 2005 [1983], Schlesinger, 1978), and science department (Silverstone, 1985). Over the past twenty years, production studies has developed into a dedicated field of research, with important contributions including John Caldwell's study of the rituals and routines of film and video production workers in LA (2008); Georgina Born's impressive ethnography of the BBC (2011); and Hesmondhalgh & Baker's behind the scenes account of the making of a TV talent show (2011). In their introduction to an influential collection, Vicki Mayer, Miranda Banks & John Caldwell claim that media production studies 'borrow theoretical insights from the social sciences and humanities, but, perhaps most importantly, they take the lived realities of people involved in media production as the subjects for theorizing production as culture' (2009, p.4). My reference to politics is not intended to register an interest in formal political institutions, but rather the everyday politics which Mark Banks defines as 'how [a thing] is constructed, managed and performed' (2007, p.3). I want to draw attention to some of the layers through which this idea of the politics of media production appears throughout this

thesis. Firstly, there is the interplay between the individual and the organisational, and the way in which examining an individual's experiences can illuminate broader issues, such as the influence of commercialism, deregulation, the operations of media institutions, and technological developments. Conversely, an appreciation of such organisational factors can also enable us to make sense of facets of individual experience, such as visibility, recognition, representation, accountability and care. In recently published work, Bethany Klein & Stephen Coleman (2021) argue that appearing on TV could be considered an alternative mode of self-representation at a time when the legitimacy of conventional politics has been undermined by widespread public distrust, apathy and cynicism; and that the voices and reflections of contributors should be taken more seriously in light of the increasing centrality of media participation in everyday life (2021, p.2). I return to the question of whether media participation could constitute a form of digital citizenship in Chapter Four, but for now, what I am trying to signal is an overt interest in power, and the way it is iterated throughout the micro-interactions of the production process; an awareness that a set of relations is being produced between the media and the people it represents, alongside the tangible artefact of the text.

As mediators between the ordinary people they *work with* and the media organisations they *work for*, documentary-makers play an important supporting role in this project. Existing research has explored their experiences in the workplace, but has not generally focussed upon the aspects of their working lives which involve engaging with contributors. I have therefore, included interviews with a small number of documentary-makers amongst my sample in order to provide a context for participation, linking the individual accounts of contributors to industry politics.

Finally, to circle back to the remaining key term in my question – *experiences* – by this, I wish to convey an emphasis upon subjectivity, not only for its own intrinsic value, but also as a means of connecting the drier topics of institutional practice, policy, and bureaucracy to the actual people involved, by tracking the way this politics of media production unfolds through specific moments and instances, and is embodied in their lived experience.

1.4 Thesis structure

Having described my topic and approach, and the objectives of my research, in the remainder of the introduction, I will outline the structure of the rest of the thesis. In Chapter Two, I

review the relevant literature about the role played by ordinary people in the media, and how it intersects with patterns of change and continuity in the cultural industries and society more generally. I then describe the various ways participation has been conceptualised within the documentary scholarship more specifically, before finally locating this work within debates about creative labour and the cultural industries. In the context of these discussions, I examine some of the key concepts which will play a role throughout the rest of the thesis, such as exploitation, democratization, and power. Chapter Three establishes the methodology I have employed, including the research design, data collection, sampling and analysis, reflections on how my positionality as a researcher is informed by my own involvement in the industry, as well the measures I have built in to minimise the risk of misrepresenting people who in some cases, have already been misrepresented by the media.

Chapters Four, Five and Six deal with the processes and procedures through which documentary participation is organised. By analysing the mechanics of how members of the public are recruited, and the ways in which these practices shape their subjectivities, I examine their role in reproducing and institutionalising systematic inequalities. The main argument I want to put forward is that the commercial framework and the ongoing marketisation of the media have a considerable impact upon the people at the centre of production processes, resulting in a participatory deficit which has profound social consequences.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the different motivations that contributors bring to documentary production. A clearer grasp of motivations is a vital preliminary to this topic of research, because until we know more about what ordinary people hope to gain from participating, we cannot evaluate the extent to which it fulfils their hopes and expectations. By reframing participation as an inherently political act, I hope to disrupt some of the persistent and reductive clichés about contributors as fame-hungry narcissists, or victims of the media.

Chapter Five is about the casting process, where issues of access and fairness loom large. By comparing the different approaches to casting experienced by my interviewees, I hope to demonstrate the influence of the commercial context, and how it exacerbates pre-existing patterns of social visibility and marginalisation.

The subject of Chapter Six is consent. Examining how consent works in the documentary context, as both a bureaucratic process and an ethical concern, allows us to consider the legal and moral obligations producers have towards their subjects. Ostensibly a process which

formalises participation and enshrines the rights of contributors, my research reveals how consent can also become a means of disempowering them.

Although many of the processes under discussion are not limited to a specific stage of production, the organisation of my data follows a roughly chronological logic, moving on from the pre-production stages towards the filming itself. Chapter Seven deals with the relationships between documentary filmmakers and their subjects, which can have a longevity and intensity which distinguishes them from other forms of media production. Typically analysed through a focus on unequal power dynamics, my aim in this chapter is to think about the documentary relationship as a form of labour, performed within the challenging conditions of the contemporary media workplace.

Chapter Eight considers the wellbeing of contributors, examining the potential risks and benefits that participation presents. Here, I consider Ofcom's new duty of care measures in greater detail, arguing their effectiveness has been compromised by their failure to pay sufficient attention to the structural causes of contributor distress. The argument I make is that the wellbeing of participants is inextricably linked to both the wellbeing of producers and the political-economy of the media industries.

Chapter Nine examines patterns of presence and absence enacted in editorial decisions during the filming and the edit. I analyse incidences of censorship and self-censorship, staging and construction, and the influence of culturally-embedded narrative norms, which mean contributors can find their amorphous experiences bent into story arcs, with a beginning, middle and end. Several of my interviewees took part in documentaries filmed using a 'fixed-rig' – heralded as 'television's holy grail' by filmmakers who claimed it would offer unmediated access to real life (Littleboy, 2013, p.134). Their experiences offer a compelling explanation of the reasons why technical solutions can never collapse the difference between representation and reality.

Chapter Ten focuses on what happens when contributors encounter the text and their mediated selves, and how they navigate the transition from documentary subject to representational object. Scholars have previously noted the uniquely creepy and unsettling effect of watching oneself on screen (Piotrowska, 2013b, Palmer, 2017a). My aim here is to develop the work of those who precede me by describing how production arrangements are utilised to manage the politics of representing human subjects. Also under discussion is the marketing of texts, and their journey through the press and social media. Finally, in Chapter

Eleven, I bring together the main findings of the thesis and the answers they provide to the central research question.

2. Documentary contributors and the cultural industries

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundations for this thesis, bringing together the academic literature which has influenced the development of my topic, choice of genre, and approach, and identifying the debates to which it seeks to contribute.

Firstly, I wish to engage with a significant thread of scholarship addressing the role of ordinary people in the media, which to date, has largely focussed on reality TV, unscripted entertainment, and journalism (Turner, 2010, Andrejevic, 2004, Palmer, 2017a). The expanded presence of 'the ordinary' in media culture is reflective of significant transformations in wider society and the functions of the media. Whilst some commentators and scholars claim there is something inherently democratizing about representations of the *demos* and everyday life, for others, they are inherently deceptive and exploitative. With reference to the relevant literature, I explore this paradox, unpacking the normative implications of key terms such as *democratization, exploitation,* and *flourishing*, and how they apply to this research.

In section 2.2, my analysis then turns towards the genre-specific research about contributors from the documentary scholarship, which is largely framed through a textual engagement with canonical works, privileging feature-length films created by auteur directors. Through my discussion of this literature, I show that whilst the current debates about duty of care emphasise 'the new' - such as the longevity of digital texts, or the trolling people are exposed to on social media – a trawl through the literature reminds us of the endurance of more fundamental issues connected to imbalances of power, the terms of consent, and fair representation, which have persisted from the very beginnings of cinematic documentary in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Brian Winston claims that since the Grierson era, documentary-makers have been drawn to making films about the 'victims of society', who are easily manipulated and exploited, and have little to gain from participation (1988, p.35). In this section, I examine ideas about victimization and exploitation by considering their manifestations within both the interpersonal and structural organisation of production, and present alternative means of understanding the documentary encounter, foregrounding the importance of relationships, unconscious psychological mechanisms, and questions of power. By engaging with this body of work, I provide a rationale for developing an approach to media participation which gives equal weight to subjective experiences alongside economic explanations.

Finally, I locate my research within a lineage of scholarship which examines creative labour and the cultural industries, exploring some of the influential ideas underpinning this work, and its key concepts. In this section, I consider how structural reorganisation and digitalization has transformed documentary production, and revolutionised creative labour, building a picture of the contemporary media context which forms the backdrop to the experiences of media contributors. Here, I argue that the study of creative work should be extended to include those who participate on-screen as well as off-camera, and consider what kinds of insights might be gained from doing so.

2.1 Ordinary people and the media

According to Graeme Turner (2010), media culture has taken a 'demotic turn', characterised by a proliferation of opportunities for ordinary people to participate across a diverse range of formats and platforms – from vox pops on the news, to entertainment talent-shows, to online blogs and social media. Although the demotic turn is usually associated with the development of reality TV, the internet, and the dawning of the digital era around the turn of the millennium, these transformations could be more accurately described as accelerating rather than initiating the trend. Charlotte Brunsdon (2003) writes about the 'daytimization' of the schedules in the '90s, pointing to a diverse range of social and institutional developments as influential factors, including the arrival of multichannel TV, the rise in property ownership, female entry into the workforce, the postponement of motherhood, and the privatization of leisure time. Domestic issues such as cooking, home-improvement, and makeovers proliferated, with a quadrupling of lifestyle formats at prime-time between the start and the end of the decade.

Casualties of the explosion of the ordinary included some of the more traditional factual genres. A 2006 Ofcom review found that 'serious' documentaries were in serious decline, with Channel 4 commissioning 25% fewer than they had five years previously (Holmwood, 2007). In her history of Channel 4, Maggie Brown quotes the then-Head of Documentaries Angus McQueen's assessment of the output during this time:

> Channel 4 had become very conservative…like my old aunt giving me advice: how to live, eat, clean the house, bring up my kids, talk to my husband – middle class norms, conservative with a small 'c' (2020, p.319).

Mark Andrejevic (2004) takes a broader view on the historical factors underpinning the shift. Tracing the roots of reality TV back to observational documentaries of the 1970s, such as the PBS series *An American Family,* Andrejevic argues the valorisation of ordinariness emerged during the transition from the post-war Fordist model of industrial production to the era of flexible capitalism, when the destabilisation of mass society necessitated a remaking of boundaries in order to maintain social and cultural hierarchies. Around the turn of the millennium, the apparent invitation for real people to share control of the media became ideologically important, at a time when real control over financial resources was becoming concentrated in the hands of a privileged few. According to Andrejevic, the ostensible democratizing of celebrity has played some role in enabling a growing societal divide:

> The offer of participation…compensates (symbolically) for growing inequality and…keeps alive the promise that 'anyone' can make it in an era when the concentration of wealth and ownership in the hands of an increasingly rarefied group of elites is becoming increasingly obvious (2004, p.76).

Participation can be understood as a kind of compensatory offer - the sugar coating which helps us to swallow a bitter pill – but this might suggest that the expanding presence of real people in the media corresponds to an expansion in opportunities for positive recognition and representation. In other words, it invites the question of whether media visibility has led to empowerment for the real people who take part, and a democratization of the representational resources of the media?

It is firstly important to acknowledge the power of simply being seen, and the striking impact media visibility can have upon our collective ideas of what it is to be an ordinary person. Brunsdon claims the inclusion of gay and mixed-race couples within the '90s lifestyle trend - depicted doing normal things like hanging wallpaper, choosing what to wear, and making their breakfast - has made a 'considerable contribution to changing ideas of what it is to be British…these people were just not on television 25 years ago' (2003, pp.13-18).

Yet these opportunities are also associated with risks. John B. Thompson argues that mediated visibility is not only a way of bringing aspects of social and political life to the attention of others, but has become the principle means through which social and political values are articulated and contested:

> In this modern age of mediated visibility, the struggle to be seen and heard, and the struggle to make others see and hear, has become an inseparable part of the social and political conflicts of our time (2005, p.49).

Mediated visibility is characterised not only by conflict, but also by a kind of fragility, where communicative attempts are particularly prone to gaffes, leaks, outbursts and scandals. The processes of mediation make this type of social interaction impossible to control, and liable to backfire. Shakuntala Banaji and David Buckingham explore the idea that the Internet could provide a form of digital citizenship to young people by enabling new forms of civic participation, but find the discursive meaning of *civic* is vague and nebulous, and not all forms of participation are benign. In fact, they warn: 'the danger is that - far from encouraging civic participation – some online activity becomes a substitute for it' (2010, p.22). The implication for this research is that the connection between broadening access and democratization is neither automatic nor uncomplicated; the politics of participation require further examination.

At the other end of the spectrum, scholars have claimed that far from being empowered through participation, contributors are being exploited. Annette Hill (2007) highlights the distinction between the popularity of reality programming and the unpopularity of their participants, who frequently become hate-figures, mocked and reviled by the public. Audiences employ distancing strategies, dissociating themselves from the people whose lives they are watching. It is the role of the participant to be humiliated, shamed, and exposed; parachuted into emotionally challenging situations and provoked into extreme reactions. Audiences are suspicious of their motives, perceiving their willingness to debase themselves through the pursuit of fame, and judging them to be, therefore, less entitled to an ethics of fair treatment. Rather than feeling concern and empathy for contributors, viewers adopt a 'shallow ethical position', holding them (rather than the TV producers) responsible for the negative ways in which they are represented (2007, p.206).

The idea that the ordinary people who take part in reality television are scorned and exploited is reiterated by Bev Skeggs, who claims the role of these participants – particularly white working-class women - is to perform the attributes they 'lack':

> These are subjectivities out of control, beyond propriety, excessive. They cannot accrue value to themselves because their displays devalue, visually calibrating the failures of self-responsibility. They provide a spectacle of subjectivity turned sour,

> an epidemic of the will, their own responsibility for making bad choices (2005, p.974).

In displaying their 'bad selves', reality participants function as the constitutive limit of bourgeois respectability: 'Class relations are being made through these processes' (2005, p.974).

Whilst the critique is aimed at the media, an unflattering depiction of contributors emerges from these accounts, as deserving victims. They are deluded, fame-hungry, work-shy, naïve, or narcissistic, and with a degree of inevitability, will be chewed up and spat back out again by a ruthlessly commercial industry. In short, they are being exploited, and their complicity denotes a failure to grasp the truth of the situation they are entering into.

Exploitation is an important concept in relation to media contributors, to which I want to devote some space for consideration. Exploitation is one of the terms featured in the cultural historian Raymond Williams' brilliant book about lexical semantics, *Keywords* (2014b [1976]). Its early usage in France and England at the beginning of the nineteenth century was linked to the feudal system of land management, the industrial and commercial use of resources, and the colonial exploitation of overseas territories. Initially, the word had a positive resonance, relating to what were deemed successful projects, but later morphed towards more pejorative associations connected with slavery, subjugation, excessive wealth, and deceptive practices (2014b [1976], pp.92-3). David Hesmondhalgh makes the distinction between the everyday definition of the word and the classical Marxist definition, which sees labour exploitation as resulting from the ownership of the means of production by the capitalist class (2015, p.31). Putting aside for a moment the possible objection that participants are not paid workers (a matter to which I'll return in Chapter Four), a conventional account of labour relations is undermined in this context by the lack of coercion or consequence. No one expects or obliges, nor would think any less of ordinary members of the public, should they decide against taking part in media productions. They are not compelled to act by the necessity to put a roof over their heads or food in their bellies. Hesmondhalgh (2015) argues that a critical conception of exploitation should instead be centred on systemic unjust advantage and suffering – the potential for both of which are in ample evidence in this scenario. Voluntarily agreeing to take part in a documentary is not comparable to labouring on a factory floor, but nevertheless, there is real potential for

exploitation and suffering to take place, which should be measured not as absolutes, but in degrees.

The apparent voluntarism through which participants put themselves into a position whereby their own exploitation may follow only becomes explicable if we also consider the potential opportunities it provides them to flourish. The concept of flourishing was developed by Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2006), who created a list of central human capabilities, ranging from bodily health and integrity; to the ability to play, imagine, and feel emotions. Crucially, to flourish is not the same as to be happy, and this was evident in my conversations with interviewees – many of whom underwent intense emotional discomfort whilst contributing to documentaries, but nevertheless considered themselves to have benefitted from the experience of taking part. For documentary contributors, it may be considered that the potential to be exploited is off-set by the possibility of flourishing, which is why a recognition of their motivations and pleasures is so fundamental to an account of media participation: without this, their choices are hard to comprehend.

The conceptualisation of participants as exploited victims offers a partial account of media participation, but lacks an understanding of contributors as conscious and motivated agents *as well as* potential subjects of exploitation. Scholars such as Fuller (2005), Gaudenzi (2013) and Dovey (2014) describe the media as an ecosystem, where texts are 'relational objects' dependent upon the active participation of several actants, which therefore do not exist as separable independent entities (Gaudenzi, 2013, p.15). According to Dovey, the apparently contradictory dynamics of exploitation and collaboration observable within media participation are more accurately understood as inseparably intertwined – an ontological insight which shifts our emphasis towards seeking out patterns of connectivity and relationality; examining the ways in which the modes of participation available to real people are mediated, and how their agency functions within these contexts. Exploitation is, therefore, a core issue, but a term which must be approached with caution, mindful that its connections to economic relations could be reductive, and to an extent, missing the greater point of what it is that contributors are actually doing when they take part in media productions.

The problem with the narratives which have tended to dominate discussions of media participation - of 'individualised psychological deficits or cultural narcissism' (Wood et al., 2017, p.117) - is they tell us little about the subjectivities of contributors: their hopes and expectations, their lived experiences, their pleasures and their concerns. They analyse the

political ramifications of media participation without paying sufficient notice to the people involved. Furthermore, through their focus upon pathologized individuals, they also operate to 'efface the profound changes in structural conditions of media industries' and their potential effects (2017, p.118). There is a deeper, more complex story about media contributors which deserves our attention.

Although a number of scholars have argued that a higher priority should be placed upon contributors within media research, there remains a dearth of empirical data (Sanders, 2016, Sanders and Nash, 2019, Wood et al., 2017). Helen Wood, Jilly Boyce Kay & Mark Banks (2017) conclude that the paucity of more situated analyses of the activities, practices and talk of those who produce texts – both on and off-camera – means that we are left with an incomplete sense of their desires and motivations, which may include the need 'to achieve a social standing, have a voice within the public sphere, or secure some sense of control by escaping an inherited social fate' (2017, p.124).

A handful of research papers have been published based upon case studies of individual contributors (Curnutt, 2009, Shufeldt and Gale, 2007, Nash, 2010), but our understanding has been limited by a lack of systematic empirical attention. One notable exception – and perhaps the most direct precursor for this research – comes from the adjacent field of journalism studies. Between 2009 and 2011, Ruth Palmer interviewed 83 ordinary people who had been the subject of newspaper stories, to find out how they felt about their media involvement (2017a). Palmer's ground-breaking study was the first to offer a systematic account of media participation from the perspective of contributors. Rather than being duped or conned, Palmer found most subjects had made a rational and balanced calculation of the risks and benefits of participation. They were cognisant of the pitfalls of media exposure, but had chosen to take part nonetheless - not necessarily because they were flattered or seduced by the reporter, but because they identified a clear and coherent range of potentially positive outcomes. What emerges from Palmer's research is a conceptualisation of subjects as complex individuals, who sometimes feel ill-used, but who also stand to benefit from their involvement; a diverse collection of people who have differing levels of agency, whose relationships with journalists are complicated by asymmetries of power, but who nonetheless, often locate pleasure in participating. The assumption that news subjects are victims of the media is demonstrated to be both reductive and inaccurate. In this way, Palmer demonstrates the potential of empirically-based research, which devotes close attention to subjective experiences, to reset entrenched ethical debates.

However, whereas Palmer's news subjects had typically fleeting relationships with their reporters – in some cases, having their stories featured in the media without their consent or active participation – documentary contributors experience a very different kind of involvement with the media, sometimes lasting for months, years, or even (in the case of one of my interviewees) whole lifetimes. As much as they might evade definitions and overlap, significant distinctions between different mediums remain, and merit further research.[3] In the following section, I will review the genre-specific work on contributors which has arisen from the study of documentaries.

2.2 Documentary contributors

The documentary scholarship is largely based around a canonical repertoire of feature documentaries. This work tends to be heavily informed by film theory and textual analysis, but nevertheless betrays a long-standing concern for contributors. One of the earliest documentary films was Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North (1922)*, which depicted the everyday lives of a family of indigenous Inuits in Northeastern Canada, and was filmed on location in Quebec in 1920 over a period of 16 months. A fire in the cutting room destroyed the rushes of an earlier version of the film, leading Flaherty to reshoot, this time putting human interest at the centre of the story – an accident which, a hundred years later, continues to shape the generic expectations of documentary (Barnouw, 1983, p.35). But scholars have criticised the film and the discourses surrounding it, questioning the role of visual media in legitimating anthropological knowledge and other regimes of truth (Rony, 1996, p.100). Although presented as a contemporary record, the events of the film were based upon the everyday lives of what was in fact an earlier generation. By the 1920s, the Inuits were using motorised vehicles and rifles, eating canned food, and living in wooden framed houses; yet most signs of twentieth century life and white contact were erased for the purposes of filming. The documentary is soaked in false nostalgia, grasping onto a vanishing culture which was already changing under the influences of modernity and colonialism. Nanook wasn't really called Nanook, but Allakariallak. He was exposed to physical dangers during the making of the film, hunting walruses and seals without the use of his rifle. Flaherty had sexual relationships with a number of the women in the film, fathering then abandoning at least one Inuit son. Despite the worldwide commercial success of the film, its protagonist

[3] See Chapter Three for further discussion of documentary definitions.

died two years later, either of starvation or disease (1996, pp.122-3; 104). Thus from the genre's very beginnings, tensions emerge between real and representation, artistic success and ethical practice, and what happens off-camera vs what is depicted on-screen - tensions which remain at the heart of documentary scholarship a century later.

In contrast to the denigrated figure of the reality TV contributor, Flaherty's Inuits were uncomplicatedly benign – noble, hard-working, skilled hunters - heroic survivors battling the Arctic elements whilst all the time 'incessantly smiling' (1996, p.109). The valorisation of the everyday man is a theme shared by the Griersonian documentaries of the 1930s, which focussed upon the lives of fishermen, shipworkers, coal miners and slum dwellers; and social issues such as malnourishment, labour strikes and overcrowded schools. John Grierson believed in the democratic potential of documentary, as a tool to help inform, engage and represent the apathetic citizenry (Barnouw, 1983, p.85). The Griersonians may have intended their films to serve a political purpose, but Winston claims 'they were nothing but poseurs, clutching their double firsts from Cambridge' (1988, p.35). By training their lens on people who are marginalised within society, the filmmakers guaranteed they would have the upper hand in almost any documentary situation, and their contributors were easily manipulated (1988, p.41). According to Winston, the Griersonian focus on victims has been assimilated within the documentary tradition, yet their plight remains unchanged, and the films have patently done more good to the documentarists than it has to their subjects (1988, p.52).

There is something seductive about this account, with its apparent elevation of the rights of ordinary contributors in the face of exploitation and manipulation by powerful media organisations, yet there is a simplistic conflation of the lower classes with victimhood, as though the connection between the two is straightforward and direct. The claim that documentaries are ineffective agents of social change is held to be self-evident because of the continuing existence of a working class, whose numbers are 'scarcely diminished' (1988, p.41) – but even whilst capitalist structures persist, society is not resistant to change. Winston's arguments rest upon shaky empirical foundations and a number of untested assumptions. Without a greater knowledge of how contributors themselves understand their experiences, the characterisation of them as victims is a conjecture.

At the heart of much of the criticism of documentary filmmaking are questions of power. As Kate Nash claims, power in relation to documentary is typically confronted as a problem:

> A negative force, a force of domination; it prevents, restrains and commands the participant (2010, p.23).

However, the conceptualisation of power presented in such accounts is equated with the ability of documentary-makers to dominate their subjects, to the exclusion of more nuanced analyses. Nash poses the question:

> In focussing exclusively on the documentary-maker's exploitation of the participant do we conceal the complex power relationships that make documentary possible? (2010, p.24).

Nash goes on to argue that the emphasis placed upon filmmakers' power has obscured the importance of building an account of contributors' agency, and how the individual is transformed into a social subject. Although power critiques have been the dominant theme of the scholarship, they are not necessarily the only – or even the best – framework for interrogating the 'difficult space' between documentary-maker and subject (Piotrowska, 2013b, p.2). Drawing upon psychoanalytical concepts, and in particular, the work of Lacan, Agnieszka Piotrowska argues the documentary encounter is governed by unconscious mechanisms – the key one being transference. Within clinical psychoanalysis, transference is a term used to describe the attachment between analyst and analysand which enables therapeutic work to take place, but may involve a transfer of misplaced or archaic emotions from past encounters, frequently presenting itself as intense feelings of desire, or even love (2013b, pp.45-6). Piotrowska believes that transference is not confined to the clinic-room, but is a common and everyday feature of the workplace within a whole range of different professions and institutional settings. The intensity of the documentary encounter, involving intimate disclosures and self-exploration, make it a particularly fertile environment for such emotions to flourish:

> Documentary filmmakers often appear the perfect canvases on which to draw one's emotions. Just like psychoanalysts, they listen, they try to stay 'professional' regardless of their drives, they attempt to hold onto their boundaries in order not to reveal too much of themselves to those about whom they make films. These very attempts of course make them perfect candidates for experiencing transference (2013b, pp.48).

The difficulty of transference within the context of documentary production is that it remains unnamed, and therefore hidden, creating confusion and sometimes hurt feelings when

contributors are ultimately left feeling manipulated, used, and exploited. Psychoanalytically-based accounts of documentary making demonstrate the crucial importance of examining the subjective and emotional dimensions of participation – not supplanting, but alongside issues of power and exploitation. However, the focus on the dyadic relationship between filmer and filmed leaves little space for the consideration of issues of structure, and the influence of the context in which these encounters are enacted.

In the academic literature, there has been a historical lack of empirical research about the methods of documentary production. Willemien Sanders (2016) argues that documentary participants have been theorised almost exclusively in terms of ethics, exploitation and vulnerability. They have significant creative input, yet are regarded as extrinsic to the institutional context in which productions are made, and have been erroneously excluded from production studies research (2012, p.202). One important exception, and a key influence underpinning this research, is Patricia Aufderheide's *Honest Truths* (2009). Based on interviews with 45 documentary-makers in the United States, Aufderheide challenges the cliches of filmmakers as deceptive and ruthless, revealing the ethical dilemmas they face when adjudicating between creative and commercial imperatives, and the fair treatment of their subjects. Aufderheide's research suggests that filmmakers have protective feelings towards their contributors, and in some circumstances, are willing to share creative control; yet at the same time, they recognise that manipulation and deception go hand-in-hand with their work. In contrast to Piotrowska, she describes the relationship in pragmatic terms, as 'less than a friendship and more than a professional relationship' (2009, p.6). Crucially, Aufderheide's work attributes appropriate significance and complexity to the connection between filmmakers and their industry, demonstrating how the link between the two can, in some ways, make filmmakers vulnerable as well as powerful, with individual workers 'trying to behave conscientiously within a ruthlessly bottom-line business environment' (2009, p.20).

The links between such an environment and the dysfunctional and potentially exploitative practices described by documentary scholars merits further critical attention, in order that the context in which such encounters take shape can be fully appreciated. In the following section of this chapter, I review what we know about the working conditions and practices of creative labour, describing the evolution of this research, the insights it has generated, and why I believe its scope should be expanded to consider the people in front of the camera as well as those behind it.

2.3 Creative labour in the cultural industries

It is little wonder that the role of media contributors is under-recognised – only recently have labour theorists acknowledged that cultural work is actually work at all. Traditionally, more 'authentic' forms of work associated with manufacturing and heavy industry, or bureaucratic office-life have dominated our understanding of what *real* work consists of. By contrast, creative work is regarded as trivial, superfluous, and frivolous – a fun or pleasurable vocation rather than a structured economic activity (Banks, 2007, p.8).

However, there are compelling reasons to take creative labour seriously. David Hesmondhalgh argues that the importance of the cultural industries finds its basis in three related elements: their ability to make and circulate products that can influence our understanding of the world; their role in the organisation and management of creativity and knowledge; and their influence as agents of economic, social and cultural change (2007, p.7). Work in the cultural industries is highly desirable. Viewed as egalitarian, progressive, and self-actualizing on the one hand, whilst marked by conditions of chronic precarity, endemic exploitation and individualised risk on the other; the paradoxes of creative work pre-empt and illuminate a new evolution of capitalist labour relations:

> Creative labour markets are exemplary of patterns that emerge more broadly within the "new capitalism", where class and gender re-emerge as significant factors determining success within opaque, networked modes of insecure, contingent employment (Lee, 2012, p.483).

A number of influential bodies of research underpin the contemporary interest in the cultural industries and creative labour. The concept of cultural industries derives from the work of Frankfurt School philosophers, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1972), writing in exile from Nazi Germany in the 1940s, but unpublished until the 1970s. Their biting critique about the commodification and industrialisation of culture claims it functions as a tool for the transmission of ideology. Revisited by scholars in the '70s and '80s, Adorno and Horkheimer's account was deemed elitist, excessively pessimistic, and economically determinist (Miège, 1989). However, the lineage of cultural industries research within Marxist critique remains important, with culture frequently theorised to be a means for the dissemination of capitalist values.

A second thread of scholarship developed in the 1970s and '80s, taking a sociological, often ethnographic approach to the analysis of newsroom cultures (Tunstall, 1971, Gans,

1980). For his classic study, *Putting 'Reality' Together* (1978), Philip Schlesinger spent over four years observing TV and radio newsrooms and interviewing members of staff to learn about the bureaucratic routines and ideologies of news gathering. Also at the BBC, Roger Silverstone followed the genesis of an episode of the long-running science series, *Horizon,* with the aim of examining the 'negotiation with a set of political, aesthetic, technical and bureaucratic constraints which provide the context for most of the filmmaking in a given organisation or culture' (1985, p.2).

These studies found that institutional norms and practices have a hugely powerful effect in constraining the agency of individual creative workers. However, in the years since this research was carried out, the role of broadcasting institutions has changed dramatically. Since the launch of Channel 4 in the 1980s, government policy has been geared towards the expansion of competition and the commercial broadcasting sector, targeted by Margaret Thatcher during her push towards privatization, who called it the 'last bastion of restrictive practices' (quoted in Sparks, 1994, p.142). The creation of an independent production sector put downward pressure on budgets. Within the BBC and ITV, centralised commissioning and internal markets were introduced to increase their competitiveness and cut costs. Georgina Born (2011) writes about the BBC's institutional responses to these conditions, such as the rush towards popular or fashionable genres, the generation of repeatable formats as a strategy for managing risk, the reliance on marketing tools such as ratings and scheduling, and the advent of managerial culture at the expense of the autonomy of creative staff.

The independent sector might've started as a network of small-scale kitchen-table businesses (Brown, 2020), but over time, market forces have favoured size and scale. David Hesmondhalgh writes:

> An oligopoly of vast multinational corporations now dominates cultural production and circulation in North America and Europe, and to a lesser extent in Asia (2007, p.186).

Alongside these organisational and structural changes, the past twenty years have seen significant technological developments, brought about by the arrival of the internet and digitalisation. In documentaries, production methods have been revolutionised by the advent of handheld digital cameras, which, accompanied by falling budgets, has led to the prevalence of multi-tasking self-shooting producer/directors, who work without a crew (Ellis, 2011, p.44).

Around the turn of the millennium, scholars who became known as the 'digital optimists' wrote celebratory accounts heralding the democratizing potential of these technologies, which put the means of production directly into people's hands, giving ordinary members of the public the opportunity to bypass the traditional platform gatekeepers to broadcast their own content. As the century has worn on, these emancipatory claims seem risible in the light of what we've since learned about big data, privacy, surveillance, and the continuing concentration of media power.[4] But what has the reorganisation of the media industries meant for creative workers? The work of documentary production now tends to be freelance, project-based and insecure, characterised by long working hours, de-unionisation and uneven financial rewards (Lee, 2012, p.481). Project teams are afforded a relatively large degree of autonomy, but the division of labour is organised hierarchically, and characterised by sharp distinctions in status and financial rewards (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, pp.96-7). Furthermore, the negative aspects of creative work impact disproportionately upon those who are already marginalised by society – the working-class entrants who cannot afford to accept unpaid internships; the mid-career women who leave in droves when they have children, then never progress to the upper echelons of management, which continue to be dominated by white men (Conor et al., 2015, Franks, 2013). Last year, for the first time, Ofcom reported that more people were leaving the TV industry than joining (Ofcom, 2021a). The latest *State of Play* survey of almost 1,200 production workers, conducted by Bournemouth University in association with BECTU, found 'unethical' and 'damaging' working conditions in which discrimination, nepotism and bullying thrive, and indeed, are normalised as 'how the industry works' (Van Raalte, 2021, pp.5-6).

Scholars have explored the puzzle this situation presents: where cultural work is perceived as desirable and highly prized, despite the ambivalent proposition it offers its workers, who embrace long-hours and low-pay with apparent enthusiasm. Influenced by Foucault, governmental theories of cultural work emphasise the immanence of power in all social contexts; seeking to reveal how power relations are embedded within societal institutions, and maintained and reproduced through everyday discourses and procedures (Banks, 2007, p.41). In a widely-cited article, Gillian Ursell (2000) describes the connection between late-stage capitalism and very particular technologies of self, whereby 'one constructs oneself with a view to marketability and value-adding propensities' (2000, p.809). Our subjective desires for self-actualization are harnessed by corporations, who promote work as a source of

[4] See Chapter 10 of David Hesmondhalgh's *The Cultural Industries* (2018) for a comprehensive summary.

meaning and identity, and regimes of consumption as a way of shaping individuality. Within the TV industry, the authority of the firm extends beyond their own internal hierarchy, into an externalised pool of surplus labour. 'An economy of favours' has developed to organise a scarce resource: not the money so much as the work itself (2000, p.813). Workers' ostensible acceptance of exploitative working conditions could therefore be understood as an investment in reputation-building within a closed occupational community; and an industry which appears to be a progressive workplace, but is in many ways, in fact the opposite. A recent report on occupational distress in factual TV production claims:

> On the surface, TV culture appears to be an egalitarian, dressed-down world in which the idea of autonomy and the right of the individual to have an independent voice is fully respected. But that is true only in part. Many producers…also described a world that is markedly hierarchal, even quasi-military in structure (Rees, 2019, p.17).

The report goes on to detail the rigid chain-of-command structure and expectation of unquestioning compliance, which makes it difficult for juniors to challenge senior staff, or to raise issues of conscience. However, Ursell rejects the idea that the workers' complicity makes them 'ideological dupes', insisting that other motivations are at play – including the 'buzz', the challenge, the pursuit of pleasure, the scope for creativity and aesthetic self-expression:

> For workers, television production is simultaneously a source of potential rewards, both material and existential, and a source of definite exploitation. At its heart are processes of commodification, in large part activated and realised by the workers themselves (2000, p.819).

Governmentality, with its focus on internalized systems of power alongside the external structures of ownership and control, has directed scholarly attention towards the micro-routines and everyday subjective experiences of those who work in the media, and the development of a corpus of work which could be referred to as media production studies (Hesmondhalgh, 2010a). Analysing creative practices and the internal working of media institutions has become a valuable way of revealing the imperatives, priorities, and pressures of cultural production; illuminating questions of power, and how it is inhabited and exercised by producers; and drawing connections between the social and cultural conditions of production and the resulting text (Paterson et al., 2016, p.9). Although there has been little

engagement with the perspective of media contributors, these studies are of particular relevance to my research – not only in terms of their epistemological approach, but also the understanding they offer of the circumstances through which the participation of media contributors is enacted.

Milestone studies around the turn of the millennium included Andrew Ross' *No-collar* (2004) – which dug beneath the informality and apparent autonomy offered by the workplaces of the New Economy centred in New York's Silicon Alley during the dot.com boom - and Angela McRobbie's research on the alienating logic of creative work in London, and how its failure to deliver upon its utopian promise could ultimately lead to self-blame and disillusionment among workers (2002). One of the main inspirations for my research is Laura Grindstaff's study of the production of confessional TV talk-shows in America, *The Money Shot* (2002). In the late '90s, Grindstaff was employed as a production assistant and intern on two daytime chat shows. During this time, talk-shows were regarded as the nadir of popular culture: sensationalist, tabloid, fake, and callous in terms of their exploitation of their guests. The production of cultural hierarchy was one of Grindstaff's core concerns, and she used her experiences behind the scenes as a lens through which to examine these structures and their relation to social inequality (2002, p.29).

Although the perspective Grindstaff inhabits is primarily that of the producers, she also writes extensively about the ordinary contributors who appear on the shows, and how they are 'produced' for mass consumption. The term 'ordinary' implies a particular set of values in this context. Talk show guests are not people who are average or typical or representative; often quite the opposite. Their status as 'ordinary' carries an expectation about what they will talk about and where their source of authority lies. In contrast to expert and celebrity guests - who are understood to be more distanced and dignified, with their private lives off-limits - ordinary contributors are authorised only to discuss personal matters – sexuality, conflict, victimization, abuse - with a maximum of emotional expressivity, their expertise stemming from first-hand experience (2002, p.19). The text's claim to authenticity is based upon these displays:

> The genre is thus a kind of machine for producing ordinariness, where ordinariness is associated with emotion (the body) and expertness with reason (the mind), the former a signifier of the private world of personal relations, the latter a signifier of the larger universe of social relations (2002, p.21).

In *The Money Shot*, and in her later work, Grindstaff examines the construction of performance in real people, demonstrating the way in which producers orchestrate dramatic situations, both on and off-screen, building a scaffold from which contributors can 'play' a version of themselves 'with a maximum of emotional and physical expressiveness' (2009, p.71). Storylines are not encoded in formal scripts, but embedded in social situations and mutually understood generic conventions.

Another significant contribution, this time based in the UK, is David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker's *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (2011). Like Grindstaff, Hesmondhalgh and Baker develop Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labour to describe the work of cultural production. Hochschild claims emotional labour is employed when work is performed upon people rather than things. Emotional labour 'requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (1983, p.7). It is not the labour itself, but its link to an underlying exploitative system of recompense which is troubling. By connecting the two, Hochschild's concept enables us to see how the textual and organisational conditions are registered in the experiences of TV workers (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011, p.170) – and, I would argue, in the subjective experiences of the participants as well.

Hesmondhalgh and Baker deal explicitly with questions of normativity, asking what kinds of experiences are offered by the cultural industries to their workers, and establishing a criteria for judging what constitutes good or bad work (2011, p.7). They offer a framework of features characterising the good – for example, decent pay, autonomy, sociality, work-life balance, and security – and also the bad – such as boredom, isolation, overwork, and risk (2011, p.17). As well as thinking about the production processes, their focus includes the quality of the products they create, and their potential contribution to the wellbeing of others and the common good. They develop this framework by relating it to the specific context of cultural production, in order to explain the structural forces which might shape these experiences. Their conclusion - that cultural work is 'the hardest way to make an easy living' - foregrounds its fundamental ambivalence, and seeks to position the problem of 'good' work as a component of broader political problems of freedom, equality and the social division of labour (2011, pp.221-2).

In both of these key studies, issues of diversity and exclusion are never far from the analysis. For Grindstaff, the production of ordinariness is both rooted in and reproduces

class-based assumptions. The emotional expressiveness mandated by talk-shows is coded as a bodily display, which is out-of-control, vulgar, and fundamentally lower-class (2002, pp.267-8). The exploitative manipulation of contributors is ensured by institutional and generic requirements which compel producers to 'go after the most vulnerable and disenfranchised, making entertainment out of lives distorted by poverty and hardship' (2002, p.253). The gendered tilt of the problems of creative labour is noted by Hesmondhalgh and Baker, who describe the disproportionate impact of difficult working conditions upon the careers of female producers (2011, p.147). In recent years, the industry has publicly grappled with its diversity problem. MacTaggart lectures by Michaela Coel, David Olusoga, and Jack Thorne have highlighted the lack of opportunities for black and disabled producers. David Olusoga told the Edinburgh TV Festival:

> In all honesty, if I had known how lonely it was going to be being black in this industry, how much the deck was stacked against me – in terms of both race and class – I am sad to say that I would have never attempted a career in television (2020).

Notwithstanding the introduction of diversity quotas on and off-screen, the most recent report by Directors UK (2018) found that just 2% of TV programmes are made by directors from ethnic minority backgrounds. A recent report by the Screen Industries Growth Network found that women in their 20s are earning 39% less than their male counterparts (Swords, 2022). Undoubtedly, a chronic lack of inclusivity is one of the more problematic features of working conditions in the media industries, which despite their claims to nurture raw talent and enable meritocratic advancement, remain 'enclaves of privilege' (Banks, 2017, p.91).

The link between the lack of diversity behind the camera and problematic textual representations is further explored by Anamik Saha (2012), who shows how Asian producers can become complicit in creating racist representations because of the cultures of production they are working within. Diversity is treated as an HR problem, but would be better understood as an outcome of a deregulated working environment where only the privileged can flourish, and sensationalist content is perceived as a means of creating competitive advantage. Capitalism, therefore, is a major influence in governing counter-narratives of difference in the age of global neo-liberalism (2012, p.426).

Despite the important insights generated by this body of research, one of the key arguments I want to make is that the study of creative labour has been excessively narrow and

restrictive in the ways in which it defines labour, focussing on paid workers to the exclusion of the different kinds of creative contribution which are essential to media production: the most obvious one being the contribution of on-screen participants. The role played by these ordinary people has been significantly under-conceptualised. An exception I wish to acknowledge is the argument which positions contributors as unpaid workers in a post-industrial advanced capitalist economy, which invites new forms of self-commodification and immaterial labour.[5] Alison Hearn (2006) claims the work of self-presentation involved in TV participation is a form of self-spectacularization and image-entrepreneurship, which is part of a broader corporate colonization of the 'real'. Contributors are converting their embodied subjectivity into a commodified image with recognizable market value. The fame and notoriety they hope to gain from participation becomes an asset subject to capitalist exchange. Hearn argues that although participants are actively engaged in their own self-commodification, their agency is limited by the process itself. The personas available to them are 'pre-set, freeze dried presentations of self, moulded by a prior knowledge of the dictates of the reality television genre, and deployed strategically to garner attention and potentially, profit' (2006, p.134). Their immaterial labour does not create a product per se, but first and foremost, a capital relation – dramatizing and embodying the collapse of any meaningful distinction between the individual and capitalist processes of production, and the subsumption of social existence by capital (2006, p.132; p.145).

Having worked as an advisor to the UK parliamentary select committee enquiry investigating the spate of suicides of reality TV participants, Helen Wood makes a similar argument for contributors to be classed as creative workers, albeit through a different rationale, motivated by a bid to see them properly renumerated and have their wellbeing protected by workplace regulations (2021). Whilst I share these concerns, and admire their intentions, I would argue that further study into the experiences of contributors is a necessary precursor to any kind of re-evaluation, in order that important differences between production staff and participants are not overlooked, conflated, or misapprehended.

[5] Immaterial labour is defined by Lazzarato as: 'The labour that produces the information and cultural content of the commodity' (1996: 1). For a discussion about the relative merits and shortcomings of this approach, see Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 159).

One obvious such difference is the limited evidence of financial gain for contributors, either from the programmes they participate in directly, or by monetizing their public profile in the aftermath. Perhaps it might be argued that work is not always exchanged for payment, and the very fact this labour goes unpaid is evidence of its exploitative nature; but as David Hesmondhalgh (2010b) argues, the frequent pairing of free labour with exploitation is unconvincing and incoherent, lacking analytical precision. The fact that labour is performed for free does not in itself constitute sufficient grounds for objection - indeed, from practising musical instruments to playing Sunday league football, most cultural activities go unpaid (2010b, p.277). The decisions of ordinary people to participate in the media are not reducible to capital or economic relations – a broader variety of rewards and motivations guide their choices. Furthermore, in amalgamating workers and contributors to the same category, there is a risk of eliding the significant differences in their structural positions – their differing goals and expectations, the disparities in the knowledge and expertise they bring to a production; and perhaps most of all, their dissimilar relationships to configurations of power.

2.4 Conclusion

This review of the existing literature reveals a combination of insights to build upon and deficits to address, helping to concretize the research priorities of this thesis. The scholarship on ordinary people highlights the changing values of the media, and their connection to a wider political, social, and economic context. It draws attention to the ambivalent relationship between media texts and the people who feature in them, but has explored these broader implications from a stage of remove, without always paying sufficient attention to the actual people involved. There is a particular paucity of systematic and situated analyses to help us understand the roles they play.

The documentary studies research reveals enduring concerns about exploitation, and the asymmetrical relations of power between documentary-makers and their subjects, but has been restricted in its scope, methodologically narrow, and limited in terms of the perception it offers of the ways that contributors exercise their agency. This is most evident in discussions of power and exploitation, which fail to take into account the motivations, pleasures, and experiential involvement of media contributors, resulting in a characterisation of them as hapless victims, which simplifies and distorts in a similar manner to the media representations they are critiquing.

Research on creative labour demonstrates the potential advances to be gained through empirically-focussed study, but has been limited in the way it defines labour. The overall argument I want to bring forward is that the study of creative work should be extended to include participants. The subjective experiences of contributors are not only fascinating because of the unique perspective they afford, but can also be recognised as a neglected component in analyses of the relationship between the capitalist context, production conditions, and the politics of representation, which therefore has the potential to illuminate these issues.

A study about the experiences of documentary contributors must therefore pay mind to the political context without losing touch with the subjectivities of the people at their centre; offer an exploration of generic structures, but not in a totalizing sense, negating individual agency; and look beyond the text itself towards everyday production practices in order to observe how the politics of media production are embodied and enacted.

3. Research design and Methodology

Having established the aims and objectives of this project, and identified its relationship to the relevant academic debates, I now want to focus on the design of the research and methodological approach. In the following chapter, I describe the rationale behind the choices I have made, and consider how they enable me to go about answering the central question organising this research project, which is: *What can the experiences of documentary contributors tell us about the politics of media production*?

Firstly, in section 3.1, I describe the research philosophy underpinning my analytical approach, and how it has guided my decisions. In section 3.2, I move onto the mechanics of data collection and sampling. Alongside a description of the methodology, I have included details of the people in my sample, and a rationale for why I chose to interview each of them. In section 3.3, I give details of my method of data analysis, and its limitations. In section 3.4, I conceptualise the field of study and research objects, reflecting upon how the unstable theoretical boundaries between fact and fiction impact upon the pragmatic processes of gathering and analysing the data. In an effort to contextualise the claims made by this thesis, I will also reflect upon the ways in which my own professional background in documentary production mediates the approach I have taken and the subsequent findings. Finally, in section 3.5, I discuss the ethical review process, reflecting upon the challenges posed by representing representations of others, and the measures I have taken to minimise the risks of repeating or compounding the pitfalls and potentials I have intended to draw attention to.

3.1 Research design

This is a qualitative research project, influenced by ethnographic and feminist approaches to media research which aim to capture a sense of values, narratives, personal histories and subjective experience. The research design is based around thirty-one in-depth interviews, which were carried out between December 2018 and June 2022.

Because there was little existing empirical research to build upon, and with numerous variables which could potentially affect the nature of contributors' participation and influence their experiences, I chose to follow a grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis. Grounded theory is defined by Glaser and Strauss (2017 [1967]) as a constant comparative method of social analysis, which aims to develop qualitative inquiry beyond the

descriptive, with the goal of generating theoretical insights (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003, p.441). This approach offered the most appropriate means of answering my core question, not only because of its ability to build substantive theory up from ground level, but also because of its ability to infer relationships between research-objects: in this case, the link between the experiences of documentary contributors and the politics of media production (Gynnild, 2016, p.122; p.126).

Although the emphasis of this research is on contributors, I decided it was important to also include a small sample of documentary-makers. They were able to offer an overview, allowing me to situate the data I was gathering within the more general context of media production and the cultural industries. As the point of connection between the two, speaking to documentary-makers provided a way of understanding how the media environment in which they operate impacts upon ordinary people.

Interviews are one of the most widely-used qualitative methods, but it is nonetheless important to acknowledge their shortcomings as a research tool. Their use is premised upon an epistemological assumption that it is possible to learn about people and their motivations by asking questions, and that the interviewees are well-positioned to offer a straightforward account. Yet as Andrew Sayer claims, 'people do not understand themselves or others perfectly or truthfully' (2010, p.38). Interviews are a form of knowledge based on *telling* rather than *doing* or *being*, which Schechner characterises as 'twice-behaved behaviour' (quoted in Coleman, 2013, p.91). This can be problematic, as systematic or historical influences may not form part of their consciousness, or be so naturalised that they are taken for granted (Hesmondhalgh, 2017b, p.27). However, the perspective of hindsight from which my interviewees must speak also brings benefits to the research. The ripple that participating in a documentary has created through their lives is relevant information, and narrating events from a position of temporal and psychological distance offers them the opportunity to reflect upon its impact in ways which may not have been available to them at the time. The important epistemological caveat is that the data generated and analysed here should not be understood as definitive or sacrosanct, but as a dialogically-produced reflection of how my research participants have ascribed meaning to their experiences at a particular moment in time.

I considered interviewing the actual documentary-makers my participants had worked with in order to get a fuller sense of the productions they describe, but eventually decided not

to, as I didn't want the research to have a sense of adjudicating between differences of opinion. My focus upon the perspective of participants redresses its historical absence in public debates, and therefore the accounts I analyse are subjective, favouring one-side of the story rather than offering a definitive version of events.

The qualitative approach I applied to the interviews was enabled through many hours of preparatory viewing, familiarising myself with the relevant texts in order to make the discussions personal and specific rather than generic. As well as viewing their documentaries, I prepared for the interviews by speaking to potential interviewees over the phone, reading reviews and interviews in the press and on social media, taking notes, and writing memos to document my ideas as they took shape. This involved a significant investment of time, and had a knock-on in terms of the sample size I was able to build, changing the tenor of the research from 'extensive' to 'intensive' (Harré, 1980).

I decided not to include any textual analysis of the documentaries my participants took part in, and to centre upon their subjective experiences rather than any kind of critical evaluation of their representation. In part, this decision was pragmatic - because of the sheer volume of data I would have to deal with – but also because this method would not directly help to answer my research question. However, there were moments when it would have been useful to compare the interview data alongside a more objective account of the text, and I acknowledge this limitation.

I have chosen not to anonymise my participants, because the specificity of their subject-position is an important part of understanding their stories and experiences. By definition, they are already figures whose stories are in the public domain, and by not identifying them, there is a danger I could erroneously implicate other contributors in the documentaries under discussion. In a few instances, the quotes I have used in the thesis are unattributed, to avoid making individual or unnecessary criticisms. Blurred organisational boundaries mean it is difficult to attribute responsibility or 'blame' for poor treatment or misrepresentations, and in any case, my intention is to scrutinise working cultures rather than mistakes which may have been made by individual producers or the companies they work for. The decision to name my participants has a significant impact upon the way the reader engages with this research, and one of my aims in naming them is to present my interviewees as collaborators rather than subjects - as three-dimensional people, rather than generic information sources. Every

contributor has been given the opportunity to read the entire thesis prior to publication, to add their comments, and amend as they see fit.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

Because of huge diversity of people who take part in documentaries, under all kinds of differing circumstances, it was not feasible to effectuate a representative sample. Instead, I used a purposive approach, building a sample which was geared towards generating as broad a range of data as possible. In the first instance, I made an effort to include documentaries made by different production companies and broadcasters, including the BBC and ITV, as well as various independents. The emphasis is mostly on television, which remains the dominant mode of documentary production in the UK, but I have also included texts which have been made for cinematic-release and streaming platforms. I sought to balance my sample between highly-acclaimed and award-winning films alongside more populist or sensationalised styles, including some which were explicitly criticised for their representations of contributors. Rather than relying upon crudely quantifiable social characteristics, such as age, gender, and ethnicity, I have tried to build meaningful diversity by encompassing a wide variety of different subject-positions and participatory experiences. I followed up leads and ideas as they arose in my research, seeking out documentaries which placed different kinds of demands on their contributors, following them through challenging life experiences, for example, or for extended periods of time.

Most of the people I interviewed spoke positively about their overall experiences of participation. In effect, this meant I had to purposefully seek out people who had grievances to air. This struck me as justifiable, because of the value in building an understanding of how and why things can go wrong, but it is equally important to acknowledge the unintended effect of amplifying negative experiences, which are not necessarily representative. Further quantitative work would be needed to in order to arrive at any conclusions about how commonly these types of experiences arise.

My selection of interviewees was governed, to some extent, by practicalities. I needed to be able to view the documentaries they'd taken part in, so the texts had to be available online, or through one of the databases the University subscribes to, such as Box of Broadcasts (Learning on Screen). I also needed to be able to trace the contributors, which effectively meant that most of my interviewees had some kind of online presence. Mostly, I contacted

them through personal websites or social media sites such as LinkedIn or Twitter. There were a few exceptions, of people whose phone numbers I obtained from professional contacts or press offices. A handful of the interviewees are people I had pre-existing relationships with – former work colleagues, and in one case, family members. I chose to interview these people because I knew they had exceptionally interesting stories to tell, and I wanted to include their accounts within my research. I judged that the compromise to objectivity (a subject to which I'll return shortly) was outweighed by the value of the insights their experiences could enable.

I invested time in sending each person a tailored request, making sure I knew a little about them, and was familiar with their documentary. I explained my rationale for choosing them, emphasising what I anticipated would be unique and useful about the contribution they could make. The vast majority said yes. I spoke to many more people than I formally interviewed, both over the phone and in-person. Some were reluctant to go public with their comments, or hadn't been involved as contributors but had information they wanted to share about a particular production, or the way the industry operates. At their request, their names and specific details won't appear in this thesis, but their input was nevertheless invaluable, and has helped to shape my thinking.

Approximately 80% of the sample are contributors and 20% documentary-makers. Within the parlance of this thesis I tend to refer to them as documentary-makers, producers, or sometimes borrowing John Ellis' more inclusive term (to incorporate amateur footage and user-generated content), 'filmers' (2011, p.25). In factual production, the roles of producing and directing are often combined, and my sample also includes executive producers, and people who might perform different professional roles on different projects. In using the term 'producers', my intended meaning is the people who broadly-speaking produce documentaries, rather than the more limited job title. As the documentary-makers are a small sub-sample of the whole, I have tended to gravitate towards more senior and experienced crew members. It would have been beneficial to interview people at different stages in their careers, and in different roles – perhaps including technical staff such as camera-operators and editors, who will have their own relationships to the participants they work with – and with a larger sample, this might have been possible.

The relatively small sample size is a significant limitation of this research. The biggest constraint on numbers was that each interviewee came with an associated quantity of

viewing. In the cases of people who took part in several documentaries, or in repeating series – and particularly the documentary-makers, who had a whole career's worth of credits to familiarise myself with - this could take many hours. In the cases of some of the producers I interviewed, it was impossible to watch their full body of work, and I had to make judicious selections based on time, availability, and personal judgements about which films might've raised issues with their contributors. Inevitably during these interviews, I regretted being unable to have watched more, as examples arose which I was unfamiliar with, though the producers were unfailingly patient in describing work I hadn't seen.

In advance of the interviews, I tended to prioritise preparation rather than sticking to a generic list of questions. I tried to give my interviewees ample opportunity to discuss what was important to them by asking open-ended questions and following their cues. Soliciting thoughtful and honest answers has as much to do with building a connection as raising any particular topics or concerns, and as such, I decided to invest time in getting to know them, speaking to them over the phone, going to meet them in their homes or places of work, taking them out for coffee or lunch. Then in March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and the UK went into a series of lockdowns. The research continued but migrated online, which was vastly more time-efficient, but perhaps lost something in terms of the depth of relationships, which would be impossible to quantify in terms of its impact upon the project, but should nonetheless be acknowledged. Most of the interviews lasted between 1-2 hours, but the shortest (with a busy company director, whose story I felt was valuable) was only 15 minutes. No one was paid, nor asked for any payment. I made audio recordings of the interviews, and took contemporaneous notes of any other phone-calls, emails, and conversations with my interviewees.

Here follows a list of the people I interviewed, with a brief biographical note and rationale for why I wanted to speak to them. I have decided to provide these details within the body of the chapter, rather than as an appendix, because an understanding of who they are is vital to the reader, and has an effect upon how the findings of the research are interpreted. By collecting this information in a single place, it is also my intention to provide a reference point for readers to remind themselves of who I'm speaking about when I'm discussing data from their interviews throughout the thesis.

	Name[6]	Production	Details
1.	Ashleigh Williams	*Louis Theroux: Selling Sex* BBC2 Tx: 2020	Williams is a sex-worker and art student in her 20s, who describes herself as working class, gay, bi-racial, autistic, and a survivor of sexual abuse (2020). Having interviewed a substantial number of people who'd had largely positive experiences, I decided to seek out alternative perspectives. I found Williams online via an open letter she wrote to the BBC complaining about her treatment and the way she was represented (Harvey, 2019). I interviewed Williams alongside her friend and co-contributor, Georgina Tyson.
2.	Claire Lewis	Credits include: *Seven Up* (1984 – present) *The End of the Line* (2009) *Jimmy's Farm* (2004)	Lewis is an award-winning producer known for her work on the *Seven Up* series over the last 40 years, alongside Michael Apted. She's now a freelancer, but began her TV career as a staff member at Granada, having previously worked as a school teacher and a journalist. Lewis is known for making documentaries about sensitive subjects, including autism and the care system, and has also produced cinema features.
3.	Daisy Asquith	Credits include: *Queerama* (2017) *After the Dance* (2015)	Asquith has directed 25 films for the BBC, Channel 4, Irish Film Board and the BFI. She's won or been nominated for a number of awards, including a Grierson, an RTS, and a BAFTA. She's a senior lecturer in creative video and screen documentary at Goldsmiths, University of London and has a PhD from the University of Sussex – see www.daisyasquith.co.uk.

[6] Documentary-makers are shaded grey

		15: This is Me (2000)	
4.	Emily Ingold	*Shut Ins: Britain's Fattest People* Channel 4 Tx: 2019	Ingold was filmed undergoing weight-loss surgery for a Channel 4 documentary series. I contacted after reading a newspaper article which called the programme 'exploitative and troubling', along with comments online questioning why on earth anyone would agree to take part (Smith, 2017). I spoke to Ingold over the phone and found that, contrary to the public perception, she'd found the experience transformative and overwhelmingly positive, and decided to interview her to find out more.
5.	Emily Speirs	*Born to be Different* Channel 4 Tx: 2003 - present	Speirs has spina bifida, and has been filmed throughout her entire life, since she was an unborn baby in utero, for a long-running Channel 4 series chronicling the ups and downs of family life for disabled children and their parents. I interviewed her to examine the dynamics of longitudinal filming, and the intensity of the relationships between documentary-makers and their contributors which underpin such projects.
6.	Gemma Rawnsley	*Feral Families* Channel 4 Tx: 2017	Rawnsley is a mother of seven who lives in Hebden Bridge, who took part in *Feral Families:* a documentary about 'no-rules parenting' which generated a substantial backlash on social media and in the press. I interviewed Rawnsley to explore how it feels to be at the centre of a social media storm.
7.	Georgina Tyson	*Louis Theroux: Selling Sex* BBC2 Tx: 2020	Georgina Tyson had a small on-screen role in *Louis Theroux: Selling Sex,* alongside her friend Ashleigh Williams. Tyson spoke to me about how she felt about being largely edited out from the final cut, highlighting issues concerning the differing status and treatment of major and minor contributors.

8.	Heather Ward	*Can't Stop Won't Stop Hoarding* Channel Five Tx: 2014	Heather Ward took part in a Channel Five documentary about her elderly father, who is a hoarder, and has since participated in a further programme made by the same production company called *Hoarders: Landfill in My Living Room* (2019). I interviewed Ward to learn about how the process of making the documentary interacted with their complex family dynamic, and find out more about how the wellbeing of vulnerable contributors was safeguarded during the production.
9.	Janet Morsy	*24 Hours in A&E* Channel 4 Tx: 2018	Morsy was an 'accidental' contributor, who was filmed for *24 Hours in A&E* after she was stabbed by a stranger in a random attack in a supermarket carpark. She was unaware that she'd been filmed via remote cameras until her consent was gained retrospectively several days later. I was keen to speak to her to explore the idea of impersonal filming, and how it impacts upon ideas about documentary realism and informed consent.
10.	Jeff White	*Brainwashing Stacey: Anti-abortion Camp* BBC Three Tx: 2017	Jeff White is an anti-abortion activist based in Southern California, who runs an organisation called Survivors of the Abortion Holocaust, and has taken part in numerous documentaries over the past 30 years. BBC presenter Stacey Dooley attended one of his annual anti-abortion summer camps for Christian teenagers, where she observed the group and challenged their views. After the issue of objectivity came up during my interviews, I decided to speak to people with controversial beliefs to find out how they felt about the way this journalistic norm is enacted by the media.
11.	Jenna Presley	*Feral Families* Channel 4 Tx: 2017	Along with Gemma Rawnsley, Jenna Presley took part in a Channel 4 documentary which was ostensibly about home-schooling. I interviewed her about the issues which arose regarding children and consent.

12.	Jenny Smith	*Educating the East End* Channel 4 Tx: 2014	Jenny Smith is the headteacher of Frederick Bremer school in East London, which was featured in the high-profile Channel 4 series, *Educating the East End*. I spoke to her to explore the politics of filming in public institutions, and the use of fixed rig technology.
13.	Jerry Rothwell	Credits include: *The Reason I Jump* (2020) *How to Save the World* (2015) *Heavy Load* (2008)	At the suggestion of a mutual friend, I interviewed Jerry Rothwell, who has won numerous awards, including two Grierson Awards, a Sundance Award and Special Jury Prize, and two British Independent Film Awards. Rothwell began his career in community filmmaking and is primarily known for cinema-release feature docs, which proved to be hugely useful in highlighting the impact that different organisational structures can have upon the experiences of documentary-makers and their contributors.
14.	Jo Lockwood	*The Making of Me* Channel 4 Tx: 2019	Jo Lockwood and her wife Marie were filmed for more than two years as she underwent a gender transition. The film focussed on how her transition affected their marriage, and I was interested to find out what it was like to have the cameras follow them through their changing personal circumstances.
15.	Jonny Mitchell	*Educating Yorkshire* Channel 4 Tx: 2013	After participating in *Educating Yorkshire*, Mitchell briefly became a TV celebrity, and was offered lucrative roles on other high-profile shows including *Strictly Come Dancing* and *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here*. I interviewed him about the experience of overnight fame and the impact it had upon his everyday life.
16.	Julian Dismore	*My Life: Danny the Bravest Boy in the World*	Julian Dismore is a former colleague from ITV who recently took part in a documentary about his disabled son, Danny. I was interested to speak to him, as someone with

		CBBC Tx: 2020	experiences on both sides of the camera, to find out how his perception shifted through the process of participating.
17.	Kate Warrender	*The Real Death in Paradise* Discovery Tx: 2022	Kate Warrender is my aunt, who recently took part in a documentary about the death of her son (my cousin), Charlie, who was killed under suspicious circumstances in the Seychelles in 2015 aged 23, whilst serving with the Royal Navy. Charlie's death was never properly investigated, and was widely misreported in the press at the time. Speaking to the media offered an alternative way of correcting this misinformation and seeking justice, but came at the risk of further misrepresentations.
18.	Kulvinder Lall	*Operation Live* Channel Five Tx: 2018	Kulvinder Lall works at Bart's Hospital as one of the UK's top cardiac surgeons. Along with the hospital trust, he took the bold decision to allow an OB unit access to his operating theatre to film surgery live and in real-time. I spoke to Lall about risk, consent, and filming in public institutions.
19.	Liane Piper	*Ugly Me: My Life with Body Dysmorphia* BBC Three Tx: 2018	Piper was filmed for a BBC documentary as she was first diagnosed with body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), then underwent a year-long process of therapy at the Maudsley Hospital. I decided to interview people who fit into Ofcom's definition of 'vulnerable contributors' to find out more about how their wellbeing is safeguarded during the production process, and the ways they are represented in the media.
20.	Luisa Hammett	*Great Ormond Street* BBC2 Tx: 2015	Luisa Hammett was filmed at Great Ormond Street Hospital whilst her 17-month-old son, Cody underwent life-or-death brain surgery. I interviewed her about the ethics of filming people during extreme or distressing events, and why she decided to allow the cameras to film her son's operation.

21.	Lydia Tischler	*The Last Survivors* BBC One Tx: 2019	Having recently turned 90 at the time of our interview in 2019, Lydia Tischler is one of the UK's last remaining Holocaust survivors, who spent her teenage years interned in Terezin and Auschwitz, where her mother was murdered by the Nazis (Tischler, 2018). She took part in Arthur Cary's BAFTA-winning documentary, but her contribution was largely edited out. I was interested to talk to her about this, and also Lawrence Langer's (1996) ideas about the pervasiveness of culturally-preferred narratives in retellings of the Holocaust, and how denial continues to shape the speech of its survivors.
22.	Nikita Roberts	*My Extreme OCD Life* Channel Five Tx: 2017	23-year old Nikita Roberts took part in a documentary about obsessive compulsive disorder. OCD is widely misunderstood, and frequently misrepresented in the media. Having spent most of her life concealing her condition, from even her closest friends and colleagues, I was interested to learn about the impact that going public had upon Roberts' life.
23.	Omari Eccleston-Brown	*Ugly Me: My Life with Body Dysmorphia* BBC Three Tx: 2018	After interviewing Liane Piper, I decided to approach Omari Eccleston-Browne, who took part in the same documentary, and in addition, has made a number of media appearances on programmes such as *The One Show.* As someone with an anxiety disorder which makes being the focus of attention intensely uncomfortable, I was interested to learn more about what motivated Eccleston-Brown to participate, and how he perceived the benefits and risks.
24.	Paul Dilley	*Emergency Helicopter Medics* Channel 4	48-year-old Paul Dilley collapsed on a golf course and was filmed by a TV crew who were following the air ambulance which was called to help him. On the way to hospital, he almost died. He stopped breathing for 46 minutes and his heart had to be restarted 18 times

		Tx: 2019	- the paramedics later described it as the most challenging situation they'd ever attended. I interviewed Dilley about informed consent in evolving, unpredictable, and high-stakes situations.
25.	Peter A. Gordon	Credits include: *The Man Who Shared His Liver* (2009) *Children of the Holocaust* (1994) *Cold Blood: The Massacre of East Timor* (1992)	Peter A. Gordon is a multi-award-winning producer/ director and executive producer, who has worked in television for over 30 years – during several of which, he was my boss at ITV. Between 2007 and 2008, we made together the RTS Award-nominated documentary, *The Man Who Shared His Liver*, about the UK's first living donor liver transplant. I interviewed Gordon about the industry's transition from a stable, unionised workforce to a freelance marketplace, and how it has affected ordinary contributors.
26.	Philipp Tanzer	*I Am a Men's Rights Activist* BBC Three Tx: 2020	As a former gay porn star with political ambitions and controversial opinions, Tanzer has an ambivalent relationship with the media, who are keen to feature his story, but have frequently misrepresented the nuance of his views. I spoke to him about his experiences with the media in general, and more specifically, a BBC Three documentary which followed his journey to an international conference for men's rights in Chicago.
27.	Rich Willis	*Living Differently: My Dad the Powerlifting Champion*	Rich Willis is a world champion powerlifter with diastrophic dwarfism. He took part in an online documentary made by Barcroft Media, who are known for their 'freakshow' films about bearded women, people with tattoos covering their entire body, and plastic surgery gone wrong (see www.youtube.com/user/barcroftmedia/videos). I spoke to Willis about the

		BBC3 Tx: 2017	media's representations of disability, and how he weighs up the advantages and disadvantages of taking part.
28.	Sheona Beaumont	*One Born Every Minute* Channel 4 Tx: 2014	Sheona Beaumont is an artist, academic, and practicing Christian, who gave birth to her second child on *One Born Every Minute,* which is filmed using a fixed rig of remotely operated cameras embedded into an NHS labour ward. I spoke to her about the politics of the way childbirth and Christianity are represented in the media, and why she decided to allow herself to be vulnerable in the public eye.
29.	Steve Plaskitt	*The Real Death in Paradise* Discovery Tx: 2022	Steve Plaskitt is my uncle. I interviewed him alongside my aunt Kate Warrender, to hear his thoughts about the documentary which was made about the death of their son, Charlie.
30.	Sue Bourne	Credits include: *A Time to Live* (2017) *Mum and Me* (2008) *My Street* (2008)	Director Sue Bourne is renowned for finding the 'extraordinary in the apparently ordinary', and for combining the personal with the professional. Her credits include *My Street,* where she knocked on every door of the street where she lives, and filmed whoever lived there; and *Mum and Me,* about her relationship with her elderly mother who suffered from Alzheimers (see www.wellparkproductions.com).
31.	Vicki Beckett	*Child of Mine* Channel 4 Tx: 2018	Vicki Beckett was approached to be filmed by a production team shortly after being told her first baby, Ruby, would be stillborn at 26 weeks. I interviewed Beckett about what compelled her to give the crew access during this devastating time, and how she balanced her desire to raise awareness against the potential intrusion into her private grief.

3.3. Data analysis

Once I'd collected the data, I transcribed it all laboriously by hand. I chose not to use a transcription service or software in order to get to know the material intimately. This was time-consuming, but on the other hand, made the coding process easier. The overlap between transcribing, coding, and data-gathering meant that the emerging themes could feedback into the sample selection and the ongoing interviewing process.

I used the computer software programme nVivo to code my data. Because of the paucity of existing empirical research to expand upon, the analysis was, by necessity, exploratory and inductive by nature. Following a grounded theory approach provided me with a method of systematically identifying, coding and comparing themes in order to generate empirically-based theory (Gynnild, 2016, p.120). However, my research approach might be considered to vary from classical grounded theory in a number of respects. Whereas grounded theory is primarily associated with inductive research, my approach was to some degree deductive as well. Because my sample was neither random nor representative, there was an imperative to follow my hunches and test out ideas. For example, after an interesting conversation with the producer Claire Lewis about objectivity, I decided it would be valuable to interview contributors with contentious views to see whether they felt the journalistic norms she'd described had been put into play. My interview questions with these people were not only open-ended, but also explictly asked questions around this theme. Some scholars would argue that this deductive quality is admissable within the iterative cycle of grounded theory, whereby further data collection is employed to test developing theories (Bryman, 2016, p.233). Strauss and Corbin (1998) characterise this strategy as 'theoretical sampling', where data-gathering is driven by evolving theory, and is concerned with refining ideas as much as boosting the sample size (Bryman, 2016, p.233). However, another complicating factor is the issue of my own professional experiences of working in the television industry, and the inevitable influence of my own pre-existing ideas about documentary contributors. Bryman argues it is unrealistic to claim that theories emerge from a 'pristine mind', unaffected by such prior experiences (2016, p.7). Later in this chapter, I will reflect further upon how my professional background may have informed the discussion and analysis.

Along with confessing to a degree of deductive working, I would also question whether my research could be judged to have attained theoretical saturation point. Strauss and Corbin define this stage as follows:

> This means, until (a) no new or relevant data seems to be emerging regarding a category, (b) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and (c) the relationships among categories are well established and validated (1998, p.212).

Although the second two points are comfortable descriptions of my research process, I would argue that new and relevant data emerged with every interview. In a small sample, with an immense range of variablity it seems unwise to claim that nothing new could be discovered, and furthermore, I'm dubious about the extent to which the idea of a saturation point can apply too such a large and amorphous population of people. However, the degree of overlap in themes suggests significant commonality in the types of experiences my interviewees had, which indicates that many of the most important issues relating to media participation have been addressed by the thesis. Bryman argues that qualitative research often lacks an obvious end point, and one important reason for it to be brought to an end is that reasonable answers to research questions have been formulated (2016, p.234) – which is a more humble, but I believe in this case, more honest claim to advance.

3.4 Defining the research object: between theory and practice

'So much depends in social research on the initial definition of our field of study and how we conceptualise key objects,' writes Andrew Sayer in *Method in Social Science* (2010, p.2). Such starting points, he claims, are inevitably fraught with problems which shape the course of the research and limit the range of possible outcomes, whether they are acknowledged or not. Having already spent a little time unpacking the key terms of my research question in the thesis introduction, in this section, I want to talk about the impact of their conceptualization upon the pragmatic processes of data collection and analysis. In doing so, my aim is to expand an understanding of the methodological approach employed outwards from a narrow description of technique towards Sayer's more encompassing perspective upon method as 'a carefully considered way of approaching the world' (2010, p.12).

Within the scope of this research project, one of the most significant meeting points between theory and practice is the conceptualisation of documentary. Here, the theoretical ambiguities in relation to the genre begin to make their presence felt in terms of the practical choices of who to interview and which texts to include.

Debates over definitions of what constitutes a documentary are as old as the genre itself. Memorable attempts include John Grierson's 'creative treatment of actuality', which captures something of documentary's contradictory impulses; and John Corner's conceptualisation of documentaries as a 'series of transformations' through which the 'art of record' is located (see Creeber, 2015, p.148). It's also useful to consider the etymology of the key terms. Documentary is derived from the Latin word *docēre* – to teach – betraying an intention to instruct and guide, rather than merely observe or reveal. The Latin root of fiction is *fictiō* – to mould or to shape – denoting a relationship to realism which disrupts the habitual framing of fact and fiction as binary opposites (Merriam-Webster, 2022). John Ellis argues the boundaries between the two are in fact both 'soft' and 'essential' (2005, p.356) – a claim which suggests the only practicable way to study documentary is to embrace a degree of messy ambivalence; to work with tendencies rather than absolutes. Whilst a rigid approach to definitions isn't appropriate for the study of such a mercurial form, it is possible to highlight some missteps in the various ways documentary has been framed within the scholarship, observe how this has shaped the field of existing research, and endeavour to correct these patterns within my own contribution.

A legacy of the documentary scholarship's connection with film studies has been a historic focus on film, to the exclusion of television. In the UK, the majority of professionally-produced documentaries are made for TV broadcast, yet these texts have been largely ignored in favour of a relatively small canon of cinematically-released features – a selection which is both 'exclusive and conservative' (Bruzzi, 2006, p.4). Allied to this tendency is an over-emphasis on the role of auteur directors, and a narrow methodological concentration on textual analysis. As a result, questions about the role of institutions, professional practices, social and economic routines, and the development of generic systems have been side-lined until more recently (Creeber, 2015, p.145). A desire to shift the focus away from the elite, towards the everyday and the typical, is at the core of much of the best cultural studies research. In practical terms, the intention to adopt a more inclusive and democratic ethos means embracing a wide variety of documentary styles and genres, including hybrid texts which crossover into reality TV or even drama. One example of this would be the fixed rig documentaries such as *24 Hours in A&E (2011-),* and *One Born Every Minute (2010-),* which transpose the technology of the *Big Brother (2000-2018)* house into more traditional documentary precincts. I have gravitated towards finding people with high levels of personal investment in the documentaries

they've taken part in; people with something significant at stake. For this reason, I've sought out contributors who've been filmed within the context of their real lives, rather than parachuted into artificial situations, prioritising what Jean-Louis Comolli categorises as narratives that 'pre-exist the cinematic relation' (1999, p.42). I have also tried to extend this intention through not only the choice of text, but also in redefining what might be considered significant within those texts. For example, as well as studying the main characters, I have also made an effort to include minor contributors and peripheral characters, people who've played supporting roles as well as the central cast.

A significant consequence of the realism debate is that when documentaries have been shown to diverge from the reality they depict, they have been judged as ontological failures. As Stella Bruzzi writes:

> Because the ideal of the pure documentary uncontaminated by the subjective vagaries of representation is forever upheld, all non-fiction film is thus deemed to be unable to live up to its intention, so documentary becomes what you do when you have failed (2006, p.6).

Documentary's inability to faithfully reproduce the social world is often attributed to technological limitations – a misapprehension which is debunked in the discussion of fixed rig filming in Chapter Nine – but if the genre's failure to offer unmediated access to reality hasn't dimmed its appeal, then one could surmise its value lies in other characteristics. This research therefore suggests an opportunity to explore the values documentaries are ascribed by the people they represent, rather than those which have been assumed by scholars, critics, and audiences.

The documentary-maker Werner Herzog claims that the best films are created 'when the filmmaker is clear about who they are in the story' (quoted in Asquith, 2019, p.20). A similar point could be made about social research. Sayer writes:

> To make judgements about method it helps considerably if we have some idea of the nature of the relationship between ourselves and that which we seek to understand (2010, p.12).

This understanding is what he terms 'knowledge in context' (2010, p.12). A key part of my methodological process, therefore, was to make myself present in the research by reflecting

upon my own positionality vis-à-vis the topic, and thinking through the influence of my professional background.

Access to the media has historically been difficult for academics. Georgina Born spent several years embedded as an ethnographer within the BBC researching her book, *Uncertain Vision (2004),* but faced ongoing problems gaining access, often finding herself excluded from the situations she most wanted to observe. She describes these access negotiations as a process of attrition, 'like waging a military campaign', recounting how she stealthily increased her level of penetration within the institution by being an 'invisible anthropologist', sitting in the back of production meetings, becoming part of the furniture (2004, pp.14-16).

Undoubtedly, my familiarity with the industry has helped me to identify an important topic, and to shortcut some of the access difficulties which Born and others have encountered. My own personal experiences of confusion and ambiguity when it came to working with contributors - of navigating uncertain boundaries between the instrumental and the personal, of struggling to maintain the precarious balance between objective distance and personal intimacy - have played an influential role. In many ways, this project sets out to reflect upon and resolve the dilemmas of my previous career, and I'm by no means the first to bring lived experiences into analytical focus. Laura Grindstaff refers to her own experiences of participant observation in the TV industry as 'a means of knowing others through oneself' and oneself through others (2002, p.281). However, the advantages of the 'insider' perspective are offset against methodological and ethical complications: the dangers of confirmation bias, the compromise to objectivity, and the difficulties in sustaining any kind of neutrality. To minimise these risks, I decided not to directly analyse my own experiences, or interview my own contributors. There were many times during the interviews, or whilst writing up the data, when I was itching to digress into recollections of my own stories, but overall, I found that focussing on an entirely new set of experiences allowed me to encounter the issues relatively afresh, and to develop a voice to analyse them which felt more rigorous and considered.

Nevertheless, it would be naïve to imagine that any research could be unmediated by the researcher. I firstly want to acknowledge the formative nature of my experiences in the TV industry, having started working at the BBC at the tender age of 20, and continued making programmes until my mid-30s. Finding stories, working with people, gaining access, building trust, and figuring out where the interest lies are all skills I have drawn upon in this project

which are common to production, and how I go about them will inevitably be shaped by the character of the media institutions where those abilities were first honed.

The insider approach denotes a loss of objectivity. In some instances, I used my professional network or contacts to find contributors, even interviewing former colleagues. TV is a small world, and some of the documentaries I have studied have been made by people who I know or have worked with. To an extent, these crossovers were unavoidable, but as I have set out to analyse media production rather than to make individual criticisms, I didn't judge that my critical capacity would be excessively curtailed.

Whilst certain skills overlap between media production and social research, I also had to be mindful about the significant ways in which they differ. The most obvious is the degree of immersion in the topic. Whereas my longest documentary project lasted for 18 months, this research has taken several years; and whilst in television, its commonplace to focus single-mindedly upon the story you wish to tell - to seek out the exceptional and the unique - in the context of this research I have learned to be mindful not to cherry-pick, nor to discard the repetitive and the mundane, but to work through the entire dataset methodically and systematically.

My background as a producer/ director predisposes me to be defensive in certain ways, and critical in others. Aufderheide notes that documentary-makers often display a 'protective attitude' towards their contributors (2009, p.9). This dynamic certainly resonates for me, and perhaps my decision to undertake this research is an extension of the desire to speak up for contributors, my relationships with whom were meaningful, transformative, and enriched my life enormously. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that my own hands are by no means clean. The contributors in documentaries I made were sometimes treated in ways I found troubling – and sometimes, with my own complicity. This tension between intentions and actions is one of the knotted contradictions I hoped to untangle.

In a similar vein, I would concede that I'm primed to look for structural rather than individual flaws. As a producer/ director I was the person who was responsible for the production, but I didn't always feel powerful, in many instances, making decisions that were the least bad options, or enacting choices other people had made. The power of individual producers is often undifferentiated from the power of the media organisations they work for, but the two are not synonymous. Creative workers aren't simply agents of media power. They are not only part of, but also subject to the systems they represent.

Having given context to the knowledge produced within this thesis, and discussed my own positionality in terms of the research, in the final section of this chapter, I want to move on to consider the ethical issues raised by the research design, and in particular, the difficulties of representing representations of others.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Before I began the data collection phase of the research, my project was reviewed by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee at the University of Leeds.[7] Alongside the issues of impartiality which I have already discussed, the key ethical issues surrounded confidentiality and anonymity, data handling, and consent. Much of the discussion centred around how to minimise the risks of misrepresentation, and in some cases, re-traumatisation. As Ofcom's new duty of care regulations emphasise the particular needs of 'vulnerable' contributors, it was clear from the outset of the project that I would need to people with specific vulnerabilities, and that my own dealing with them would need to be respectful of their dignity and ethically robust.

Just as there is a degree of overlap between the production of media texts and the production of social research, there is a similar synchronicity between representing peoples' experiences in research and representing them on screen. As a sociologist working on daytime talk-shows, Laura Grindstaff noted the parallels between the two roles:

> I understood the work of producers and guests, the relations between them, the choices that they faced, and the decisions that they made all the better because I encountered similar relations, dilemmas, and choices of my own (2002, p.276).

This common ground is particularly pertinent to my research, which is structured somewhat like an Escher artwork, whereby I'm making representations of people who are representing their views about previous representations of themselves. By speaking out about their experiences, my contributors inevitably risk further distortion.

Attempts to democratise participation have their echo within documentary history. In the 1960s, the direct cinema and cinema verité movements articulated a desire to represent life without mediation. This naïve optimism was succeeded by a move towards collaborative

[7] Ethics reference: FAHC 18-003, 23rd August 2018.

filmmaking – particularly by feminist filmmakers in the 1970s, who sought to cede some degree of control and authorship by arming their contributors with the means and know-how to be able to produce their own footage (Coffman, 2014). However, the disparity in levels of professional skill were not easily remedied, and the same drawbacks could apply to academic research – participants could not be expected to translate their lived experiences into a scholarly framework, and are therefore unable to collaborate on an equal footing.

In documentaries, then followed a move to make filmmakers more present in their work, which is associated with '90s directors such as Nick Broomfield and Michael Moore, who could be physically seen on-screen interacting with their contributors, the style of their questioning and nature of their relationships apparently open for viewers to observe. The intention here is not a disavowal or diminishing of the influence of the author, but a foregrounding and acknowledgement of how it shapes the resulting work.

Yet this type of presence and collaboration has typically been limited to the shooting cycle. The edit doors remained closed, and the final decisions of how subjects are represented usually remain in the hands of the documentary-makers. Furthermore, these endeavours are not always as innocent and benign as they may first appear. Feminist critiques of ethnography have claimed that collaborative methods can mask 'a deeper, more troublesome form of exploitation in that it transforms personal relationships into *use value* (as research) and leaves subjects at greater risk of manipulation and betrayal' (Grindstaff, 2002, p.286).

Moral quandaries cannot be resolved by ceding interpretive authority, and as such, are better framed as questions of epistemology and representation. Laura Grindstaff argues:

> It is important to remember that inequality, exploitation, and even betrayal are endemic to *any* discourse or method of inquiry in which the researcher has more power than respondents to frame the issues, gather data, interpret the results, and then author an account (2002, pp.287-8).

Although imperfect, the principles of collaboration and presence are methods through which control can be shared more equitably, and in this spirit, I decided to offer my research participants the opportunity to read my research prior to publication, to correct mistakes, and to anonymise their contributions either partially or fully. Whilst the final draft of this thesis was being reviewed by my supervisory team, I sent a copy to all of my participants, offering to explain and discuss my findings with them, and make space available within the thesis for any commentary they may wish to add. A number of people took up this request and asked

me to fix factual errors. Despite my best intentions, the nuances of what was being said were sometimes lost in translation, and the sentiments they had intended to convey were not fully realised on the page. I received a number of kind emails, expressing enthusiasm for the project and wishing me success in disseminating the findings. However, one interviewee found the review process triggering, at one stage asking to withdraw before changing her mind and deciding she did want to be included after all. This experience was instructive for me about the messy business of representation, and the ever-present potential to cause distress and get things wrong.

Another repercussion of my decision to identify contributors, which has become more apparent as I have begun to publish this research, is the increased risk of defaming people connected to the documentaries, whose actions or behaviour might be subject to criticism – either implicitly or explicitly. Whilst it has never been my intention to single out individuals for criticism, in providing a platform for people to discuss their experiences, I am also creating a forum where grievances may be aired. After seeking advice from the University's Legal Affairs and Research & Innovation teams, and having lengthy discussions with my supervisors, we agreed that the research had to retain its power to criticise in order to maintain its integrity and value, but the added risks meant it even more important to conduct the research in a manner which is ethical and rigorous, and open to scrutiny.

My efforts to make my research process inclusive has meant developing ongoing relationships with my contributors, which in all likelihood, will continue for several years further as I continue publishing, disseminating and developing my findings. However, rather than limiting my ability to construct arguments, the continuing involvement of many of my participants can be recognised as a useful corollary, reminding me to treat material as specific and personal, rather than generic and disembodied. It instils a discipline that the data is not mine to do with as I will, and a necessity that my decisions must be explicable and justifiable.

As previously discussed in Chapter Two, Agnieszka Piotrowska claims that transference is one of the psychological mechanisms at play during the documentary encounter. This also resonated within my research, where I've felt a strong sense of identification and admiration for the people I have interviewed, whose words I've analysed so intently, in a connection which is undoubtedly one-sided, and far more significant to me than to them. As such, it is hard to remain completely objective, and the research is inevitably coloured by the confidences we've shared, and the many hours devoted to their study, but perhaps this is a

loyalty that researchers rightly owe to the people who they study, and something to be acknowledged rather than to be overcome.

4. The motivations of documentary contributors

In this chapter, I want to discuss what kinds of motivations contributors bring to documentary productions. As Bethany Klein and Stephen Coleman point out, the very limited amount of empirical research on this subject has not prevented scholars and commentators from speculating about what attracts or compels them:

> The lazy answer is that participants are all fame-hungry narcissists, worryingly typical products of a culture dominated by vacuous celebrity (2021, p.9).

Much has been assumed about contributor's role as exploited subjects without a broader understanding of how these experiences are lived. We have insufficient knowledge about the complexities of their motivations, the values and meanings they confer upon participation, and whether it ultimately lives up to its promise.

I firstly want to make the point that a clearer grasp of contributor's motivations is a vital preliminary to any kind of research which focusses upon their experiences, and therefore, the foundation of this thesis. Until we know more about what contributors hope to gain from participating, we cannot evaluate the extent to which it fulfils their expectations. Building a more nuanced understanding of motivations is therefore essential to developing an account of contributors' agency and how it operates within the documentary production context.

In this chapter, I engage with the stereotypes which persist and use my findings to interrogate their validity and build an alternative account. In doing so, what I hope to demonstrate is that the stereotypical ways we've understood contributors are reductive simplifications, which have the effect of closing down debates about media participation rather than opening them up. Instead, I wish to put forward the argument that participation is inherently political – whether intended or not – and could be seen to constitute a form of digital citizenship in a mediatized society, albeit one which is constrained by the competing values of the media.

4.1 Victims and dupes

As discussed previously, the stereotypical characterisation of media contributors as victims and dupes is a recurring trope in both the public discourse and the academic scholarship. Brian Winston is perhaps the scholar who's pursued this argument most forcefully. He draws

upon two related senses of the word 'victim' – as the disadvantaged within society, and also the ordinary people who the media exploits. Being the former makes the latter more probable, suggesting that some people are perennial victims - 'The victim of society is ready and waiting to be the media's 'victim' too' (1988, p.35).

The documentarists' emphasis on victims represents an abandonment of the role wherein they could be of genuine benefit to society, as 'watchdogs of the guardians of power' (1988, p.41). Their attitude to their subjects is reckless and self-serving, encouraging them towards behaviours which may risk their wellbeing. They fail to consider the potential for negative consequences for the people they work with, considering them to be 'their inferiors,' and generally regarding them as 'too uninteresting to report' (1988, p.52; p.43). This dysfunctional dynamic is endemic, and exacerbated by the industry itself, which 'tends to make moral behaviour an unaffordable luxury' (2000, p.162). Winston's conclusion is that a clearer duty of care is needed in order to stop the 'unfettered media right of exploitation of those in society least able to defend themselves' (1988, p.55).

The 'dupes' argument shares an understanding that deficits in people's character or social standing make them vulnerable to manipulation. Calvin Pryluck claims the media secure the co-operation of members of the public by exploiting their urge to communicate, their loneliness and insecurity - yet taking part in the media is rarely in their best interests. In fact, they have 'little or nothing to gain from participation' (1976, pp.23-4).

Although these claims are typical of a confident era of scholarship, where the strength of argument was perhaps valued more highly than conveying the nuances or contradictions of a topic, the stereotype of victims and dupes continues to be reproduced in more recent research - particularly work on televisual representations of social class and the welfare state (De Benedictis et al., 2017, Kozma, 2018, Skeggs, 2005). Such claims are posited through a sense of concern on behalf of contributors, and the commendable desire to side with them against the media, who are perceived as unaccountable, and irresponsible in their treatment of the ordinary people whose participation they depend upon. They seek to draw attention to the political consequences of negative or damaging misrepresentations of ordinary people, but do so whilst paying limited attention to their own perspectives, using them in service to a broader argument. The journalistic discourse, however, tends not share these sympathies, and will often circulate the same stereotypes in a more derogatory fashion. Whilst *Benefits Street (2014)*, for example, was criticised as 'depressing, exploitative, and brutally sensationalist',

the people who took part in it were equally derided as ‘people not clever enough to realise they're being stitched up’ (McGiffin, 2014).

In support of the victims/ dupes argument, my research certainly uncovered evidence of deceptive practices. There were occasions where the contributors I spoke to felt they were misled about the content, tone, or message of the documentary they were making, or what role they would be expected to perform. Jenna Presley was one such interviewee, who told me:

> It’s really disappointing that they didn’t do what they said they were going to do…in hindsight, it feels like they were being quite fake…I guess that’s the nature of their work, but it makes you feel like you’ve been played.

However, my data fundamentally challenges the cliché of contributors as media victims finding ample evidence that people have a sophisticated knowledge and awareness about the proposition of taking part in media productions, and are equipped to make rational calculations about the benefits and risks it may bring them. Many people described a process of evaluation which took place prior to them giving their consent. Typically, they recognised an instrumental dimension to their relationships with the producers and the production itself - but crucially, the dynamic was reciprocal rather than one-way. Jenny Smith put it bluntly:

> I think it’s an acceptance that you’re both using each other.

These findings echo Ruth Palmer’s research about the ordinary people who feature in newspaper stories. Palmer disputes the idea that contributors are ‘duped’ by the media, claiming instead that the material and psychological benefits of participation tend to be downplayed or omitted entirely from scholarly debates, which often focus on problematic or negative experiences, positioning them as the norm rather than the exception (2017b, pp.582-3).

A striking example from my research was Emily Ingold, a young mother from Northamptonshire, who took part in a Channel 4 documentary series called *Shut Ins: Britain’s Fattest People (2019).* The format – which follows obese people undergoing bariatric surgery - was criticised by *The Telegraph’s* reviewer as ‘exploitative and troubling’ (Smith, 2017). As Sender & Sullivan report, television frequently represents the obese as figures of fun or failure. They write: ‘an obese body is evidence of an inner malaise…epidemics of the will and failures of self-esteem’ (2008, p.573).

Given the likelihood of stigmatization in such a production, I arranged an interview with Ingold to ask whether she felt as though she had been exploited and victimized. In our conversations, Ingold demonstrated a high-level of awareness of the problematic depictions of obesity in the media, and acknowledged the risk of humiliation she was taking by agreeing to participate:

> I was scared that I'd be portrayed as fat and lazy, which is what obese people are branded as…It is a disease, but it's not recognised as one…there's such a stigma.

Ingold was not duped into taking part, but rather recognised the transactional nature of the proposition, and calculated that the reputational risks were outweighed by the access the documentary would give her to life-saving weight loss surgery.

> EC: The cynical way of thinking about it is that it's a transaction – you get the weight loss surgery and in return they do this stuff which has the potential to be humiliating.
>
> EI: Yeah
>
> EC: What do you think about that – does it ring true, or is that over-simplifying?
>
> EI: No, no, that's accurate…I'm taking this gamble on getting this big thing out of it, but I'm not sure how it's going to look. It was scary. I think that's why I was so terrified when it went out.

Whilst I do not wish to erase the exploitative aspects of the exchange, it is important to make the point that Ingold did have a clear-eyed grasp of what was at stake, and that rather than considering herself to be a victim, she was prioritising her own wellbeing, and doing everything within her power to secure the help that she needed. Saying yes to the documentary was one of a very limited set of options through which she could express her agency and change her circumstances. Ingold told me she didn't feel exploited by the programme-makers, and that participating in the documentary had a transformative effect upon her:

> I'm really happy with how my life is turning out now, and it wouldn't have happened without all this.

Although some of my interviewees did feel they were taken advantage of in hindsight, the victims and dupes characterisation does not stand up to scrutiny. Every person I interviewed

was able to offer a credible and convincing account of their motivations. The contributors had a clear set of goals and were using the proposition of media attention to their perceived advantage. The dynamic therefore is less accurately described as extractive than as an exchange. In the majority of cases, the choices they made to participate were vindicated by a positive outcome; most people enjoyed the experience and said they would do it again. The claim which is commonly circulated, therefore, that media contributors are 'invariably injured' as a result of their participation is contradicted by my findings, and certainly merits further investigation across different media genres (De Benedictis et al., 2017, p.22).

The characterisation of contributors as victims and dupes is a blunt simplification which significantly underestimates their agency. In the following section, I move on to discuss what my data reveals about an alternative stereotype, whereby a type of agency is ascribed to contributors, but in a derogatory or dismissive sense, emphasising self-interest and the pursuit of shallow or delusional goals.

4.2 Fame and fortune

In recent years, the idea that media participation has enabled ordinary people to experience a form of celebrity has gained traction. Chris Rojek uses the term 'celetoid' to describe a particular brand of fame conferred upon ordinary people, with no discernible talents, who enjoy 'their moment of fame and then…disappear from public consciousness quite rapidly' (2001, p.12). Helen Wood, Jilly Kay Boyce & Mark Banks (2017) suggest that becoming an 'ordinary celebrity' through media participation could even constitute a new labour model, providing an income and other benefits akin to a conventional job.

In order to address these claims, I firstly want to question the extent to which the opportunity to accumulate capital could offer a convincing explanation of contributor's motivations. Another way to frame this idea is that participation is effectively bought through the direct and indirect material benefits it confers upon them.

The direct payment of contributors is a contentious issue. Scholars such as Andrejovic (2004) and Hearn (2006) are troubled by contributor's status as unpaid workers, generating profits for capitalist organisations without recompense. But equally, the media is criticised for the practice of 'chequebook journalism', where payment is seen to 'encourage people to lie or

embellish facts to gain money…impede the free flow of information…[or] induce people to breach others' privacy' (Franklin et al., 2005, p.35).

With their relatively low budgets, the ability of most documentaries to offer direct financial incentives is, in any case, limited. Very few of my interviewees were paid to participate, and those who were received a small token fee – typically a few hundred pounds - unlikely to have a decisive influence. Claire Lewis told me:

> Money only works in very large amounts. You can bribe people with extraordinarily large amounts of money, but you can't bribe people with tiny amounts. It's not the same.

In addition to budgetary restraints, documentary-makers have traditionally justified their reluctance to offer payment with recourse to ethical objections. Their concerns include the impact payment can have upon relationships and the undesirable way it shapes the dynamics of filming; or that financial incentivization could warp contributors' motivations, which should not be corrupted by economic interests. Peter A. Gordon explained:

> The argument was if you paid somebody, it would taint what they said.

However, my research indicated the norm of non-payment is not applied consistently. Claire Lewis is the longstanding producer of *Seven Up (1964-).* She told me her participants have been paid for as long as she's been involved in the production. They receive:

> A small amount of money…enough to have a really nice holiday. It's enough to stop them feeling deeply resentful, but it's not enough to make them do the programme if they don't want to do it.

Lewis argues that paying the cast is an essential part of securing their long-term cooperation:

> They're our talent. They're talent with a major 'T'. If they decide they don't want to do the film, we don't have a film.

As her quote suggests, the people who tend to get paid to appear in documentaries are public figures or unique talent, who are in a stronger negotiating position or have an agent to barter on their behalf. Julian Dismore is a producer/ director who recently made *The Mega Council Estate Next Door (2020)* for Channel 5. He objects to the ethical argument for non-payment

on the grounds that it's an exclusionary practice, pointing out that some people are less able to give up their time for free:

> There's a major concern that there are so many hurdles put in place…[and then] only folks who…have enough money to be able to devote their time to being on television, and don't need money, can appear on television.

Although every documentary makes different demands upon its contributors' time, many of the people I spoke to made extensive commitments. Emily Speirs has been filmed for the Channel 4 series, *Born to be Different (2003-)*, for her entire life, since her pregnant mother first discovered that she would be born spina bifida. This might be an extreme example, but several of my interviewees were filmed over the course of a number of years. More typically, people will be filmed in intensive bursts over a more limited time, of a number of months. Jenny Smith is the headteacher of a school in Walthamstowe which was filmed for *Educating the East End (2014).* She told me the production team were 'working ridiculous hours', shooting throughout the school day, then interviewing staff and pupils in the evenings:

> You work long hours anyway, but then they'd want you to do two hours on camera…it might be at 7 or 8 o'clock at night. Sometimes I did it at weekends.

In addition to the observational filming, Smith estimated she was interviewed for around 15 hours, 'and out of that 20-30 minutes may have made it into the final thing.'

Paying contributors could be a way of making participation more accessible to broader sections of society, but the money that is spent tends to be paid to those who need it the least. The inconsistency with which payment norms are employed suggests that ethics are flexible, but commercial interests are not.

Several of my interviewees felt it was unfair that one side should be paid for their labour and not the other. Sue Bourne told me:

> Don't you think that is hypocritical beyond belief? All of us are making a living – in some instances quite a good living – out of making our films. We go into people's lives, we expose them to all sorts of things, not all of them good. We demand a lot from them, and we don't give them a penny to say thank you. I think it's shocking.

The level of actual profit accrued by production companies and broadcasters is routinely obscured from both the documentary-makers and their contributors, but in the instances when it was apparently obvious that a production had been a commercially success, contributors sometimes felt taken advantage of. Jenny Smith told me:

> It leaves a very bad taste in the mouth…you see people making profits out of it. You get nothing, and you're the subjects of it. It's quite hard.

For some people, money was linked to a sense of worth, and feelings of being valued or undervalued, or even exploited. Ashleigh Williams is a sex worker, and was told she couldn't be paid to take part in a documentary as it might be construed as soliciting:

> If it was a doctor, you'd pay for their knowledge. Why not pay us for ours? It's that whole thing of you're not worthy of being paid…Why are you being paid and I'm not?

But not all of the contributors I spoke to argued that they should be paid. For some, receiving payment would've constituted an uncomfortable alignment with stigmatised stereotypes of media contributors, which they were at pains to disassociate themselves from. Jo Lockwood gave up a huge amount of time to be filmed during the course of her gender transition ('a day or two days every four to six weeks…over the course of two or three years'). She told me:

> I can hold my head up high, if someone ever criticised me for doing it, and said you're doing it for the money: no, I wasn't…I'm not selling my story. No one can ever judge me…I can say I never received a penny.

Taking money for participation can undermine the legitimacy of the other types of motivations contributors bring to the production. Jeff White is an anti-abortion activist who's taken part in several documentaries. He explained:

> It's our cause. It's a symbiotic relationship. We have a cause. My job is to shout it from the rooftops. The media is a way to do it. I wouldn't expect to get paid.

In this case, the value of any financial payment is judged to be less important than the 'purity' of the motivation, and also the freedom to participate on his own terms. White told me:

> If someone's giving you $15,000 to say something, you've got to say what they expect you to say.

Tensions between the creative and commercial are internalised by the contributors themselves. Refusing money is a way to resist the pressures of commodification and objectification. Agnieszka Piotrowska describes documentary participation as a 'fragile and precious gift for all involved', which like love or friendship, defies capitalist relations and should not be subject to being bought or sold (2013b, p.71). My data supported this claim, insomuch as that when people were paid, the money in itself never felt like adequate compensation for what they had given. Daisy Asquith recounted an instance where she had been able to share the money left over from a budget underspend with her contributors - who up until then, had happily given up their time for free:

EC: And were they really chuffed?

DA: Not really. They were like – is that all? [laughs]

For contributors, the direct financial benefits of taking part in documentaries are unconvincing – certainly not commensurate when weighted against their investment of time. However, many of the contributors I interviewed disclosed to me that they were motivated by the opportunity to accrue material benefits indirectly. Several sought publicity or promotion for a venture or project. They drew upon an understanding of media exposure as a powerful tool in a process of self-entrepreneurship; a strategic decision to develop and promote a personal brand, which can be monetised later down the line. Alison Hearn describes participation as an exercise in remodelling the self, performed by neo-liberal subjects in response to the precarity of work in twenty-first century capitalism: 'Participants are labouring to create a product they know has a market value – fame' (2006, p.136).

The pursuit of fame can therefore be seen as a capitalist practice, as well as symptomatic of an era of normalised narcissism, where modern media phenomena such as reality TV and social networking have both fuelled and created an outlet for narcissistic individuals (Lasch, 1978, Opree and Kühne, 2016). Research suggests that narcissists more likely to find the idea of fame alluring. They spend more time fantasising about being famous, and perceive it as a realistic future goal. Furthermore, there is a 'co-morbid self-aggrandisement' between narcissistic character traits and contemporary media formats (Greenwood et al., 2013, p.491). Young & Pinsky (2006) claim that producers gravitate towards narcissistic contributors, because of their superficial likeability and tendency to create drama. However, the evidence from the producers I interviewed challenges this perspective. Most told me they were actually less likely to select people who displayed narcissistic tendencies. Jerry Rothwell told me:

> If they're doing it for fame or money, that's a problem I would say….I want to get to the truth of their experience. If your motives are other than telling the story, you may tell that story according to those motives rather than in a truthful way.

Sue Bourne told me she actively preferred to cast contributors who were reluctant to participate:

> I love people who say they don't want to be in the films. I much prefer that. It means they've thought about it. They're not wannabees who just want the fame and the publicity, the 15 seconds of fame. It's people who are really are thinking carefully about the repercussions of exposing themselves and their families, what it means and what could happen to them.

However, the most significant objection to the idea that media contributors are motivated by fame (or for that matter, fortune) is that for the vast majority, this is not the outcome of the project. Most of the people I spoke to did not feel their personal visibility had increased significantly, and even those who did reported that the effects were short-lived. Jenny Smith explained:

> [We] live in such transient times. It's all forgotten pretty quickly.

In order to find out how the promise of fame and fortune impacts upon documentary contributors, I purposefully sought out an interviewee who had experience of them. Jonny Mitchell was the headteacher in Channel 4's hit series, *Educating Yorkshire (2013).* The series was watched by over 4 million people and won an Emmy, a Grierson, and a National Television Award. Mitchell described the surreal period of his life which followed, where he was mobbed by strangers in bars, found his photograph printed in *Heat* magazine as 'Torso of the Week', and was sent a pair of knickers through the post. However, as an ordinary person with an ordinary job, he found that fame was not compatible with his everyday life. He was unable to take advantage of the offers he received to take part in reality shows: he could hardly run a large comprehensive school whilst learning the *paso doble* or eating kangaroo testicles in the jungle:

> I'm a public servant…I have a day job and my governors will want to know where I am.

Not only did Mitchell tell me that he had 'never taken a penny' for any opportunities which arose through his media appearances, but there were also negative consequences for his

private life. His wife struggled with the media attention, and the fame he experienced contributed to the breakdown of his marriage:

> I won't say that me and my now ex-wife weren't having marital issues anyway, but the experience of the aftermath expedited my departure from my marriage…She said [the fame] went to my head. Arguably for the first four or five weeks, it really did.

In order to move on from *Educating Yorkshire,* Mitchell ultimately had to leave Thornhill Community Academy, and apply for a job elsewhere. In spite of the personal costs, Mitchell insisted he has no regrets, but took part in the documentary in spite of the prominence it brought him, not because of it:

> I didn't do it for the fame and approbation. I did it for the public good; to open their eyes.

This sentiment was echoed by many of the other interviewees I spoke to, who considered the exposure to be an ambivalent prospect. Contributors often experience a disjunct between different framings of self (Goffman, 1981, Ellis, 2011). The public nature of documentary breaks down hitherto compartmentalised aspects of identities, creating intersections of the self and others which may be unwanted or undesirable. Some people spoke about the risk to their professional reputation. Jo Lockwood said:

> I was worried about it damaging my brand by showing me as a blubbering wreck, or as an arse, a bastard.

Others felt personal discomfort about the idea of becoming the focus of discussion or scrutiny. Liane Piper told me:

> I hate being centre of attention…I've got very low self-esteem….I hate being noticed. I like to slink by in the background.

As much as the desire for attention might incentivise some contributors, it is equally clear from my research that many people are reluctant participants, which begs the question, why would they say yes?

An important point which arose from my findings is that people by and large did not seek out attention for its own sake. The majority of people decided to put themselves in the public eye for logical and understandable reasons. One such example is Kate Warrender and Steve

Plaskitt, who decided to take part in a documentary about their son, Charlie, who died after a night out whilst serving with the Royal Navy in the Seychelles. They told me one of their main motivations was to correct a very public misrepresentation which had been made about his death previously:

> The headline in the local paper was 'Sailor Dies of Drink and Drugs'. The actual article was not so bad – it was more factual – but that headline on the front page of the newspaper…it just wasn't fair.

The circumstances of Charlie's death were quite obviously suspicious – the money in his wallet had been stolen, his bank account raided, and his body was dumped in a park - yet neither the Seychelles nor British police forces launched an investigation. After a year of combing meticulously through the available evidence themselves, the family presented their findings at the coroner's inquest, which concluded that Charlie was not a drug user, and the lethal dose of heroin which killed him was 'likely administered by a third party' (Parveen, 2016). The only way to counter the misinformation circulating about their son was to once again put his story into the hands of the media:

> Although it was something we didn't want to do, it was something we needed to do for Charlie: to challenge the story that was out there, so that people who knew him would know the truth about what happened rather than the headline…It's ironic, isn't it, because if there hadn't been that headline…we wouldn't have felt this burden, or this need to try and put the truth out there.

My data suggests that the decision to participate is indeed often motivated by a desire to generate mass attention – however, typically this attention is not the end in itself, but intended to serve a calculated purpose. Rhetorical work is being performed by the accusation that contributors are drawn to the media spotlight for reasons of personal narcissism, which diminishes the sense of contributor's agency, and undermines their legitimacy, but fails to explain the motivations of reluctant contributors, for whom attention is not the prize itself, but the admission cost of gaining a platform for their message to be heard in the public sphere.

4.3 The politics of participation

Having described and refuted some of the stereotypes surrounding the motivations of contributors, in this section, I want to make the argument that participation is *always* a political act. Understanding media participation as inherently political reframes the discussion which surrounds it, and indicates a direction where scholarly attention could more productively be focussed.

Many of my interviewees told me they were motivated to offer their stories to the media as a way of effecting social or political change, characterising their participation as a means of civic engagement and a way of contributing to larger public conversations. Laurie Oullette (2015) discusses the example of feminist documentary makers in the '60s and '70s, who understood that sharing personal experiences on camera had a potentially empowering impact, validating the views of participants and increasing their visibility. Klein & Coleman (2021) develop the argument further, exploring the connections between media participation and civic participation, and the idea that ordinary people who feel formal political processes fail to offer them sufficient opportunities to have an impact upon public affairs might use the media as an alternative platform.

My research substantiates these claims. Several of my interviewees articulated explicitly political motivations, mobilising their narrative histories in order to challenge the existing state of affairs. Child psychotherapist Lydia Tischler spent her teenage years imprisoned in concentration camps at Auschwitz and Terezin, but didn't begin to talk about her Holocaust experiences in public until she was in her eighties, when her concerns about the contemporary socio-political environment motivated her to speak out:

> Because there is quite a rise in anti-Semitism, and altogether in racism and xenophobia, and I think it's very important for people like me, who experienced it first-hand, to talk to people about it, and also particularly with my professional background, to put some sort of explanation of what can lead to this – when you project all the badness onto *the Other*, and ignore the potential Nazis within ourselves - so this is my take on it. I feel it's important to help people to understand it, if they are able to hear me.

Contributors such as Tischler are able to connect their embodied experience to a political alignment or principle in an attempt to shift perceptions relating to a particular issue or concern. Vicki Beckett was approached to take part in a Channel 4 documentary shortly after

discovering that her baby's heart had stopped beating during a routine antenatal appointment. Going public with her experience was a way to challenge the taboo surrounding stillbirth, which she feels has led to its de-prioritisation by politicians and the NHS, resulting in the UK having one of the worst rates of stillbirth in the developed world (Hope, 2011):

> I think because it's such an awful experience, lots of people don't talk about it because it's too painful - so actually, it's quite easy for [the politicians] to ignore it…I didn't want to let the Government keep getting away with it. For me, it's a blatant disregard for life in the womb… If that number of two-year olds were dying, they would be under massive scrutiny.

Beckett saw the opportunity to participate in *Child of Mine (2018)* as a way to reclaim her agency in a situation where she otherwise had no control:

> I was just motivated because I was really pissed off. I still am to this day…I wanted to make a noise and I was given a platform to make some noise.

For some of the other people I interviewed, the value of their participation was centred less on what they were actually doing or saying, and was more a question of visibility. By virtue of some aspect of their identity, simply occupying a media platform was a means of challenging societal norms or prejudices. These people described a conscious sense of being a representative of a social group, which in many cases are maligned or misunderstood, and marginalised in public life. For Jenny Smith, taking part in *Educating the East End (2014)* was an opportunity to convey a message about women and leadership:

> For me, personally, to get strong female representation was really, really important...It was…about female empowerment and stepping up.

In some cases, marginalised interviewees equated the lack of public profile their social group commands with discrimination and a diminution of their rights. Sex workers Ashleigh Williams and Georgina Tyson sacrificed their anonymity in order to take part in a documentary, connecting the public ignorance about their work with the lack of statutory protection they receive. Williams told me:

> There are so many things you can't do as a sex worker. If you want to move house, what job are you telling them you have?...They ask you for bank statements, and why is all this cash?...We don't have any protection, and the general public just don't know anything.

Contributors often displayed a sophisticated understanding of the different strata of audiences they wished to reach. Some targeted their speech towards a wider public of potential allies, whose awareness could force those in power to change; or whose ill-informed misconceptions may damage them. Others had a desire to reach a specific cohort facing similar struggles to their own. Omari Eccleston-Brown took part in *Ugly Me (2018),* a BBC documentary about body dysmorphic disorder (BDD). He told me:

> I still get messages on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn saying…'I saw you in that documentary', and 'Oh my God, it explained exactly what I'm feeling. I never knew what it was. I've never met anybody with BDD before.' So for me, it's about *that* public. It's other people who possibly don't even know they've got BDD…they're suffering in silence; they don't know how to reach out and normalise it. There's a lot of stigma around mental health. I want to normalise the conversation…I want it to be discussed.

The desire to make this kind of connection to other people with similar experiences is self-affirming as well as altruistic, speaking to our interconnectedness and innate sociality; the ways we conceptualise our subjectivity; and how we relate to others in an increasingly fragmented society. Nikita Roberts has obsessive-compulsive disorder, but prior to filming *My Extreme OCD Life (2017),* her mother was the only person in her life who knew about her diagnosis. She told me that the fear of being seen as 'the weird one' had made her keep her condition secret, which had left her feeling profoundly isolated. The documentary offered her the opportunity to present herself more authentically to others, and begin to build a personal support network:

> It's reassuring to know other people were out there, that it's not just you…I felt like I wasn't so alone.

But even those who might not intend to cannot help but make a political point when they agree to take part in a documentary. Emily Ingold took part in *Shut Ins (2019)* in order to access weight loss surgery, but her participation exposes deficiencies in the NHS, who refused to fund her treatment or offer any support for her eating disorder. Rich Willis, who has diastrophic dwarfism, told me the media has often sought to portray him as a novelty or a figure of fun:

> I quite often get approached by people to do silly roles, get dressed up in silly costumes, film roles and things like that. I've always refused every one I've been…asked to do, because I think it's demeaning.

For Willis, to be seen on screen simply doing ordinary things and being himself, is to make a political claim about his right to be considered normal and equal:

> I feel if you want to tackle those issues of being accepted in society, you've got to make yourself available within society on an equal footing.

The most obvious objection to the idea that documentary participation offers a form of digital citizenship is that the opportunity to take part is only extended to a small minority of people, and even those who are offered the chance are not able to speak on their own terms. Documentary production is marked by the same inequalities of participation as other forms of political or civic activity, as I shall explore further in the following chapter. Some interviewees told me that not only did their political goals go unmet, but the final text actually colluded with the same problematic tropes and misrepresentations they had set out to challenge. One such example is Jenny Smith, who had wanted to showcase a school with strong female leadership, but was disappointed about the representation of the ambitious, intelligent female pupils in an episode which was supposed to focus upon their achievements:

> It became about the skirts and the make-up and the boys, which was not what it was supposed to be…It was going to be a really positive episode about the girls…and it'd all been reduced to this argument about a boy.

Part of the reason why the ordinary people who participate in the media are so well placed to reveal something about the politics of production is precisely because their stories undergo this kind of mediation. Klein and Coleman write:

> Opportunities for mediated visibility offered to culturally excluded and marginalized groups are never on their own terms. But even though they are framed and filtered through production norms over which they have little control, people utilize spaces of mediated visibility wherever they can find them (2021, p.6).

Pervasive stereotypical representations of media contributors prime us to be cynical about the suggestion they might have political motivations, but there is no binary distinction between self-interest and civic engagement. Most people experience a mixture of political and personal motivations which shift throughout the processes of participation and its aftermath,

often over the course of many years. To step up to a public platform is an inherently political act – whether contributors consciously intend it to be so or otherwise – which should not be discredited by a lingering, but under-evidenced suspicion of naïve victimhood or individualised narcissistic self-glorification.

4.4 Conclusion

The accounts documentary contributors presented of their motivations disrupt the cliches about fame, fortune, attention-seeking and self-aggrandisement. At the centre of the urge to participate is an orientation of the mediated self to others which is inherently political, yet is obscured by these reductive cliches. Furthermore, the inattention that has been paid to political motivations within the public discourse and academic literature prevents us from asking more interesting questions, about the extent to which media participation delivers upon these perceived promises, and what in turn that reveals about the politics of media production.

Reframing participation as political restores rationality and agency to contributors, rather than treating them as though they were 'just bags of unscrutinised desires' (Nussbaum, 2001, p.122). The director Sue Bourne summed up this argument when she told me that all of the contributors she'd worked with were fundamentally motivated by the same aim:

> It is invariably because they think they've got *something to say.* They want to be heard.

However, my research also suggests that people from marginalised social groups discover that visibility is not in itself a remedy for the exclusion and misrepresentations they experience within their everyday lives. Being given access to a platform is insufficient as a means of democratizing civic participation, because media platforms are not neutral; they are imbued with the values of the wider political-economic system they form part of. The following chapter will discuss the industrial context in which the casting and consent process takes shape, in order to build an understanding of how media contributors' agency operates within this environment, and how their ability to give a fair account of themselves is impacted by generic conventions and the production context.

5. Casting contributors

In this chapter, I examine the various ways that ordinary people are recruited to take part in documentary productions. The process of casting raises issues of access and fairness, revealing the means through which people and social groups are rendered more or less visible by the media. By analysing the mechanics of how potential contributors are identified, selected and recruited, this research demonstrates how the method itself informs the outcomes.

There are two main arguments I want to advance. First of all, that the different experiences described by my interviewees occur within a commercially-driven context that has a determining role in the way the casting process is enacted - the effect of which is to reinforce existing patterns of recognition and representation. Secondly, that the casting approach adopted by a particular production will condition the nature of the interactions between contributors and crew, shaping the incipient interpersonal relationships which develop between them - then ultimately, the resulting representations.

The chapter is structured as follows: in section 5.1, I offer a historical perspective on how casting developed as a distinct phase in production conducted by specialist producers, and the impact this reorganisation has had upon contributors. I will then contrast different approaches to casting, based upon the relative availability of participants: the casting call and the casting trawl. In section 5.2, I analyse the data my research generated about casting calls, where producers sift through a potentially large number of applicants in order to find their contributors. My findings challenge preconceptions about the qualities and attributes that are prized by productions, demonstrating countervailing emphases on honesty and authenticity alongside the dramatic and sensational. I then move on, in section 5.3, to compare this approach to a casting trawl, where the crew sets out to find participants based upon a wish-list of characteristics. A reliance upon intermediary organisations such as charities and public institutions to assist with casting trawls can compromise the editorial freedom of documentary-makers. An alternative scenario is discussed in section 5.4, where documentary-makers must gain access to a unique set of contributors in order to make their story work. My research suggests that each of these casting models has an influence of the interpersonal dynamics within the production, and how participants express their agency. In section 5.5, I offer my conclusions.

5.1 The development of the casting process

Though widely used in the industry, with its connotations of manufacture and performance, casting is a far from neutral term, and a description which is not uncontentious. Director Jerry Rothwell told me:

> I have to say really hate the idea of casting…I think casting […] suggests a very particular kind of relationship with the contributor. It comes from drama. It feels like it's putting them in a role within the film, whereas actually the film should be based around the contributor rather than the contributors around the film.

The etymology of casting originates from the Middle Ages, from the verb *cast* to mean an act of throwing, flinging or hurling. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the word *cast* carried an idea of the form taken by a substance after it has been thrown or moulded, leading to the generation of further new meanings including the theatrical sense of a group of actors coming together to create a performance from the seventeenth century onwards (OED, 2022). *Casting* was part of the language of theatrical production from the nineteenth century, translating into film production in the twentieth century, with the phrase 'casting couch' suggesting impropriety and the abuse of power (Fortmueller, 2022). Throughout its lexical history, casting has implied an act of construction, crafting or moulding a product into shape, rather than simply discovering or exhibiting. An implied sense of performance, contrivance and manipulation is inherent within its origins.

Several of the producers I interviewed connected the arrival of the term *casting* within factual production with the development of reality TV and the rise in formatted programming, where members of the public would be used interchangeably within formulaic returnable series (Brunsdon, 2003, Bell and Hollows, 2005). The adoption of the phrase *casting* is revealing in terms of the changing values of factual production, with entertainment, ordinariness, domesticity and replicability increasingly prized, and the space for so-called 'serious' standalone documentaries squeezed out of primetime scheduling (Brunsdon et al., 2001). By the turn of the century, TV participation had begun to suggest a different set of meanings to the public. Claire Lewis told me:

> The landscape had completely changed. *Big Brother* had happened, constructed programmes started to happen, and people suddenly realised what being on telly was about as a real person...The minute there was that dawning of consciousness,

> we weren't dealing with a very naïve, wonderfully immature television audience. Everything changed…our contributors had changed.

Although the industry discourse tends to focus on the impact of generic innovations, these aesthetic adaptations are a consequence rather than a cause, symptomatic of broader shifts in the political economy of broadcasting (Born, 2011). Casting became a distinct and separate process within factual production, not only because of changes in genre and values, but also because of the influence of the reorganisation of working patterns as part of a process of deregulation and neo-liberalisation (as discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two). These changes are of particular relevance to discussions of casting, which as part of a post-Fordist emphasis on specialisation, is now often conducted by a dedicated casting team who recruit contributors, then pass them onto a shooting team. Although organisationally efficient, my research suggests the fragmentation of creative roles has been problematic for contributors, due to the consequential loss of consistency and overall authorial responsibility. Peter A. Gordon told me:

> The division of labour that now exists - it's not the one person who makes contact, maintains contact and then the editing - it's probably three or four different people. Someone's found them, someone's edited, someone's filmed them…so the nuances of what was said and what's been understood are gone.

Although the contributors I spoke to were largely unaware that things were once done differently in documentary production, several spoke of their sadness or disappointment when a crew member they had bonded with suddenly vanished. Jo Lockwood, who took part in Channel 4's *The Making of Me (2019a),* told me:

> I didn't realise at the beginning that Emma was freelance. So there were some times where she'd disappear for three or four months, seeing other people…Once the filming stopped, she said 'I'm off for another job now, I'm off that show.' We said 'Hang on! We expected you to be our friend till the end! And you're off! You're not even part of the final edit.' That was a shock to us, where we found at different stages of production, people were coming and going, and then disappearing.

In some instances, the interchangeability of production staff can have more serious consequences for contributors. Liane Piper suffers from a debilitating anxiety disorder. For her, the sudden loss of a trusted presence was deeply unsettling:

> I don't like meeting new people. I always wonder what they're thinking of me. I'd have to take the producer to one side and say do they believe me? Do they think I'm lying? Do they like me? Do they think I'm annoying? I didn't really like it when it changed. I was more comfortable when I got to know somebody.

Being passed from pillar to post generates a lack of accountability, an erosion of producer autonomy, and a breach in the painstakingly built relationship of trust between documentary-makers and their participants – but it also suggests an attitude of replaceability which extends to both producers and contributors alike.

Having described how the restructuring of creative labour has influenced the development of the casting process, I now want to move on to describe its specific iterations within different production contexts. Whilst there is no single method by which casting is performed – the process being influenced by subgenre, individual preferences, the routines of specific institutions, programme budgets and schedules - my data suggests that the relative availability of suitable contributors can be a decisive factor in determining the approach, and that the approach in turn can have a significant impact upon the resulting documentary.

5.2 The casting call

Several of the people I spoke to initiated their relationship with the production by responding to a casting call, where members of the public are invited to reply to an advert circulated on social media, in the press, or a flyer left in a selected location. In their interviews, they evoked a feeling of competition about the casting process, and a perception that the producers had a large number of potential contributors to choose from. Emily Ingold told me:

> It was a really long interviewing process, loads of stuff to go through, always being told at the end of phone calls: 'We really like you but don't get your hopes up because we've had lots of people apply.'

People who were recruited through a casting call described a process of ascending through various rounds of selection, where their application would be considered by people of increasing seniority within the production team. Test footage was often shot to be shown to executive producers or commissioning editors, with the understanding that these people would be the final decision-makers. From the very beginning of their involvement with the production, an idea is conveyed to contributors that the people who have ultimate control are

not people with whom they will have direct contact. In these accounts, there was a prominent sense of audition and performance. The process itself helps to establish a shared understanding of participation as a privilege, with the production in a position of relative power to pick and choose who they want to take part. This can have a persuasive role in convincing contributors who might otherwise have reservations about participating, making them feel as though they have been plucked from a crowd, and are lucky to have been selected for a rare and prestigious opportunity. Jo Lockwood told me:

> Marie, my wife, was getting more anxious about the whole thing, because she's definitely not one for the spotlight or the public eye. I said we're a long way off, there are hundreds of people in this. So we did the Skype chat, they videoed it, recorded it. They said, 'We'd like to get serious' – and we went, 'Oh…shit!.'

Director Daisy Asquith raised concerns that casting had become a 'desk-job', and people who were not easily discoverable via the internet or over the phone dropped off the radar of most productions. People who are already less visible or marginalised within society - the old, the young, the disabled, non-native English speakers – are harder to include if casting teams conduct their work solely from the office, as the constraints of budget and schedule often dictate. Irrespective of any intentions the production team might bring to the project, it is a process which is tilted towards a particular direction from the outset. Rather than redressing participatory inequalities, the default outcome of a typical casting practice is liable to magnify existing patterns of visibility and absence.

Previous research suggests that what TV producers are looking for in their subjects is a propensity to perform exaggerated, sensational versions of the self, creating moments of conflict, drama and jeopardy (Gamson, 1998, Higgins et al., 2012). In the late '90s, Laura Grindstaff spent several years working as a participant observer on TV talk-shows and reality formats. She writes:

> The 'best' guests were not only forthcoming about the personal details of their lives, but also willing to 'play' themselves with a maximum of emotional and physical expressiveness in ways that reinforced prevailing class-based cultural stereotypes (2009, pp.71-2).

For the contributor's part, Alison Hearn (2006) likens their willingness to perform to 'donning Mickey Mouse ears at Disneyland'. They are *au fait* with the performative

expectations of various TV genres and set out to deliver what it required of them in order to be chosen (2006, p.134).

Some of my interviewees perceived sensational aspects of their personal histories lent them a value within the casting process. Phillipp Tanzer told me one of the reasons the media have featured his story numerous times is because of his 'weird past', as a former Mr Leather and gay porn star, whose mother was murdered by his stepdad (Kelleher, 2021). However, as much as his personal history makes him distinctive within the casting process, he also recognises it can be a barrier to him being taken seriously:

> It can help and it can hinder. It helps because it creates interest and it engages people…but if you're weird, you can be attacked by other people, 'Oh, he's just a weirdo.'

However, data from the producers I interviewed complicates the notion that what they are seeking is extreme performances or personal histories. Several told me their personal casting values favoured the ordinary over the sensational. Sue Bourne said:

> Lots of people when I talk to them initially say you won't want me, I'm really boring. No one's boring. Everybody's got a story. And then you cajole it out of them. Because I know what I'm looking for. Sometimes it is in the apparently ordinary that you find something.

Similarly, Jerry Rothwell told me:

> My starting point is everyone is interesting, therefore it's about how do you form a relationship where people can reveal their interestingness, rather than let's look for interesting people.

The documentary-makers I interviewed spoke at length about this 'interestingness', and which qualities or attributes they were looking for, whilst I also asked the contributors to explain why they thought they were chosen. Some described personal characteristics such as charisma, good humour, 'a spark'. There was an emphasis on atypical experience over the commonplace – people who 'didn't fit the typical mould.' Sue Bourne described the casting process for her film about people facing terminal illness, *A Time to Live (2017).* Most of the people she contacted told her they wanted to use the time they had left 'spending time with the family…being with the grandchildren, and I'm thinking, well, that isn't going to cut the mustard with me.' Bourne might not have been looking for the unsurprising, but it did not

follow that what she was seeking were exceptional people who were planning on completing 'stupid bucket lists' or 'running six marathons' in the final days of their lives:

> I'm looking for *truth*. That's what I think. I don't know if I'm a particularly good filmmaker, but the one thing I am good at is interviewing people. I do get people to open up; you sense the honesty of what they're saying.

Honesty, articulacy, and openness were qualities which were mentioned in many of my conversations. Whilst the commercial value placed on exaggerated, performative, or sensationalist content suggests a pull in a certain direction, a set of contradictory values prioritises authenticity and self-disclosure, suggesting that casting is a more nuanced and variable process than is generally granted. The imperative for contributors to be willing to share emotional revelations about their personal lives could be taken as further evidence of the media's systematic exploitation of contributors, but there is a distinction to be made between vulnerability and victimhood. The expectation that contributors will bare their souls does not simplistically equate with their abuse, but it does entail a level of emotional investment which implies an immense responsibility on the behalf of producers to safeguard their subsequent wellbeing – a topic to which I will return in more detail in Chapter Eight.

5.3 The casting trawl

In many productions, producers are looking for something specific. Their film requires contributors who have a particular profile or story to tell, and so the pool of potential participants effectively shrinks. Many of the contributors who took part in this research were pro-actively approached as the result of a targeted search. Sue Bourne described a typical casting trawl, where having done some initial research, she would draw up a wish-list of archetypes who she envisaged would be the best people to help her tell the story:

> We wanted a teenager, a mother at home with young babies, a divorcee - we had a list of types. We'd drawn up a list of about 20 if not more, and then we targeted our research to go to charities, organisations, local newspapers, newspaper articles, and did it like that.

Claire Lewis concurred, 'If you want to represent certain views within the programme, you have to go and look for those stereotypes…the fact is they usually do fulfil what you think they're going to do.'

In order to fulfil their wish-lists, producers typically draw upon the resources of pre-existing organisations and structures, and accounts which have already been published. Peter A. Gordon told me:

> I would've found [my contributors] through reading about them, which means they've previously given an interview to someone else, or through an organisation or a help group, where there would always be a mediator…otherwise, how would I find them? I'm not going to go knocking on doors. It would always be through somebody.

Using newspaper cuts to source contributors and stories is a recycling of material which is already in the public domain. The cannibalistic nature of the media means that 'new' content is more often old content in the guise of a different format. There is an amplification of voices we have already heard, and a muting of those which are already marginalised, with a consequential reproduction of historic or institutionalised patterns of discrimination.

If existing media texts play a passive role in enabling producers to access contributors, institutions and organisations often take a more active role, putting forward potential contributors from their membership or affiliations, or even becoming the setting for the documentary series itself. Productions are frequently centred upon public institutions, such as hospitals and police stations, where a reliable churn of dramatic stories is guaranteed. Many of the contributors I spoke to were positive about the link between public institutions and the media. Kulvinder Lall is a cardiothoracic surgeon at St Bart's Hospital, who took part in *Operation Live (2018), a* Channel Five documentary which broadcast live from an operating theatre. He told me the BAFTA-nominated series was reputation-enhancing for the hospital, doubling recruitment overnight, and raising public awareness about what happens during surgery. 'It's all been positive,' he claimed.

However, there is a potential for documentary productions to be compromised through an over-reliance upon institutional access. Claire Lewis, who's made several such documentaries said:

> Talk about editorial control. There is no editorial control on any programme like that, otherwise you can't do it. Same with *A&E*, same with *Hospital* – all the things that are filmed in hospitals or institutions, the programme makers have no editorial control at all. Because they say, 'Yeah, you can do this, but we want to see the

> rough cut, we want to lose anything that is any kind of inference on our professionalism. Lose this, keep that.' It's a complete fallacy.

When documentary-makers are entirely dependent upon the cooperation of institutions and organisations, there is pressure to make sure their agenda is fulfilled; otherwise, they may not be welcomed back. These arrangements incentivise documentary-makers to produce uncritical representations in order to maintain their access.

From a pragmatic viewpoint, wish-list casting is an eminently sensible way to approach the task of recruitment. Finding what you want is much easier when you know what you are looking for. However, there is something inherently reductive about casting to type. Sue Bourne was critical about the way casting teams typically approach the task:

> Tick tick tick. They go hammering in, and they're not interested in the person. It's always about what *they're* looking for, for *their* programme. It's not about a genuine interest in that human being, to find out what that human being can offer. It's just about can you talk about this, can you – how many of the boxes that I have to tick off do you tick off?

The contributors I interviewed were often aware of the way they had been cast to exemplify a pre-conceived notion of identity. Ashleigh Williams told me:

> They find someone as close as they can to fulfil these stereotypes they have in their head, and then perpetuate it onscreen.

Conflict can arise when the match between the wish-list and the contributors is imperfect. Some contributors felt they were being squeezed into a pre-existing notion of a character, and that some aspects of their identity were more welcome than others. Williams continued:

> They put a stereotype into the spotlight, then they egg you on to behave in a way that they want you to behave, then only take those bits, so they can say: 'The stereotypes are true.' They take narratives away from people who live in very complex situations.

Rich Willis expressed a degree of ambivalence about the media attention he received when he became a world champion powerlifter, happy to find his achievements celebrated on the one hand, but equally struck by the contrasting lack of interest in disabled people's everyday lives:

> People…are more interested in those superhuman efforts that what it must be like for someone with dwarfism or any disability who goes to university then studies to become a doctor or a surgeon, or get a PhD – how amazing is that, given all the obstacles they have to encounter? To me, that's more superhuman than lifting a few weights.

The iconic documentary series *Seven Up (1964-)* offers an illuminating example of the broader consequences of casting to type. The documentary has followed the same group of contributors for nearly 60 years. Claire Lewis has been the producer and main point of contact for its contributors since the 1980s. She told me:

> They were stereotypically represented. They were chosen to be examples of social class…the girls were chosen to be examples of working class and the boys were chosen to epitomise the upper class…They didn't set out to find personalities…they weren't looking for particular people, they were looking for representatives of a particular story.

Seven Up was designed to make a point about social class and determinism, but its casting unintentionally reflected the dominant values of a wider society which have since been exposed and challenged. The late director, Michael Apted, was criticised for the overwhelming focus on the stories of white males and the lack of contributor diversity. Lewis told me:

> When I met Michael, when I started on *28 Up*, my first question to him was…'Where are the women?' He said because when they made *Seven Up* it was pre-feminism…Women didn't have careers, they stayed at home and had their families…Television was made by men…It never entered anybody's heads.

The unbalanced casting had profound representational consequences, which Apted described as: 'a felony that was going to haunt me as long as the series survived…choosing only four girls was bad planning and it meant we missed out on the women's movement, one of the most powerful social and political upheavals of my lifetime' (Lewis, 1991, p.11).

Stella Bruzzi describes the casting of *Seven Up* as an attempt to create balance through pairings; 'binary opposites through which the underlying arguments could be explored' (2007, p.10). The pairs included two trios of East End girls and upper-class boys; the rural

working-class contrasted with the landed gentry; and the boarding school pupil compared against two boys growing up in a Barnardo's home. Interest was directed towards the extreme ends of the social spectrum, and what lay between those poles was largely excluded. Preconceived notions of a social script helped Granada TV make their point about social class, but frictions arose when the life events or behaviour of contributors disrupted the role they had been cast to play. When the father of John Brisby, one of the upper-class boys, died when he was nine-years old - problematising his portrayal as the beneficiary of a privileged childhood - it was never mentioned on-screen. 'Anything that doesn't quite fit what he [Apted] wants to portray of me doesn't play,' another of the contributors told Bruzzi (2007, p.94).

Understandably, as the *Seven Up* series progressed, the underlying notions of each contributor's social script began to create conflict. In *49 Up*, one of the working-class girls, Jackie Bassett, confronted Apted on-camera, irritated by his assumptions and misunderstandings, refusing to be reduced to a cliché. Lewis told me:

> Jackie never forgave him for stereotyping her…[she] always resented being used as a stereotype…Jackie said, 'You'll edit the programme how you see fit. I have no control over that.'

One of the trio of upper-class boys, Charles Furneaux, pulled out of the series altogether after *21 Up*, then later threatened to sue Granada over the continued use of his archive despite his withdrawal. The grouping of contributors into threes, organised by their social class, gave a 'falsifying sense of homogeneity' (Bruzzi, 2007, p.93). The contributors did not necessarily agree that their social class was the most salient aspect of their identity, in some cases rejecting the whole agenda. As Lewis told me, 'They outgrew their social class and became people.'

5.4 Unique contributors

Irrespective of any attempts by producers or external organisations to exert control over the casting process, in the context of some productions there is simply no choice to be made. Claire Lewis described this situation as follows:

> You're working with the people who are at the centre of the story, whose story it is. They could be articulate, inarticulate, shy, extrovert – you're literally stuck with the real people.

During the production of Sue Bourne's *My Street (2008b),* she approached residents of the 116 houses in the street in West London where she'd lived for 14 years, most of whom she had never met before. There was no casting process to speak of here – only the task of persuading the people who answered a knock on their door to take part. These people ranged from a man with Tourette's syndrome, to a convicted drug smuggler, to a man dying of cancer. The apparent randomness of the casting was the film's unique selling point: 'I wanted to say this could be your street…sometimes it is in the apparently ordinary that you find something.' For another documentary, Bourne wanted to study the phenomenon of family annihilation by examining the case of Robert Mochrie, a former civil servant who murdered his wife and four children before committing suicide. What came across in my interview with her was the sheer difficulty of convincing the traumatised and bereaved that participating aligns with their interests, when it would be so much easier for them to decline:

> Trying to persuade [the surviving relatives] was one of the toughest, toughest things…Why on earth they would want this brought back up into the public domain?

In such situations, the power balance tips. Without the contributor's involvement, there can be no film, and so rather than competing against one another for the privilege of taking part, participants must somehow be persuaded. The scholarship often emphasises the producer's nefarious charisma in performing such tasks. Janet Malcolm offers the following description of unscrupulous print journalists:

> Like the credulous widow who wakes up one day to find the charming young man and all her savings gone, so the consenting subjects of a piece of nonfiction writing learns – when the article or book appears – his hard lesson (1990, p.3).

My research did provide a degree of evidence to support this characterization of media workers, which Ruth Palmer calls the 'seduce-betray scenario' (2017b, p.584) . Several of my interviewees evoked a sense of a seduction or a courtship, where the producer must woo them and convince them to say yes. Just as the casting call conditions the production process in a particular way, this type of courtship conditions it in another: because the feeling of being desired, sought out and prized in this way is hyper-flattering. Jenny Smith, the headteacher

from *Educating the East End (2014),* told me there were times when she felt the school's families were convinced to take part against their better judgement:

> The production company can be very persuasive…they're very good at getting what they want…They give families lots of attention, they made them feel great, they build up a really good relationship with them. They take them around cakes, they take them out for dinner. Because they build up that trust the families often do say yes. They think this will be a nice thing to do.

As Smith's account demonstrates, the line between trust and manipulation can be blurry. It could be argued that taking people gifts and buying them dinner is simply good manners, and a recognition of their efforts in helping to make the documentary. However, it was also clear is that any ambiguity motivating such treatment is not lost upon contributors. Jo Lockwood told me:

> They want to emotionally bond you into the process. There's a lot of effort in the early stages to make you feel comfortable – and then you do feel like a bit more of a star. It's great sometimes, you've got a production crew around you, getting you coffees, driving you here, 'You want a sandwich? We'll get you a sandwich. Just sit there, Jo, don't worry about it'…And then you realise – I wouldn't say they're fake. I wouldn't say anyone on the production crew was fake – but then you realise that you are just a commodity, at the end of the day. They're making sure their commodity is treated in a way that makes them want to perform.

These moments of insight reset the power dynamics, presenting challenges for the documentary-maker as their contributor's sense of their own value and agency grows. I asked Claire Lewis how she had persuaded the cast of *Seven Up* to make such an extraordinary lifelong commitment to the production. She told me:

> I can't persuade them to do it. They either want to do it or they don't...I don't think you can persuade people to do things they don't want to do…They have complete power. Apted has no power, I have no power, ITV has no power - they hold it all. The question was, how long would it take them to realise?

As Lewis' comment suggests, once filming has commenced, contributors become an irreplaceable and indispensable production asset, without whom the documentary could not

be made. The dawning of this realisation accounts for one of the inbuilt tensions of documentary-making.

5.5 Conclusion

Having analysed contrasting approaches to casting, I want to bring my arguments together to make two key points. The first is about the influence of the commercial context, and how production processes are enacted in accordance a set of commercial demands. My research suggests a shifting dynamic between contributors and the production, which is largely based upon their relative availability as a resource. When content is plentiful, and there are many potential contributors to choose from, people must compete to take part. If content is rare or unique, stories can be highly sought after, and a process of courtship and persuasion follows in order to secure their compliance. Whilst there are many possible approaches to performing the task of casting, to a significant extent, it is economic and organisational imperatives which dictate the manner of the process, rather than any moral sense of participant's rights and worth as human subjects, or even the preservation of editorial integrity.

Secondly, I want to make the point that the casting process is inherently reductive, reinforcing existing stereotypes, whilst the marginalised are rendered less visible. By casting according to wish-lists, producers are not so much democratizing media participation as unintentionally confirming their own biases. My research suggests that rather than redressing participatory inequalities, the default outcome of a typical casting practice is liable to magnify existing patterns of visibility and absence, reproducing and institutionalising systematic inequalities.

Through an analysis of the casting process, a competing sense of contributor's status emerges – both as unique individuals embarking upon a transformative creative relationship, and as a production asset, expressing and revealing the ethical and pragmatic tensions at the heart of documentary production.

6. Producing consent

In this chapter, I wish to advance an understanding of consent as a fundamental, yet flawed concept within documentary production. In particular, I want to show how the same principle intended to enshrine the agency of contributors can also be used to disabuse them of their rights.

Consent is simultaneously a bureaucratic procedure and an ethical concern (Anderson and Benson, 1991). By the narrowest of definitions, it is a legalistic stipulation, whereby a release form is signed by contributors granting their permission to be featured in a documentary. The requirement for all participants to give their written permission is ostensibly an affirmation of their inviolable right to make this choice; but the request to sign on the dotted line is instigated by broadcasters and producers, and ultimately, it is *their interests* the consent procedure is designed to protect. There is an evidential quality to consent. Release forms provide proof that contributors have made a commitment to participate – but meaningful consent is more than an administrative act of form-filling. A more expansive conceptualisation operates in parallel, which can be characterised as a process of ethical engagement with participants. It is the drawing and redrawing of boundaries which takes place in increments, alongside every interaction and editorial decision that is made.

By considering the processes through which consent is produced, my aim is to identify the instances in which it empowers and safeguards contributors, and the counter-examples in which it impinges upon creative collaboration, sows distrust, and shores up participatory inequalities. Using examples from my research, I discuss first the legalistic, then the ethical conceptualisations of consent in sections 6.1 and 6.2 respectively. In sections 6.3 and 6.4, I consider the challenges posed to these concepts through the filming of vulnerable contributors, and bids to withdraw. In this chapter, I discuss how production routines are arranged to obtain consent whilst minimising the risk of disruption, and question what justifiable limitations can be placed upon participants' rights to give consent for matters of public interest or editorial control.

6.1 Consent as a legal procedure

According to Mark Cenite's (2009) research, the release forms widely used in the television and film industries are simply a form of contract, whose legal authority derives from general

contract law. A standard release form gives the producers the rights to use recorded material without restriction in any media format, existing or yet to be devised, throughout the universe and through perpetuity without liability to the participant. Kate Warrender emailed me a copy of the release form she was asked to sign before taking part in *The Real Death in Paradise (2022).* She told me:

> You realize when you read that…you are utterly powerless in this relationship, because that says *we can do anything.* We can use this information however we want. We can do what we want with it…You sign the document knowing what it is that you're signing, but… you've got to agree to that, or the program won't be made.

The language of release forms is sweeping and powerful, giving an effect which can seem intimidating. Furthermore, what contributors may not appreciate is that from a legal perspective, it supersedes any spoken or written negotiations which might have taken place prior to its signing (Cenite, 2009, p.25). The significance of this is that any assurances made by the production team to the subjects of their film - perhaps during the casting process whilst trying to persuade them to come onboard, or throughout the course of the filming itself - do not carry the force of law. Documentary-makers are not legally obligated to make good on their promises beyond the scope of the form.

My data indicates there is great confusion about the significance of release forms. On the one hand, documentary-makers tended to decry them as worthless – a trick of smoke and mirrors giving the appearance of great importance without having much concrete value. Claire Lewis told me:

> Everybody tries to pretend that when you sign a consent form it's irretrievable. It's not, at all. A contributor can withdraw their consent right up to the minute before transmission, and still have to be obeyed…You can sign a consent form, but you can still withdraw your consent.

Similarly, Sue Bourne described release forms as 'not worth the paper they're written on.' She explained:

> If they decide they don't want to be in the film anymore, they can just do it. You cannot put a film out once someone says, 'I don't want to be in it anymore,' 'I hate it' or 'My life has changed.' You can't do it.

The contributors I spoke to, on the other hand, tended to see the moment of signing a release form as final and binding. Jenny Smith, for example, told me: 'I had no control. I'd signed my life away.'

The contrast between these two viewpoints is revealing. Kate Nash perceptively describes the signing of a form as a '*ritual* of consent', which in reality, may have greater symbolic than legal significance (2012, p.328, my italics). The authority of release forms could, in practice, be difficult to enforce, but if the contributor *feels* they've made an obligating commitment, then they might as well have. It is a misapprehension which, deliberately or not, serves to obscure contributors' power from their own comprehension. Jerry Rothwell told me:

> People spend a lot of time trying to tell them they don't have any power, so they don't exert it. Actually, they have incredible power. All release forms are worthless. They're worthless if somebody wanted to say no.

The ultimate power that contributors have is to withdraw from a production, but the ritual of signing a release form creates the false impression that they have already abdicated this right. As Claire Lewis said:

> We don't want to hand that control to the contributors. Why would we? We want to make the films we want to make. We don't want them interfering – that's the collective philosophy.

Despite the apparent power-grab that the signing of release forms symbolises, as these comments suggest, the producers I interviewed often expressed a degree of ambivalence or even negativity about the process, finding the forms intrusive or counter-productive to their creative ambitions. Kate Nash likens the signing of forms to 'a kind of handing over of valuables' - a source of 'ethical stress,' which protects the interests of the broadcast institution, but undermines the development of the relationship of trust necessary to make a film (2012, pp.328-9). Daisy Asquith told me she 'hated releases' and in the past, had even falsified them 'to get broadcasters off my back,' making an agreement with her contributors that they could sign 'the real one' at the end of filming instead. She said:

> The moment itself when you put that form in front of people changes your relationship with them…they're going, 'Oh, it's this legal thing going on'…

> You're filming them when they have no power and they're defensive, hiding, trying to be in control.

Conversely, Asquith argued that better documentaries are produced when contributors retain a sense of their agency, and the relationship is built upon mutual trust and shared vulnerability, rather than a legal agreement.

The signing of a release form is a moment within the production cycle which teases apart the competing obligations documentary-makers feel towards the broadcaster, their contributors, and their creative goals - which are by no means always in accordance – foreshadowing the potential for torn loyalties and conflict if and when the interests of each party diverge as the production process plays out.

6.2 Consent as an ethical process

The BBC's own editorial guidelines concede that the signing of a release form is not a panacea in establishing consent, stating:

> As consent forms contain limited information, they do not necessarily demonstrate that there has been properly *informed* consent .

Here, the concept of informed consent is brought into play, creating a distinction between the legalistic model of consent and a higher standard, addressing an ethical dimension. Informed consent has been a focal point for documentary scholars. Common criteria offered to test whether consent is 'informed' includes freedom from coercion and deception, full knowledge of procedures and anticipated effects necessary to make a reasoned decision to participate, and individual competence to consent (Anderson and Benson, 1991, p.59).

The likelihood of any one of these facets being realised within the production process has been disputed by scholars. Calvin Pryluck (1976) argues that the very presence of a film crew is coercive, and any hope of informed consent is undermined by unequal power relations between producers and contributors. In most circumstances, having had no previous experience of being filmed, contributors are poorly positioned to understand the dynamics and expectations - as Jenny Smith put it:

> I don't think you can understand what doing something like that is until you've actually done it, and you realise how bonkers it is.

Informed consent is premised upon an understanding of consequences, but Bill Nichols questions the extent to which documentary filmmakers are able to foretell what they will film or its ensuing effects (2017, p.11). My research certainly offered vivid examples of this unpredictability. Paul Dilley gave his consent to be filmed for *Emergency Helicopter Medics (2019b)* whilst feeling unwell in the back of an ambulance. He couldn't have known that ten minutes into the journey, he would suffer a series of cardiac arrests. By the time the ambulance reached the hospital, the paramedics had restarted his heart 18 times. He told me:

> It was the most challenging call out they'd ever had for a heart attack…everyone thought I was dead or would be brain damaged. I did pass away for 46 minutes…I had no oxygen to my brain. I was on life support. If I was going to wake up, I was highly likely to be brain damaged.

Dilley gave his consent without the knowledge there was a high probability he would not survive the ambulance journey, and the filming could've included his own death. I asked him how he felt, in retrospect, about having those critical moments, where his life hung in the balance filmed:

> I guess for me, it would've been OK…but how my family would've felt, I don't know. Having my last hours being filmed would've been horrific for them…Seeing me go through being brought back would've been traumatic for my family.

Nevertheless, Dilley defended the right of crews to film people *in extremis*, saying: 'It's not about that person [who is being filmed]. It's about trying to save the next person.' The air ambulance service which saved his life is funded entirely by charitable donations. Dilley reiterated how vital it is that their work is publicised in order for them to continue operating. Objections to informed consent cannot straightforwardly be upheld, because potential incursions on personal privacy must be balanced against the public interest in obtaining such footage.

During medical emergencies, events can be so shocking they eclipse the significance of the filming altogether. Luisa Hammett took her 17-month old son, Cody, to Great Ormond Street for what she had believed was a low-risk operation to remove a suspected tumour in his brain. She agreed to be filmed, but had little idea of what she was about to be told about the severity of Cody's condition:

> Our doctor in Cardiff said it was fine. They do this procedure and it's over and done with. Then when we got to Great Ormond Street, they explained the procedure and the pros and cons – it was a whole different kettle of fish. It's not straightforward. We could lose him.

On camera, the Hammetts were told that Cody had a Vein of Galen – a rare malformation of blood vessels deep in the brain. As a result of the operation, there was an equal chance he could die, be left severely disabled, or make a complete recovery – but if they decided not to go ahead with the treatment, at some point his heart was likely to fail. When being given such devastating news, the ability of contributors to consent to filming, or indeed to process any other information, becomes impaired. When I asked her about this scene in the film, Hammett told me:

> Half of it, you don't take in…I've got no recollection. You block so much out…I can't remember any of that conversation, other than the bit where [the consultant] said…he might die.

In such situations, much rests upon the strength of the relationship between contributors and the production team. Rather than perceiving their presence as intrusive, Hammett saw the documentary-makers as a source of support, who helped the family while away the long anxious hours of waiting, treating them with genuine care and concern. Their willingness to empower their participants and invest them with a degree of continuing control was an important part of forming this bond. Hammett told me:

> They always said, 'If you want us to stop, if you want us to leave, if you don't want us there at all, we can stop at any time. We can stop filming halfway through, we won't carry on.'… They were so discrete…you don't even know they're there. I was so overwhelmed with everything, I didn't even realise.

However, in other cases in my research, contributors really *didn't* know the film crew were there. The justification that consent can be taken retrospectively when filming *in extremis* is used by many documentary-makers when they are recording unpredictable developing situations. Janet Morsy was taken to A&E at St George's Hospital in London after being stabbed by a stranger in a random attack in a supermarket carpark. The first time she became aware she had been filmed for *24 Hours in A&E (2011-)* was several days later, when she discovered a slip that had been left in her handbag by the production company. Morsy was so grateful to the medics who had saved her life that she agreed to give her consent

retrospectively in order to highlight their good work - but it was only during our interview that she realised the remote cameras which recorded her medical treatment would've been monitored by a production team in a gallery, and that she was being watched by people she couldn't see. It is hard to imagine a more private space than A&E, where in the aftermath of traumatic events, patients give their medical histories, are examined in states of undress, and undergo invasive medical procedures. It's a place where people suffer, and in some cases, people die. What is striking when considering the example of *24 Hours in A&E* – which has been in production for over ten years and has broadcast over 250 episodes - is the lack of debate about this use of public space by media organisations, and the apparent sleight of hand which has been performed, where consent to be filmed is assumed, and the right to consent is only required for broadcast. I discuss this style of fixed rig filming in greater detail in Chapter Nine.

The unpredictability of documentary-making, and the unexpected outcomes which can result from filming, mean that the best practice of obtaining informed consent is often conceptualised as an ethical process which runs in parallel to the production. Jerry Rothwell - who's made films where consent is a central issue, such as *Heavy Load (2008)* about a group of people with learning disabilities who form a punk band, and *The Reason I Jump (2020)* about the experiences of non-speaking autistic people around the world – summarised this perspective, saying:

> I feel like it's not about the release form, it's a *process of consent*…consent, for me, is a relationship. It isn't about whether they've signed that form or not.

However, this ideal is belied by that fact that in most productions, consent is only taken on one occasion, and contributors are not shown the film prior to transmission. In general, previews are perceived to be both risky and unnecessary. Rothwell explained:

> There's a lot of discouragement from the production side, because it's dead inconvenient.

However, this perception of inconvenience is perhaps overstated within the industry. As John Ellis (2011) points out, the digital editing process is inherently more manipulable and collaborative than film was. Documentaries routinely undergo multiple rounds of changes at the behest of executives, commissioners, and legal departments – yet there remains an ethos of keeping contributors well away from the edit until it's too late for them to exert any control. Several of the documentary-makers I interviewed were critical about this practice.

Daisy Asquith told me:

> I think it's appalling to make people sign a piece of paper before they've seen what you've done.

Asquith tells me she always gives her contributors the opportunity to view before transmission, and only on one occasion has it backfired. She described a situation where a participant made a dramatic revelation on camera, then later begged her to edit it out:

> It was the best thing we'd filmed…But it might've ruined her life…she might've killed herself, genuinely.

Asquith cut the scene, but the commissioner was 'furious.' She told me she stood by her decision to put her contributor's wellbeing first, but felt that both the documentary and her professional reputation suffered because of the omission. Perhaps for these reasons, the majority of contributors I interviewed reported they were not given the opportunity to view before broadcast, indicating that in most cases, production priorities are differently ordered.

6.3 Consent and vulnerable contributors

Informed consent requires that contributors are competent to make the choice to participate – yet films are frequently made with contributors who are under the age of consent, or with vulnerable adults. The BBC Editorial Guidelines defends the right of the media to 'reflect the world as it is,' which justifies the added risks:

> In our output we can offer a voice to people confronting complex challenges arising from extreme poverty, illness, learning difficulties or forms of dementia, bereavement, old age, mental health or other issues and enable them to communicate their experience to a wide audience .

In several examples from my research, the issue of competence to consent was a central part of the film's narrative. Sue Bourne's documentary *Mum and Me (2008a)* was reviewed by *The Herald* as 'an unflinching portrait of her life with her elderly mother, taken hostage in her own body by the cruel thief that is Alzheimer's.' They described the film as 'surprisingly funny and tender…as well as awfully indiscrete and painfully honest' (Belcher, 2008). I asked Bourne whether she had reservations about making it:

> Fuck did I! No, no, no, there were huge reservations, because my mum…wasn't able to give full consent. So was it exploitative? It could've been seen as that.

Bourne told me her executive producer originally advised her against making the film, but later, having seen test footage of her mother – indefatigable, candid, and hilarious – understood why she would want to:

> He said, 'I get it now. Your mum's a star.' And he said, 'Do you think your mother, in her heyday, would've liked the fact that you're making a film about her, exposing her to the public when she's demented? Do you think she'd like that?' And I said, 'Well, she quite likes attention!'

Bourne described a process whereby a senior member of the production was elected to advocate for her mother's best interests. Ironically, it seems that in this case, and in other examples from my research where competence was an obvious concern from the outset, consent was a considered and robust process, and the ethical dimensions were better attended. More worrying were the cases where competence to consent could be easily sidestepped - for example, when children were filmed, and their parents could simply be asked to give consent on their behalf. Jenna Presley agreed for her 12-year old son Archie to be filmed for *Feral Families (2017)* - a Channel 4 documentary ostensibly about home-schooling. In one scene, Archie is shown struggling to read a book. Presley felt the scene was used to imply that her teaching was failing to equip him with basic skills, but the commentary failed to signpost he has dyslexia. She told me:

> After the show, his friends saw it, and people took the piss out of him. They'd made him look like he's really stupid, and he isn't…It caused so much grief…he got really bullied afterwards…He thinks he's stupid now, because of that one clip which I asked them not to use.

The very public nature of media appearances suggests the impact of unanticipated reputational damage could be challenging for any contributor to deal with, but during formative teenage years, the psychological effects could have an even greater impact. Jonny Mitchell told me he was shocked at the level of vitriol directed towards some of his pupils on social media during the broadcast of *Educating Yorkshire (2013),* who were screenshotted and turned into memes; or described with derogatory, sexualised language. Afterwards, he told me he felt guilty for the part he unwittingly played in exposing so many children to the heat of public scrutiny:

> I've put lots and lots of people in the spotlight…many of them with significant issues or mental health…How do you prepare a 14 or 15 year old kid for that?

Having worked in television for over 30 years, Peter A. Gordon expressed his reservations about the filming of minors *per se*:

> I've always thought that children always present a bigger issue. Broadcasters can hide behind the whole idea of informed consent. You can talk to the parent or the teacher and they say, 'That's fine, let's do it, little Jimmy will be fine.' You almost have to have an extra layer yourself that self-disciplines…[because] kids are exposed, and they are quite raw.

Brian Winston agrees that, at its worst, consent can be abused by broadcasters, becoming a means of side-stepping ethical responsibility, hiding dubious practices behind the shibboleth of a release form (2000, p.162). The problem with the prevailing legalistic model of consent, is that sometimes, rather than offering a means of connecting with the moral obligations documentary-makers have in respect of their subjects, it can stand in place of them.

In the final section of this discussion, I discuss examples from my research where contributors attempted to withdraw their consent, which enable us to explore the limitations which might justifiably be placed upon individual agency through arguments of public interest and editorial control.

6.4 The withdrawal of consent

When filming has had unintended consequences, expectations haven't been met, or the best interests of those involved have diverged, contributors may wish to rescind their consent. However, once the production is underway, producers are in a position of financial vulnerability. Their investment might run into many months of time and thousands of pounds, but their product has not been successfully completed and delivered. Given the scale of the financial risk, it would perhaps be naïve to imagine that attempts to withdraw from a production could play out irrespective of economic considerations, but in the discourse surrounding consent, justifications tend to be built around principles – chiefly, issues of public interest and editorial control. The following examples from my research allow us to consider the legitimacy of these limiting factors, and question the extent to which they might conceal an underlying profit motive.

One of my interviewees, Ashleigh Williams, is a sex worker who agreed to take part in *Louis Theroux: Selling Sex (2020)* - a documentary which she hoped would challenge stereotypes and destigmatise sex work. She signed her release form 'in a very rushed way, after filming, at 9pm.' Williams is autistic and had requested for her carer to be present during filming to help her make decisions about boundaries, but this request, she told me, was frequently overlooked. Her carer and co-contributor, Georgina Tyson said: 'she set boundaries and he [the director] crossed them constantly.'

Towards the end of filming, Williams – a recovering alcoholic - was asked to attend a shoot taking place in a pub – an environment where she automatically felt wrong-footed - and was explicitly told not to bring her carer along. At that interview, Williams said:

> They just probed me. They told me to bring pictures of me as a kid, so I did. They probed from them. It was immediate. 'What was it like growing up?'… I did not want to say that on TV. I don't tell people, nor have I ever told people.

Feeling coerced, Williams confessed she'd been sexually abused by a family member during her childhood – a secret she had only previously confided to a handful of close friends.

> I broke down on camera. You have to remember I've never spoken to anybody about this - not even a therapist…I said something I did not want to say. That was not the way I wanted my friends or my family to find out.

For Williams, one of the motivations to take part in the documentary was to offer a more empowered portrayal of sex workers, who she feels are misrepresented in popular culture as traumatised, damaged people - and yet in the final text, against her best intentions, Williams ended up colluding with the very characterisation she set out to challenge. In hindsight, she was able to offer an explanation of why this happened:

> The whole time I was on-screen I was really paranoid about the way I was acting, like I was acting really weird. I ended up trying to use [being abused] as an excuse for why I was so weird. They made me feel isolated and like a freak, so in turn, I wanted to demonstrate why, to save myself. They'd manipulated me into this position, where I felt like in order to escape it, I had to say some big ultimate excuse which would free me from anything bad I'd said.

The anticipated judgements of the future audience, and the backdrop of stereotypical tropes and misrepresentations already circulating in the public sphere, not only informed the

approach of the producers, but laid out a narrative arc which Williams found herself compelled to follow. The media text which resulted did not offer, in her estimation, an insight into the reality of her life, but a misrepresentation in which she became complicit in order to comply with a pre-fixed performance of self which she knew would be accepted as mitigation for her socially stigmatised choices.

Immediately after filming, Williams tried to withdraw her consent, but was told 'there's nothing we can do' and 'it won't really work without you.' She told the producers she felt suicidal about the prospect of her deepest secrets being publicly broadcast and complained to the BBC, but after an internal investigation the programme was transmitted as planned. Williams' family disbelieved her allegations and are no longer speaking to her.

Ultimately, Williams felt the documentary perpetuated many of the stereotypes she had set out to challenge – an opinion echoed by some of the reviews. *The Telegraph* claimed, 'This tired film taught us nothing new about the sex industry' (Singh, 2020). *The Independent* wrote, 'In truth, this film feels as though it could have been made at any time in the past 15 years' (Cumming, 2020). In an op-ed she wrote for *Gal Dem* magazine about her experience, Williams argued: 'It is exhausting as a community to constantly try to educate the media and the public on the realities of sex work, just for them to hijack the narrative for their own purposes' (2020). I asked Williams why she thought the media struggled to represent stories of sex work in a way which she judged to be authentic. She told me:

> Because it's really not that interesting! [laughs] You're sitting on a computer, painting your toenails, waiting for a random man to say come over. You go over. You maybe have a glass of wine. You go home. It's not that exciting. *That's* why.

In their right to reply to *Gal Dem*, the BBC claimed there were a number of inaccuracies in Williams' account, and said: 'The welfare and views of our contributors are always part of the process and it was our genuine view that Ashleigh's concerns had been resolved.' They defended their right to broadcast based on the principle of editorial control, stating: 'The final edit does, and should, lie in the control of the BBC.' The language of editorial control draws upon long-standing journalistic norms, resonant with democratic values of integrity and freedom of speech. However, in this instance we may wish to question the extent to which the invocation of 'editorial control' is serving a rhetorical function; and whether it could rightly be judged that an oblique sense of public interest in Williams' story should outweigh the very real harm she suffered as a consequence of her participation. There are a number of entangled issues

within Williams' account of these events, but what it illuminates perhaps most clearly are the many possible ways in which production practices can have a disproportionately negative impact upon people from marginalised and under underrepresented communities – whose needs are misapprehended, whose lives are misunderstood, and whose wellbeing is often considered secondary to impersonal principles such as editorial control.

Several of the producers I interviewed expressed concerns about the way editorial independence can be evoked to justify the separation of the authorial autonomy of a story from its protagonist. Claire Lewis told me:

> It's all fabrication. Editorial control is something that's been invented by the broadcasting business in order to keep our control over the kinds of films we want to make.

The sense I gathered from my research was of a principle being utilised in an uneven, and often self-serving manner, to obscure what might more accurately be considered to be commercial concerns.

6.5 Conclusion

By contrasting different conceptualisations of consent, what I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter is that a process which ostensibly formalises participation and enshrines the rights of contributors can also be used as a means of disempowering them. Whilst the legal force of release forms might be questionable, the power they hold in terms of conditioning relationships with contributors, indicating the limitations upon their agency, is very real.

Although informed consent is an inherently flawed concept, the ways in which it could be made more robust are well-established, and indeed, are an existing element of many documentary-makers' practice. The fact that measures such as obtaining continual consent and allowing contributors to view their documentaries prior to broadcast are not universally employed demonstrates a conflict between commercial risks and contributor care, in which the former often takes precedence over the latter.

The norms of free speech, public interest, and editorial independence are often used to justify breaches to the individual right to consent, but these norms are not unassailable, and the underlying interests they are used to protect should always be subject to scrutiny. When

media organisations wield such principles as a means of disarming the relatively powerless or vulnerable, their claims to journalistic integrity are fundamentally compromised.

7. Documentary relationships

The relationship between filmmakers and their contributors is an important theme within the study of documentaries, with the relative powerlessness of the participant generally perceived to be problematic (Winston, 1988, Nichols, 1991, Canet, 2022). Research into creative labour practices has shown how organisational conditions of chronic precarity and insecurity are embodied in the lives of creative workers (Ursell, 2000, Banks, 2007, Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011), but less is understood about how they are manifested in the interpersonal relationships between these workers and their subjects – the ordinary people, without whom, their documentaries could not be made.

The argument I wish to present in this chapter is that whilst scholarly attention has tended to focus upon the power of the individual auteur, most discussions have significantly underplayed the structural context, and consequently, we have a limited understanding of how documentary-maker/ contributor relationships are influenced by the production process, and how conflicts of interest are embedded within the organisation of the cultural industries. By analysing documentary relationships as a practice of creative labour, my aim is to question what it means when a job entails the production of intimate connections, which are also subject to commercial pressures and imperatives.

In section 7.1, I recap some of the ways that documentary relationships have been interpreted by previous researchers, arguing that Arlie Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour offers a useful tool for analysing the implications that permeable boundaries between work life and intimacy can have for documentary-makers and contributors alike. Section 7.2 engages with the various processes and procedures through which documentary relationships are forged and maintained (and in some cases, also resisted and challenged), and then section 7.3 will consider how these processes are managed and regulated at an organisational level. The main point I wish to make is that relationship work - although intrinsic to documentary production - is under-recognised by the media industries, and consequently, appropriate professional frameworks have yet to be developed, with worrying implications for training, regulation, and duty of care.

7.1 Documentary-making and emotional labour

The flow of power within the relationships between producers and contributors has been a key concern of scholars, with the relative powerlessness of the participant generally

perceived as problematic (Winston, 1988, Winston, 1995, Nichols, 1991). From the inmates of the Bridgewater State Hospital for the criminally insane, who Frederick Wiseman filmed being stripped naked and force fed without obtaining their formal consent; to Claude Lanzmann's 'sadistic' interrogation of the barber of Treblinka who evaded the Nazi gas chambers; to the Thai prostitute Dennis O'Rourke hired for sex then made a film about: scholars have found ample evidence which appears to substantiate these claims (Anderson and Benson, 1991, LaCapra, 1997, p.257, Williams, 1999). Bill Nichols claims the asymmetric organisation of relationships in documentary-making is such that contributors experience a displacement, divested of the authority to represent themselves. He claims the invisibility of the documentary-maker is evidence of their power. The filmmaker's specificity is effectively concealed, presented as omniscient or objective rather than situated and subjective. 'The 'I' who speaks….dissolves itself into a disembodied, depersonalized, institutional discourse of power and knowledge' (1993, p.181).

However, more recent work by Agniezska Piotrowska (2013b) and Patricia Aufderheide (2009) emphasises alternate aspects of documentary relationships, including their emotional, psychosocial, creative, and collaborative underpinnings. Alongside asymmetries of power, my research suggests that perhaps the most striking distinctive feature of the relationships between documentary-makers and their subjects is the degree of intensity involved. Whereas a journalist might typically share a fleeting phone call with the people they write about, and the producers of talent shows and talk-shows' interactions largely revolve around studio days, the process of making a documentary tends to be more protracted (Palmer, 2017a, Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Several of my interviewees described enduring relationships, lasting longer than many marriages - ten, twenty, or even forty years and counting. Emily Speirs, for example, has spent her entire lifetime being filmed for the Channel 4 series *Born to be Different (2003-).* 'It's something so special to be involved with that it's hard not to be close with everybody who is involved,' she told me. 'We just trust each other totally.'

Undeniably, there is an instrumental element to filmmaker-subject relationships. They are formed under a contrived set of circumstances, and geared towards achieving a particular outcome. Yet the data I gathered overwhelmingly describes a connection that can be intimate and complex - not only for contributors, but for documentary-makers too. Director Daisy Asquith is the godmother to two children of one of her subjects. Claire Lewis told me of the *Seven Up* participants, who she has filmed for over 40 years, 'They're like family members.'

Scholars including Laura Grindstaff (2002) and Kym Melzer (2019) have explored the affective work of media production using Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labour. In her seminal book *The Managed Heart (1983)*, Hochschild writes about the commodification of emotions which occurs when people's feelings are displaced from the private domain and assimilated within labour processes. By foregrounding the ways our inner lives can be appropriated and utilised for the benefit of the corporate workplace, this framework enables us to connect the political-economic organisation of the media to the subjective experiences of the people who work within it (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011, p.170).

Grindstaff notes that both media workers and contributors are required to perform different variations of emotional labour. Whilst the filmmakers expend their energies behind the scenes, cajoling, encouraging, and sympathising; their subjects are required to produce a convincing emotional performance which the audience will read as authentic and heartfelt:

> The payoff for the emotional labour expended by producers is supposed to be the emotional performances of guests (2002, p.193).

Because documentary relationships are inherently instrumental, there is a lingering sense that they are also manufactured and false. Arlie Hochschild, however, makes the distinction between 'surface acting' and 'deep acting' (1983, p.35). In surface acting, the gesture or expression is superficial or uncommitted, and is easily detected as false. In daily life, when our instinctive emotional response doesn't fit the situation, we instead employ deep acting, exhorting the requisite feeling or retraining our imaginations to match the appropriate response. Because the kind of close attachments involved in documentary relationships cannot be easily faked, they have to be internalized and truly felt; pretence is simply not convincing. For the relationship to be successful, it has to be genuine. Peter A. Gordon agreed, 'It is a real relationship even if it starts off formal or contrived.' Scholars have tended to characterise the filmmaker-subject dynamic as manipulative and exploitative, but if we consider the relationships filmmakers build with contributors might be genuine *as well as* instrumental, the dilemmas they face become more ethically complex.

Hochschild has been criticised for characterising emotional labour in wholly negative terms (see Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011, p.162). It was certainly clear from my research that relationships with contributors are not only a cause of stress, but also a source of pleasure for documentary-makers and contributors alike, in many cases outlasting the productions which initiated them, and continuing for months or even years afterwards. Asquith said:

> I've gained more than it's cost me. I've gained understanding, knowledge of people, and love from people – relationships with people I wouldn't have met otherwise.

But despite the apparent mutuality and voluntarism with which these relationships are conducted, it is important to recognise that they are not incidental to the project of making the text. Several documentary-makers told me that relationship-building is *the* most fundamental skill of their job, and can only be achieved through a huge investment of off-camera time. As Claire Lewis put it:

> Getting stories, getting people to talk…that's about making a relationship and spending time with people. If you cut those corners, you'll never make a good film.

Intimacy is deliberately and purposefully cultivated as an integral part of the process of documentary production. Therefore, in order to build an understanding of documentary relationships, they need to be theorised as a practice of creative labour, performed within the context of the media industries.

7.2 The practices and procedures of relationship work

Having described some of the key characteristics of documentary relationships, in this next section, I consider how they are put into effect as a component of the creative process – what are the procedures that make and maintain these relationships, and in what ways do they impact upon the people involved?

To perform the emotional labour of documentary production, producers must manage their emotional responses to situations, supressing negative feelings and limiting their self-expression, 'either pretending to care…or trying not to care too much' (Grindstaff, 2008). Daisy Asquith described her interactions with contributors as 'facilitating, listening, and asking gentle kind questions that will help someone come to their own conclusion. No one ever does it back [laughs]…you're an emotional service to that person.' When I asked her to clarify what being an emotional service meant, she told me: 'Your emotions are not important, is how I think of it'.

Many of the documentary-makers I interviewed told me they found it difficult to know what limits could reasonably be placed upon their obligations to their contributors. They described fielding phone calls at 3am, performing a role which can feel more like being a

social worker or a counsellor than a producer or director. Asquith described the personal consequences that can result from such permeability between work life and intimacy, telling me:

> The problem is you start allowing people to get away with treating you badly in your life. You're so used to being like, 'You do your worse, I will remain calm, accept everything you chuck at me.' It's your job. And then you realise you're doing it in your life as well. That's not very healthy.

The management of inconvenient emotions is harder to accomplish when a documentary-maker's feelings towards their contributors are ambiguous, or even negative. Many shared stories about people they found difficult to work with. One director described a film she made about women who sold kiss and tell stories to the tabloid press:

> Everyone in that film was well dodgy. They were! They were lying, manipulative; they would sell their granny. They were making money out of selling stories. They were morally corrupt…I didn't trust any of them.

Another director lobbied for years to make a film about gay parenting, after being repeatedly told by commissioners that 'gay doesn't rate.' When she finally convinced a broadcaster to finance the film, the contributors who were cast were people whose views she found 'appalling and offensive:'

> I've always found it hard to make a film about someone I didn't like, or even love…I'm making this film that's going to represent queer parenting with some of the worst people you're likely to meet in the gay community. What the hell am I doing?

The director described the resulting internal conflict she experienced between what she views as her 'responsibility to let people be the real extent of themselves' and 'giving them a free reign on misogyny.' A tense shoot culminated in a huge row which jeopardised the whole production:

> There was too much time together, too much proximity, and we got quite fed up with each other…I thought I'm not doing this; it's a nightmare. We probably had silence for a month, then I wrote to him and said this is what I think happened. I just backed down because it's my job…I wanted to finish the film.

In circumstances such as this, documentary-makers are required to self-edit, suppressing aspects of their own identities in order to get the job done. Ultimately, Hochschild claims, performing this kind of affective work can result in the estrangement of the self from one's own authentic feelings. Our emotions are a form of 'pre-action', which help us to orientate ourselves within the world (1983, p.56). Without emotional authenticity, our autonomy and capacity to act is fundamentally undermined.

One of the main purposes of the emotional labour of filmmakers is to elicit emotional performances from their participants, who are often required to give access to their inner lives: making intimate disclosures, sharing revelations and self-discoveries in ways which can make them feel exposed and vulnerable. Emily Ingold described the leap of faith that was required of her: 'I'm putting my whole life out there; literally, my whole life is out there.'

Such performances can be moving and powerful for the audience, but they also carry a risk for the participant's wellbeing. Contributors have tended to be portrayed as the passive partners within documentary relationships, but my research suggests that when such tensions arise, their agency finds expression in acts of resistance and ruptures, which documentary-makers must then manage and appease.

Jo Lockwood spent almost three years being filmed whilst she underwent her gender transition. She described how her attitude to the relationship she built with the producers started from a place of straightforward trust and acquiescence:

> In the early stages, it was like…whatever you want to do, whatever you ask: we answer.

As the shoot progressed, her compliance became gradually replaced with a more complex appreciation of the documentary relationship, and her position within the production:

> I learned over the course of the two or three years: it was their job, they weren't my friends - well, they were my friends, but they were my friends doing a job. And I had to remember that they were manipulating me.

Part of this shift in attitude was motivated by a growing awareness of the power she had to set boundaries and exert control over how she was represented:

> *They* needed *me* more. I started to realise that - I wouldn't say play them, but I kind of knew the rules of the game…When they were talking to me and buttering me up and being nice and persuasive, I could tell they were doing it. I would go, 'Do I

> want to do this or don't I?...No. [I'm] not going to do that.' Even sometimes in the middle of filming…I would say, 'I'm not answering that question. No.'…[I] got braver at not being sucked into it… [I] got wise to it. The crew are still our friends. They weren't superficial and shallow. They were genuinely lovely, nice people who [I] loved working with, but [I] realised it was all a job at the end of the day.

In this example, a firmer grasp of the dynamics gave the contributor a sense of empowerment and allowed her to start calling the shots. In other cases, ruptures in the relationship are manifested not so much by out-and-out refusals but through minor acts of resistance. During the making of *Educating the East End (2014),* Jenny Smith told me how she and her colleagues began to use the knowledge of production they had gleaned through the course of the production to assert themselves:

> We'd put things in the conversation we knew they couldn't put on TV to try to stop them using that footage…A lot of the time we would go other places for meetings and take the mics off, because there are some things you don't want people listening to.

This type of resistance was familiar to the documentary-makers I interviewed. Claire Lewis told me, 'They resent the intrusion after a while.' Jerry Rothwell recounted a story about one of his contributors, who would repeatedly make arrangements to meet him then fail to turn up. He explained:

> All of that was an expression of her uncertainty about being in the film. The problem was we hadn't had time and contact enough to really make that relationship.

In contrast to the perception of contributors as powerless partners in the documentary relationship, my data found ample evidence of them learning how to effectively express their agency and leverage control. Jo Lockwood described this growing awareness, 'We'd know how they could manipulate us and how we could manipulate them.' Power has often been characterised as a force of domination, weighted heavily in the favour of filmmakers, but my research suggests a more complex and fluctuating balance, which tips in different directions at different stages of the production process. As contributors learn how to express their agency, documentary-makers can find themselves in a tight corner, caught between increasingly assertive or uncooperative contributors; the perceived needs of the audience; and the demands of funders and broadcasters. My data suggests their ability to prioritise their contributors above

other considerations, and the scope of their possible responses to minor rebellions is very much dictated by the commercial context. Jerry Rothwell told me:

> The more gear you have, the more the daily cost of the shoot, the more uncompromising you can be about those things. If someone rings up and says 'I'm a bit ill, I've got a headache', and you're thinking shit, I've spent £5,000 in air fares to get here to do this – that's one response, or the other is: 'Well, I'm just here so I can wait a few days'…My experience is that the bigger the film has become, the more my relationship with the contributor has become less personal…I think the more money there is in a production, the more the thing becomes contractual.

Documentary-makers' loyalties are divided between their contributors, their employers, their audiences, and a fidelity to the truth. This alignment can shift in sudden and unexpected ways. Executive producer Peter A. Gordon told me about a documentary he made in the 1990s with West Midlands Police for the ITV current affairs series, *First Tuesday (1983-1993)*. Gordon was granted access to film in a police station, and was monitoring the output of a remote camera when he heard a detective threatening a man in custody:

> He was being picked up by the mic in the custody area. You couldn't see it, but you could hear him in the cell saying, 'Well, we can do this the hard way or the easy way, mate.'

Having taken legal advice, the production company decided there was a clear public interest in broadcasting the footage, but they had contractually agreed to show the film to the police force prior to transmission. Gordon described an excruciating viewing, sitting right next to the people he had implicated: 'We turned the lights on. They were just white. They were incredulous.' The police force tried to get an injunction to stop the broadcast going ahead but were unsuccessful. When a developing narrative is being filmed, unforeseen events can cause the agendas of the filmmakers and subjects to diverge unpredictably. Although this situation was awkward on an interpersonal level, Gordon could not withhold the footage without becoming complicit in the wrong-doing he had uncovered:

> It wasn't easy but I didn't lay awake at night thinking, 'Oh my God what a terrible person I am', and 'I've betrayed these people', because they'd broken the law and they're policemen.

The work of documentary relationships requires filmmakers not only to build close bonds with their subjects, but also in some cases, to sever those connections and break that trust.

Having described the kind of affective work involved for individual people in forging and maintaining documentary relationships, I now wish to bring the organisational context back into focus, and consider how this challenging aspect of the job is supported or complicated by media employers and institutions.

7.3 Managing relationship-work

For Hochschild, one of the core features of emotional labour is that the actual labour involved is hidden and therefore, devalued. Its success is premised upon an appearance of effortlessness, which means it remains an assumed and underregulated part of the job. As Daisy Asquith claims, 'Any meaningful responsibility assumed by documentary filmmakers is overwhelmingly a personal undertaking' (2019, p.15). A striking example from my research is Claire Lewis, who keeps in constant touch with the cast of *Seven Up (1964-)* in order to maintain productive relationships and keep them on board. The series could not be made without this labour, but as a freelancer, Lewis told me that she can only invoice for it once every seven years during the few months when the series is in active production:

> I'm there – day or night. That's what it involves…and I've never been paid for that, never.

Along with a lack of pay and recognition comes a lack of structure and support. A recent report into occupational distress in factual TV was highly critical of the industry's failure to properly equip filmmakers for aspects of their work which involve 'extensive engagement with vulnerable, often traumatised sources, and the significant ethical dilemmas it entails' (Rees, 2019, p.1). The report highlights the fact that no industry-wide training structures exist to help filmmakers engage with contributors, process the psychological impact, or mitigate risks (2019, p.11):

> Factual TV, as an industry, has not examined these occupational health questions, and has done little to prepare programme-makers for the profound challenges to ethics, craft, and emotional capacities that may accompany frequent engagement with highly vulnerable contributors (2019, p.3).

Of course, documentary-makers are far from unique in that their job brings them into close contact with other peoples' trauma, but unlike therapists, teachers, nurses, and other caring professions, there is a lack of appropriate training and professional guidance as to how they should conduct themselves. The media industries have scarcely recognised that performing such labour might have an effect upon their workforce.

Vicarious trauma is a known risk for journalists who witness acts of violence and suffering, but less attention has been paid to the effects upon workers in the broadcasting industry (Newman et al., 2003, Melzer, 2019). During the making of her doctoral documentary project, Kym Melzer describes 'sobbing uncontrollably' in her car after interviewing veterans with PTSD and their carers; the effort to supress her emotions in order to maintain a 'veneer of professionalism' leaving her feeling 'exhausted and dejected', and overwhelmed by 'intense feelings of guilt, sadness, powerlessness and helplessness' (2019, p.44).

Sue Bourne told me that during the making of *A Time to Live (2017),* a documentary which followed the stories of twelve people with terminal illnesses, she had to pressurise the broadcaster to recognise that their duty of care should extend to the production team:

> I said, 'Well actually, you've got a duty of care to *us'*...We were on the road together…going in and out of dying peoples' houses for four months. Our best contributor died the weekend before we got there…We had to put our emotions in a box and get through it.

It was clear from my research that becoming so closely entangled with human suffering, trauma and distress is a great responsibility which can take a heavy toll. Documentary-makers feel that if they do not provide unpaid emotional support, the people they work with will suffer. I asked Bourne if she found this aspect of her job emotionally stressful or draining. She told me, 'Well, I got cancer. Of course it is. No seriously, it is – it's exhausting.'

Over the course of a career, the burden becomes hard to sustain. My sample included some of Britain's top documentary makers, yet there was a palpable sense of disillusionment in many of my interviews. 'I'm just tired of fighting for everything,' one told me. 'I can't go on getting treated like this. You get no support at all.'

But the people who are most let down by the neglect of affective labour are the participants themselves. The disparity between what they need and what the industry provides them is often most apparent around the time of transmission. For contributors, this

can be a life-changing event, when they're exposed to very public representations of themselves, and along with it, the reactions of family, friends, the press, and judgemental strangers on social media. By contrast, documentary-makers are rarely kept on the payroll to oversee transmission. As such, any ongoing support they offer to their former contributors will be a matter for their individual consciences. When documentary-makers withdraw from the relationship as the project comes to its conclusion, their participants must come to terms with a mixture of different losses – not only the loss of control over how their material will be edited and received, but also the loss of a confidante, whose attention is closely focussed upon them. Liane Piper described her ambivalence as a filming process she had found intrusive and challenging came to an end:

> It was a relief, but it was also very final. In a way, it was hard to adjust…I just felt deflated. Weird…You get used to people being around and then they're not there.

The confusing mixture of personal and professional means the end of filming can feel like being 'abandoned'; the abrupt cessation of the relationship casting new light on the nature of the intimacy that was shared. Piper told me:

> I felt used…You spend a lot of time with these people. I might think we could be friends, we've got friendly, maybe she genuinely cares, then suddenly – film's out. Bye!...Part of you is like, was I only ever just a documentary to you?

Piotrowska claims the presence of transference-love is one of the reasons why so many people feel aggrieved at its loss, but there is also a sense of guilt and shame about its transience. The instrumental nature of the relationship becomes uncomfortably exposed by the way it is shrugged aside. What was happening was something 'slightly inappropriate and yet necessary, in order to make an 'intimate' film' (2013b, p.75). Jenna Presley told me:

> The producer just disappeared…they were really chatty…then it just stopped. I guess that's the nature of their work.

The absence of after-thought about what happens to participants once filming has wrapped is a failure of duty of care, which in itself has the potential to be damaging for contributors. Daisy Asquith claims:

> It is possible that the damage done to those filmed is done when filming stops, when the attention is withdrawn and life returns to banal ordinariness (2019, p.15).

Without proper training, regulation, and support systems in place, contributors are being asked to put their emotional wellbeing in the hands of people who may not have the time or skills to care for them responsibly.

7.4 Conclusion

Documentary relationships are distinctively intense and asymmetric –not only in terms of power but also intimacy. As such, the boundaries between personal and professional are inherently unstable, and difficult to enforce. They can be a source of authentic pleasure, but are also instrumental, and frequently compromised by commercial demands and constraints.

To cultivate productive relationships, documentary-makers must manage their feelings and limit their own self-expression in order to affect the emotional performances of their contributors, which the success of their texts depends upon. The conflict between the best interests of participants and the demands of the film are manifested in acts of resistance and ruptures as contributors learn to express their agency, which documentary-makers must then endeavour to reconcile. However, their central task is not to make a friendship, but to make a film, and sometimes these two aspects of the job are not compatible.

It is this mismatch between the intimacy of filmmaker-subject relationships and the commercial context in which the text is created and broadcast which means that documentary encounters are prone to misunderstandings and misrecognitions, whilst the people who create them shoulder the risk of burn out and disillusionment.

Furthermore, because their emotional labour is largely invisible, it remains unrecognised, unregulated, and unsupported by the media industries, who rely upon this work, but take little responsibility for the fallout. In the existing academic literature, lapses in duty of care are usually ascribed to individuals, but this research suggests instead that embedded ethical flaws arise from systemic features of the political-economic organisation of the media. By thinking about relationship-work as an integral component of the practice of creative labour, we can begin to understand the benefits and risks it brings to the workplace, and consider how the welfare of both documentary-makers and their subjects could be better protected.

8. The wellbeing of ordinary people in factual TV

In 2019, following a spate of suicides of contributors from *Love Island (2015-)* and *The Jeremy Kyle Show (2005-2019),* the UK media and telecommunications regulator Ofcom made changes to the Broadcasting Code, which have applied across all factual genres since April 2021. The new duty of care protocol emphasises the need for production companies to risk-assess contributors, take 'due care' to mitigate potential harm, and provide those who they consider 'vulnerable' with psychological support.

In the associated debates, attention has focussed upon the destabilising impact of media exposure upon ordinary members of the public; the negative effects of trolling upon their mental health; and the pressure created by the performative expectations of formatted content, which tend to foreground displays of intense emotion, and conflict. But the response to these tragedies has been largely driven by criticism rather than empirical research. The impact that taking part in media productions can have upon participants' wellbeing remains under-examined, and the mechanisms through which they can be subjected to harm are often assumed or inexplicit. During this period of reflection and reform, it is vital that we have an informed understanding about what contributors need in order to feel fairly-treated and appropriately supported. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to consider the effects that participation can have upon the wellbeing of ordinary people, and how the routines and procedures of the cultural industries may play a role in exacerbating or ameliorating these dangers.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: in section 8.1, I consider the risks and benefits that participation poses to contributors' physical and emotional wellbeing. Establishing a sense of when and why and how their wellbeing is affected helps to frame the debate, and enables us then to move on, in section 8.2, to discuss the efficacy of the measures the industry has instigated from the perspective of the people who've been offered them. As these measures have been designed to offer maximum protection to vulnerable contributors, in section 8.3, I highlight the experiences of the people within my sample who fall under this categorisation, showing how a lack of training and awareness can lead to them being treated in ways which are insensitive or even damaging. In section 8.4, I discuss how wellbeing connects to the broader issues of creative work in the cultural industries, then in 8.5, I summarise my conclusions.

The main argument I want to put forward is that the wellbeing of contributors is inextricably linked to both the wellbeing of producers and the political-economy of media production. By failing to recognise the connections between the production environment and duty of care, the new regulations are doing little to address the underlying risks, and therefore in many cases, fail to offer the kind of support contributors need and deserve.

8.1 Benefits and risks

A cynical viewpoint, which is widely circulated within the public discourse, suggests there is little possibility for the wellbeing of ordinary people to be prioritised within cultural production. Squeezed between the competing goals of capitalist accumulation and ruthless ambition, any ethical or social purpose will ultimately be subsumed to commercial demands. To give one example from a multitude of similar accounts, in the wake of the reality TV suicides, the i-newspaper ran an interview with 'celebrity psychologist' Dr Arthur Cassidy, who claims:

> There's an obsessional lust after profits and ratings and…it's at the expense of these people and their mental health (Martin, 2019).

The implication here is that wellbeing is an inevitable casualty of a way of working in which market forces are largely unrestrained by notions of fair treatment or the common good. Ordinary people are caught in the teeth of a capitalist production process, which appropriates and utilizes their identities with little consideration of the human impact. Mark Banks describes this negative spiral as 'neo-liberalism's characteristic demoralization of economic relations' (2006, p.455).

However, Andrew Sayer notes that the tendency of capitalism to displace moral values is only ever partially realised, as alongside this displacement runs 'countervailing forces as societies attempt to protect themselves from their destructive effects' (2004, p.3). The public backlash which followed the duty of care controversy is perhaps one example of this resistance, but furthermore, even market forces themselves cannot be understood to straightforwardly engender a disregard for participants, as the ongoing co-operation of the general public is indispensable. Safeguarding contributors' wellbeing is not only an ethical position, but a practical necessity. My intention then, is not so much to demonstrate that

contributors and their wellbeing are a casualty of commercialization, but to examine the varied and contradictory ways that this context informs their experiences.

Before I discuss the risks and benefits that participation poses to ordinary contributors' wellbeing, it is important to offer a brief definition. In utilitarian accounts, wellbeing might be thought about in terms of the satisfaction of a person's wants and needs, or be premised upon an absence of disabling, harmful conditions, but neither of these measures are sufficient guarantors of wellbeing in themselves. The media ought not to exploit or misrepresent its subjects, or carelessly inflict suffering and harm, but these requirements are the very minimum that contributors should be able to expect. Equally, an individual's own assessment of what they desire and what might be good for them can be manipulated or flawed (Sayer, 2011). Instead, David Hesmondhalgh (2017a) argues for an objectivist measure of wellbeing based upon the Aristotelian concept of flourishing. As described in Chapter Two, such an approach was developed by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2006), who created a list of central human capabilities, ranging from bodily health and integrity, to the ability to play, imagine, and feel emotions. In the context of cultural markets, this might lead to an emphasis on 'what we *would* value if we were fully informed about the merits of particular products' (2017a, p.211). The advantage of an objectivist approach – albeit a pluralist one, which acknowledges the validity of numerous different factors and opinions – is that wellbeing can be thought about systematically in terms of the way it is organised by the institutions and working cultures of the media, rather than being demoted to matters of individual grievance. Crucially, to flourish is not the same as to be happy, and this fundamental point was evident in my research. Contributors can go through the emotional-wringer during the making of a documentary about an important personal or social issue, for example, but nevertheless benefit from the overall experience of participating. The people I interviewed who took part in television programmes about their experiences of stillbirth, the Holocaust, and life-or-death medical emergencies might not have described the participation process as pleasurable, but nonetheless, claimed a positive impact upon their lives. The apparent willingness of contributors to put themselves in positions of vulnerability, incur potential reputational damage, or be misrepresented by the media is to be offset by the under-acknowledged potential it brings for themselves and for others to flourish.

Having already discussed material benefits and political motivations in Chapter Four, here, I want to focus on the psychological impact of documentary participation. Several of my interviewees told me their wellbeing was positively affected by the filming process, which

typically involved lengthy, intimate interviews where they were invited to explore and reflect upon their feelings. Vicki Beckett, who took part in a documentary about stillbirth told me:

> It helps you to come to terms with it. It's naturally therapeutic to talk about it…Every step was another opportunity to process it.

The intense focus that documentary making brings to people's stories creates a space for self -exploration: 'Like a conversation with myself', said Sheona Beaumont, who was filmed giving birth for Channel 4's *One Born Every Minute (2010-)*:

> I could verbalise and hear reflected back to me the kinds of things I was experiencing…just the recognition that emotions you're having are valid and have a legitimate platform for expression - I'd say it seemed to legitimise it.

It wasn't only the opportunity to talk at length which felt distinctive when compared to the typical conversations of everyday life, but the quality of attention being paid to them by the documentary-makers. Beckett explained:

> They remembered everything you said. They were listening. It really felt like they cared.

It might seem counter-intuitive that a conversation being conducted on-camera could typically contain this level of unguarded intensity. Some people claimed to forget the camera was there altogether, but for others, the presence of the camera itself was part of the therapeutic effect, introducing a new communicative dynamic. Director Daisy Asquith told me:

> I have some of the best conversations ever if there's a camera there. People, in normal life [find] the emotional intensity socially unacceptable….I really like it when people actually focus and go right down the mine shaft with you. The camera makes them feel like they should do that, or can do that.

Jerry Rothwell gave me an example from one of his films, *Deep Water (2006)*, which was about the mysterious disappearance of Donald Crowhurst during his attempt to sail around the world in 1969:

> It'd become a thing [the family] hadn't talked about. I think Simon, the son, hadn't really known that his father hadn't just died during the course of the journey…It was clearly uneasy territory, and all of them had lived their lives in a way that it

> had massive consequences for them. The making of the film was a point at which they all started to tell their stories, and saw each other's stories within it, and at the end they said, 'That was a really valuable process for us.'

By creating this discursive space for self-examination and reflection, a situation is established whereby people often say more than they might've anticipated or intended. Jenny Smith from *Educating the East End (2014)* told me a story about a member of staff at the school, who opened up on camera and spoke about her teenage son, who had died after jumping off a balcony for a joke:

> Hazel had never talked to anyone about that…To get her to open up on camera the way they did was incredible…It was all with her permission. And that was a very powerful episode for the staff, because a lot of them didn't know about that at all. Everyone was a bit teary-eyed the next day.

Scholars from a range of disciplinary perspectives have compared the experience of participating in documentaries to having therapy (Berman, 2005, Piotrowska, 2013b). Psychologist Emmanuel Berman writes:

> I think that there are some similarities between the two processes…like analytic or psychotherapy patients, [documentary contributors] come to a place where there will be a lot of attention to their story, hopefully in an empathic, sympathetic, interested, respectful way, and some wish for the other, the director or the therapist, to be the spokesperson, to be the one who will help crystallize one's story, will help one understand and see things (2005, p.221).

But however much the filming process might feel like a counselling session, it is, in many ways, in fact the opposite. The definition of therapy offered by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy is that it provides a 'safe and confidential space…to talk to a trained professional about your issues and concerns' (BACP). One of Paddy Scannell's characteristics of broadcast talk is what he calls its 'double articulation' – the spoken contributions of participants are to be heard by both the filmmaker who is present and the audience who are absent - and in this second articulation, they may not find a similarly sympathetic or respectful listening space (1991, p.1). Words are spoken in one context, but heard in an entirely different one. As Jo Lockwood put it: 'It's like counselling in front of five million people.'

However, for some of the people within my sample, the very publicness of their platform was an integral part of the benefit of participating. The chance to speak to a large audience about their experiences had a cathartic effect, and provided a powerful antidote to feelings of stigmatisation and shame. Omari Eccleston Brown spoke to me at length about the psychological benefits he's experienced from claiming ownership over his mental health problems - both at the level of the public conversation, where a greater awareness of mental health issues has the ability to educate the public, but also at a personal level, as part of a process of self-acceptance:

> Part of me doing [the documentary] is to not try and hide it away...I'm not trying to hide it away. It's part of my story.

Yet despite these powerful potential benefits, my findings also suggest that the wellbeing of participants is at stake when they take part in documentaries. In many, if not most circumstances, they will encounter some degree of physical, reputational, or psychological risk. Within a relatively small sample, a surprisingly high number of the people I interviewed encountered physical risks whilst participating in a documentary. Examples include Paul Dilley, on the brink of death in the back of an ambulance; or Janet Morsy being treated in A&E after being stabbed by a stranger in a random attack in a supermarket carpark. The drama and jeopardy of situations involving physical threat provides compelling storylines, which are attractive to documentary producers, but the danger these contributors were exposed to was not generated by the production itself. In other examples, taking part in a documentary generates a risk of its own, which the contributor would not otherwise have been exposed to. In East Timor in 1991, Peter A. Gordon filmed a man who aided guerrilla fighters for an episode of *First Tuesday (1983-1993)*. In a volatile situation, where civilians were being arrested and murdered by the Indonesian armed forces, broadcasting his image on TV could identify him as a potential target. Before the interview, they discussed the possible repercussions and asked if he wanted his face to be obscured:

> We talked to him, and he said, 'I want it full frame'… [On camera] he said, 'You must help us. The world must come to help us.' It was such an emotional, powerful thing.

After the shoot, the debate continued in the edit suite, with the production team conflicted over whether their greater obligation was to enable him to speak out, or to protect him from

harm. In the end, they decided that he should be given the ability to make this choice, and that anonymising his identity detracted from the power of his message:

> He had an amazing face, and his testimony was really strong. As a filmmaker, I knew it'd be more powerful to do it to camera.

In Gordon's view, the crucial point here is that contributors who are taking risks must have agency in their decision, which assumes an understanding of the potential implications. In the making of this documentary, risks were taken not only by the East Timorese contributors, but also by the British production team, who filmed undercover footage of a massacre of hundreds of unarmed civilians, then smuggled the rushes out of the country, prompting an international diplomatic response after the film was broadcast (Gittings, 1992).

In circumstances such as these, media participation can be connected with a risk of physical harm, but more routinely, contributors will be exposed to emotional, psychological, and reputational risks. Ruth Palmer finds that media appearances can confer status or stigma with 'alarming efficiency,' having substantial effects upon their subjects' reputations and social inclusion, which are then often internalised, impacting upon their self-esteem (2017a, p.150). She describes people who lost their jobs, had to move their kids to a new school, were ostracised by family members, and were left feeling suicidal after stigmatising stories about their behaviour were published in newspapers. A number of my interviewees had the perception that appearing in a documentary entailed a risk to their reputational or psychological wellbeing. This was particularly true for those who occupy a socially-marginalised subject-position. Emily Ingold, who took part in Channel 4's *Shut Ins: Britain's Fattest People (2019),* told me she was concerned that taking part would expose her to being fat-shamed and ridiculed*:*

> I care too much about what other people think…I was worried about what people would say and everything that was going to happen, if I'd get abuse in the streets.

Anita Biressi describes how television has developed a distinctive aesthetic through which it represents personal concerns within the public sphere, shaping an entire culture of confession, witnessing, exposure, and self-exposure, integrating and assimilating these modes of experience into the broader psychic economy (2004, p.401). Indeed, there was a confessional quality to some of my interviewee's appearances, which required them to make revelations about deeply private aspects of their identity or experiences. Omari Eccleston-Brown told me

he was worried that talking about his mental health in a documentary could negatively impact upon his professional reputation should his clients see the programme:

> Do I want them to know this about me? There was a lot of vulnerability coming up. How would that affect the way they see me?...Would they lose trust in me?

When the topic of the documentary is a taboo subject, the potential psychological risks are more apparent to contributors, and therefore perhaps easier to evaluate. In these examples, anticipated harm was a factor in their decision-making, but did not materialise in reality. Yet in other cases, my interviewees had considered the subject-matter of their documentaries to be innocuous, and were therefore unprepared for the impact that taking part had upon their wellbeing. Jenna Presley and Gemma Rawnsley were both participants in a documentary they were told was about home-schooling, which turned out to be far more controversial than they had expected, putting them at the centre of a social media storm, and exposing them to significant public criticism (a story to which I'll return in Chapter Ten). Presley told me the experience had a considerable negative psychological impact upon her and her family: straining relationships with her parents, making her son a target for bullies and social media trolls, and finally leading to her ostracization by the home school community, who blamed her for the unflattering representation. 'It caused me so much grief afterwards,' she told me. 'They're humiliating people…They're actually playing with people's lives.' Gemma Rawnsley similarly described a steep decline in her wellbeing in the immediate aftermath of the documentary's broadcast, which led to her being prescribed anti-anxiety medication, and eventually leaving her job. Describing this unhappy time in her life, she told me:

> I felt so saddened. I felt like I wanted to be beamed up into space….I get this pang of anxiety in my heart that strikes me and goes into my stomach when I think about the fact we're on [the documentary]…I did really psychologically struggle with it.

The contrast between these two documentaries - on home-schooling and the military occupation of East Timor - demonstrates that risk isn't only connected to heavier subject matter. A recent report on the drivers of occupational distress in factual television found that throughout the whole scope of factual production, the possibility of coming face to face with human distress is very real (Rees, 2019). Even in lighter formats, the possibility of being voted off, rebuffed, or having business pitches turned down could be crushing for participants. Vulnerable contributors can turn up in any genre, making sudden disclosures about their personal histories or mental health, sometimes leaving junior members of the

production team blindsided by stories which seemed to be about one thing, then morphed into something entirely different (2019, p.12).

8.2 Duty of care

Having outlined the risks and benefits participation poses to contributors, I want to move on to discuss the duty of care measures which have been initiated by the broadcasting industry, and analyse the ways in which my interviewees have experienced them in practice.

It is important to make the caveat that the new regulations came into force in April 2021, after my interviews were conducted. However, the insights of my research remain relevant, as many of the cases I studied followed procedures that were later formalised by Ofcom. In a Royal Television Society article summarising the changes, Paul Moore, head of communications and corporate affairs at ITV, was quoted as saying, 'There is nothing in these amended rules that we weren't already doing' (Frost, 2021).

The two major planks of Ofcom's revised guidance on the welfare of participants concern risk assessment and providing due care to vulnerable people. Firstly, broadcasters are now required to conduct a risk assessment to identify any risk of significant harm to the contributor (Ofcom, 2020, p.2). Gavin Rees describes a typical approach to risk assessment:

> A junior producer may do a pre-sort at the casting stage of a production and then only if there are doubts, will the question of whether a candidate needs to be 'psyched' be referred up (2019, p.21).

Contributors who are flagged as potentially vulnerable will go on to be 'psych-tested' by a qualified psychologist to assess if they are 'mentally robust enough to weather the pressures of being on TV and being exposed to public scrutiny' (Rees, 2019, p.20). However, there are currently no industry-wide guidelines about how and when psych-screening should be carried out, what the tests should consist of, or what kind of background and experience the psychologist should have. Individual psychologists are able to draw upon their own methods, but for the people I interviewed, this typically involved a questionnaire conducted over the phone. Jo Lockwood described this to me as 'definitely box-ticking… I didn't think they were doing it out of the kindness of their heart…They wanted to assess me mentally.' Heather Ward summarised the types of questions she was asked:

> Was there anything we didn't want to mention? Had we been depressed?...Have you ever felt suicidal?

As the screening is reliant upon self-declaration, it is relatively easy for contributors to lie or omit information which they feel might compromise their chances of being cast. Gavin Rees' research found that psych-screening is often focussed upon generic mental health and doesn't always include any in-depth discussion about the potential downsides of screen exposure (2019, p.21). Arguably then, the purpose of the test is less about equipping contributors to cope with the challenges of media exposure, and more about creating a paper trail so that broadcasters can provide evidence that due process has been followed. With an emphasis on evaluation rather than assistance, psych-screening protects the interests of broadcasters, but does less to safeguard the wellbeing of contributors.

Furthermore, in some situations, my research indicates that psych-screening can actually be counter-productive or detrimental for contributors, who perceive it as scrutiny instead of support. Julian Dismore told me that the involvement of psychologists had been a source of anxiety for some of the people he had filmed with:

> The prospect of speaking to a counsellor…that's traumatising potentially, and terrifying…because they associate that kind of conversation with welfare and social workers and having their kids taken away from them…There has to be a duty of care to your contributors, but there is a massive danger to it, and it's not achieving what you want anyway.

Ashleigh Williams was also mistrustful of the motivations and independence of the psychological support she was offered. She told me:

> I wouldn't trust her. At the end of the day, she works for the BBC.

Rees claims that the screening process is open to abuse, and can be used as a 'fig-leaf to mask a lack of appropriate contributor care' (2019, p.34). His research uncovered instances where producers used the tests as a tool to select the contributors who were most likely to generate drama and conflict on-screen, choosing the very people psychologists had advised them to avoid (2019, p.20).

The second amendment made to Ofcom's regulations states that broadcasters should take due care to safeguard the welfare of people who are at risk of significant harm as a result of taking part in a programme. Ofcom connects this risk to a number of factors including the

contributor's social identity, the type of text they're participating in, and the performative expectations it entails (see Ofcom, 2020). Their guidance gives a non-exhaustive list of people it defines as 'vulnerable', including those with learning difficulties or mental health problems, the bereaved, people with brain damage or forms of dementia, and people who have been traumatised, the sick or terminally ill (Ofcom, 2020, p.10).

The people within my sample who were considered at risk were offered psychological support, either during the production, or more commonly, in the form of 'aftercare' once the filming had wrapped. Some of my interviewees were simply given a number they could call if they felt they needed support. Others were told the producers would pay for a fixed number of face-to-face sessions with a psychologist.

My data suggests this kind of psychological support tends to be focussed on main contributors, often excluding members of the cast who are deemed to be playing supporting roles - even when their involvement in the production was substantial. Jo Lockwood told me:

> [My wife] felt like she was the contributor's assistant…She always felt they cared more about me than about her. When you look at the final story, she was an equal contributor…but she was always treated as if she was an extra…They never bothered getting her in contact with [the psychologist]…She was left on her own.

As Lockwood's quote suggests, the division between major and minor contributors can be arbitrary. There is no straightforward correlation between the quantity of on-camera time and programme-time, or the impact that participating might have upon them. I will explore the experiences of minor participants, and people who had their contributions substantially edited in Chapter Ten. However, a notable pattern within my data is that many of the people who were offered this kind of aftercare didn't take it up. Liane Piper told me:

> Aftercare-wise, they did pay for…three more sessions. I went to one…I felt like I was being judged…so I didn't go to that.

The lack of enthusiasm for the type of aftercare contributors are being offered might suggest that, in many cases, the support on offer is not the kind of help they are looking for. By contrast – and perhaps unsurprisingly, given the intense and often intimate nature of relationships between contributors and documentary-makers - my research suggests the support many received from their production team was truly valued. After filming her documentary on stillbirth, the ongoing relationship with the producers was something which

actively helped Vicki Beckett to cope with the traumatic experience she went through. She told me:

> They didn't just speak to us when filming was happening. They kept a dialogue going. They checked in on us. How are you getting on? It felt very genuine.

Jo Lockwood expressed scepticism about the help on offer from psychologists, but felt very differently about the connection she had built with the documentary-makers. She said:

> I was always talking to them on the phone. Every time [my wife] and I had an argument, I'd end up having an hour's conversation with [the producer], pouring my heart out to her…We still keep in touch.

Whilst the input from external psychologists has been formalised and funded by the industry, much of the support given to contributors from producers remains unacknowledged, and takes place outside the margins of their contracted job, without pay or recognition, sometimes continuing long after the production has wrapped. My findings indicate that the wellbeing of documentary-makers and their subjects is linked in such a way that there can be no meaningful duty of care to one party which does nothing to address the needs of the other.

8.3 Vulnerable contributors

Within my sample, I purposefully approached a number of interviewees who would fit squarely within Ofcom's definition of vulnerable contributors, to find out more about their experiences of contributor care, and the extent to which it met their needs. Liane Piper and Omari Eccleston-Brown suffer from body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) – a debilitating anxiety disorder which is characterised by a preoccupation with an imagined defect, causing significant distress and impaired social functioning (Veale, 1996). They both took part in a BBC documentary called *Ugly Me (2018).* Although Piper and Eccleston-Brown both felt there was much to be gained from taking part in a documentary – from getting access to professional help, to the opportunity to raise public awareness and challenge social stigma – they equally recognised that the intense scrutiny and attention being paid to them had the potential to trigger their anxieties. Eccleston-Brown told me:

> When you have BDD, you don't want to draw attention to yourself…I saw myself for the first time on the big screen and had all sorts of butterflies, feeling a bit sick and really disliking how I looked. That's something to deal with. 'Oh my God, I put myself out there, what was I thinking?'

Many of the vulnerable contributors I spoke to were at pains to praise the producers they worked with. However, typically, the production teams lacked any specialist skills or knowledge about the conditions they were documenting and how they might affect their contributors. Nikita Roberts who took part in *My Extreme OCD Life (2017),* for example told me: 'I think they'd done their research…but I can't say they understood it.' Omari Eccleston-Brown has made several media appearances on behalf of a BDD charity, but it was only during our conversation that he began to perceive that further accommodations could've been made to help him. He said:

> Nobody has ever said anything like, for instance, 'I know this might be difficult for you, so we'll go at your pace, if you need anything just tell me, if you're feeling uncomfortable at any moment and you want to take five' - or whatever. Nobody's ever said anything like that to put my mind at ease.

Furthermore, very few of the vulnerable contributors I spoke to reported that consultants were used to advise the production. Gavin Rees draws attention to the lack of appropriate training producers have in working with vulnerable people, understanding the impact of trauma, and developing appropriately-boundaried relationships; describing producers as being 'thrown in at the deep end and left to work things out for themselves' (2019, p.15). To blunder into such territory armed with little more than good intentions poses an unacceptable risk to the wellbeing of both parties. Liane Piper described the production team of *Ugly Me* as 'empathetic and understanding,' but told me they would purposefully initiate triggering situations in order to illustrate the way BDD impacts her:

> One of my big fears was going swimming. I have an eating disorder and body dysmorphia at the same time. I was probably the heaviest I've ever been in that documentary. They were saying, 'Let's go swimming.' I said, 'I really don't want to do that.' They were saying, 'It's good for you. It's good therapy.' And I was in such a panicked state in the swimming pool, we just had to cut it. I was just like, 'I don't want to do this.'

Even trained professionals are cautious about the use of exposure therapy to treat anxiety disorders, many believing it carries an unacceptably high risk of harm, is intolerable for patients, and poses ethical quandaries (Farrell et al., 2013). The fact that a well-meaning production crew would confront a vulnerable person with their worst fears using the justification that it's 'good therapy' is indicative that inadequate professional guidance has been put in place.

Piper's story might sound like an extreme case, but it wasn't the only example of inappropriate treatment within my data. Heather Ward's father is a hoarder. Together, they appeared on Channel 5's *Can't Stop Won't Stop Hoarding (2014)*, which they saw as a means of accessing help after his hoarding problems had spiralled beyond their control. Clinical psychiatrists advise against dismantling a hoard without tackling the underlying psychological disorder, but such documentaries tend to treat the problem as primarily a sanitation issue (Evans and Barton, 2014, p.49). 'There was no kind of psychological help,' Ward told me. Her father's possessions were loaded into a lorry off-camera to effect a televisual transformation, but then simply returned to their original place after filming had wrapped. I asked her if the documentary had any meaningful impact on his hoarding, 'Not an ounce,' she told me. 'Nothing at all.' Evans and Barton have criticised the 'superficial and insensitive' depictions of hoarding on TV, stating: 'the quick fix solutions and pseudo-medical treatments exhibited may have serious negative consequences for participants' (2014, p.41).

As for Liane Piper, she told me that despite receiving a year-long course of therapy during the making of her documentary, by the time they wrapped, her BDD was worse than ever:

> I was having the therapy, the practical CBT, and everything I was getting to combat anxiety. I understood it, and I was putting it into practice, but the filming, the constant challenges were setting me back, so I couldn't utilise the techniques as fully. It might be a psychological thing, but because I was being pushed for these reactions, it felt like I was going with it, and it was getting worse.

Piper felt the efficacy of her treatment was compromised because nearly every one of the twenty NHS-funded sessions with her psychiatrist was filmed, giving little opportunity for privacy:

> I didn't think I got the best out of the therapy, because I was too preoccupied with being filmed…I was really drained. At that point, I wished I'd never done it. As

> much as it helped me to get the therapy I needed, being filmed in the therapy sessions…I guess I didn't take all of it in as much as I could've done.

Piper's experiences, and my data more generally, vividly illustrate why the offer of a few counselling sessions by way of aftercare is likely to have limited remedial effect. It simply isn't acceptable to cause people harm, then patch them up again afterwards. The new regulations lean heavily upon the external support of psychologists, but fail to address the lack of appropriate training for producers, which can have profoundly damaging consequences for contributors. Without redressing this deficit, there is a danger that documentary productions may not only fail to protect contributors' wellbeing, but actively endanger it.

8.4 Wellbeing in the cultural industries

As a post-broadcast regulator, which assesses content after it has been transmitted, Ofcom has limited powers to influence working practices in the cultural industries. However, my research would not be the first to suggest that the workplace culture of the media has a significant connection to the industry's duty of care crisis. In their submission to the reality TV inquiry, the Film & TV Charity urged the Committee to 'look not just at those in the spotlight, but also those just *outside* the spotlight':

> We hear stories every day of the strain, stress and toll work can take on bright and brilliant people. These are the stories the industry at large doesn't hear, because in a predominantly freelance industry people often feel they can't speak up (2019).

Their submission shares the case of Michael Harm, a location manager who killed himself in 2017, described by friends as 'the most delightful, handsome, decent, creative person…[with] a wicked sense of humour' (Dunn, 2017). Shortly before he died, Harm had complained about the pressures of working in the industry, and the loneliness and lack of support he had experienced. The Charity's report goes on to describe the detrimental human impact of precarious employment and abuses of power, which are endemic within media working environments. The suicide of Steve Dymond after his appearance on *The Jeremy Kyle Show (2005-2019)* was widely reported in the media, but less coverage was devoted to the death of Natasha Reddican, a 31 year old producer on the show, who took her own life shortly after the programme was axed. At the inquest, her mother described her as 'an amazing, bubbly

personality', who had become depressed as a result of the loss of a job which was 'everything to her' (Nikolic, 2020).

In Chapter Two, I detailed the significant body of academic research which focuses upon the introduction of neo-liberal working practices and their impact upon workers in the creative industries. My contention is that changes such as the shift to freelancing, the advent of managerialism, and the erosion of producer's autonomy, alongside symptoms of dysfunctional working environments such as bullying and sexual harassment have a detrimental impact, not only upon creative workers, but all of those connected with the media industries, including the ordinary people who participate. This link between welfare and production conditions is evident in my research. Peter A. Gordon told me how much easier it was to be 'magnanimous and mature' in dealings with contributors and co-workers when the economic pressures on productions were less acute. Gordon made high-risk films undercover in East Timor and apartheid-era South Africa, but felt trusted and supported by his employers:

> When I went to Timor…the last thing [my boss] said was, 'Do you know what the most important thing is? The most important thing is that you come back safely.' It wasn't, 'Well, what's the film going to be about? Where's the jeopardy?'...Nowadays, I don't know what the commissioning editor might say, or the head of a small independent. 'This is going to cost a number of thousands of pounds, you'd better make sure you come back with a film.'

Sue Bourne also spoke about the pressure placed on younger members of the production team, through a toxic mix of long working hours, unrealistic expectations, and condensed schedules:

> They get sent out on their own, they have to drive everywhere, they stay in shit accommodation. They've got no back up. [Broadcasters are] banging on all the time about duty of care, but these kids who are on the road all the time – there's no duty of care to them.

The fundamental point, therefore, is that the wellbeing of contributors, documentary-makers, and the circumstances of production are all indivisibly linked. In order to support contributors, producers must be supported themselves, but the new policy guidance does little to safeguard them from a working environment which incurs a substantial human cost.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that media participation poses a significant risk to the wellbeing of ordinary people, alongside the potential for pleasurable or beneficial experiences. Because of these risks, there is an imperative that their duty of care is appropriately prioritised, but historically this care has been lacking, with tragic consequences for the people involved. The new amendments to the Broadcasting Code are an important milestone in bringing recognition to the problem, but fail to prescribe the kinds of care contributors truly value; to extend to all people at risk of harm; or to address deeper maladies, connected with working practices and the organisation of the industry.

Although there has never been a greater awareness of the need to safeguard the wellbeing of contributors, my research clearly shows that the media industries must develop a broader repertoire of support, more attuned to their needs; geared towards redressing underlying problems rather than offering quick fixes.

The data I have gathered offers a sense of how the production environment and the wellbeing of producers and participants are intrinsically linked, and therefore, why the kind of external psychological support which is being prioritised by policy amendments is likely to be of limited effectiveness. Ultimately, poor contributor care is an expression of poor working conditions, and the experiences of ordinary participants are a barometer for dysfunction in the media. The questions we need to ask next are about how the occupational health of the entire workforce – including people both in front of and behind the camera - can be sustained within a deregulated industry.

9. Presence and absence: the mediated visibility of documentary contributors

According to John B. Thompson, the type of mediated visibility offered by the media alters our means of perception, creating new forms of action and interaction with their own distinctive properties:

> In this new form of mediated visibility, the field of vision is no longer constrained by the spatial and temporal properties of the here and now but is shaped, instead, by the distinctive properties of communication media (2005, p.35).

Thompson situates the issue of mediated visibility within a social theory of communication, highlighting, for example, how the making visible of previously hidden practices and events has transformed the relationship between audiences and political figures, who are no longer cloaked in an 'aura of greatness', but instead must present themselves as 'one of us' (2005, pp.38-9). Thompson's work gives us an understanding of the way visibility is filtered through the media at a theoretical level, but as the subjects of these processes, contributors are able to offer a completely different perspective. Contributors provide a novel resource for exploring issues of mediation and representation, as ultimately, it is *their reality* which is being interpreted. Their unique perspective - as 'outsiders' who are temporarily granted access to the 'inside' - means they are perfectly positioned to comment upon the processes of selection and omission through which documentaries are constructed, and why certain elements of their stories were emphasised or went untold. In this chapter, I explore contributors' reflections upon how their realities were represented through the lens of the media, by focussing upon issues of presence and absence. Jean-Louis Comolli writes:

> In [documentary] cinema, presence and absence fold back upon one another…To avoid presence is to conceal absence (1999, p.38).

Presence and absence are concepts which offer a way of reconsidering the disparity between real and representation, by examining the elements which are rendered more or less visible through the production process. By framing the discussion in this way, my intention is to move beyond debates which evaluate documentary's significance as though it were entirely contingent upon its ability to enable viewers to access 'an undistorted pure reality' (Bruzzi, 2006, p.9). Instead, my aim is to develop a better understanding of why and how such patterns of presence and absence develop, and how the relationship between them is manifested in documentary texts.

Section 9.1 begins the discussion by focussing on different forms of absences, omissions, and instances my research uncovered of censorship and self-censorship. My argument is that such absences are an inevitability, but have an under-acknowledged formative influence upon the text, which is usually obscured from more traditional methodological approaches to media research. Section 9.2 elucidates the connection between patterns of absence and simulated presence, focussing upon the construction and reconstruction of actuality. These forms of constructed content are conceptualised on a spectrum from 'minor' technical re-enactments, deemed necessary to effect the appearance of seamless credibility, to wholesale re-imaginings.

Within the broadcasting industries, the gulf between real and represented life is often characterised as a technical or editorial challenge, the implication being that the potential exists for the representation gap to be resolved by technological innovation or approach.[8] In section 9.3, I offer a practical example how issues of presence and absence are manifested in practice, by way of a discussion about fixed rig production methods. Several of my interviewees were filmed using this technology, where dozens of remotely-operated cameras are embedded within a documentary precinct. Their experiences offer insights as to why technical innovations cannot eradicate representational disparities, and therefore why they are a systematic feature of documentary production.

Finally, before the conclusion in 9.5, section 9.4 considers the ways that representations are moulded within the schematic constraints of narrative structure. My research demonstrates how individual experiences are filtered through layers of cultural preference and entrenched narrative norms, rendering our resources for collective remembering unreliable. This data suggests that certain categories of human experience – such as trauma and grief - lie beyond the limits of signification. Comolli thus captures the proposition documentaries extend:

> The world would be glimpsed in those representations that fail in their effects and miss their object. The real as error, approximation, groping, transition' (1999, p.42)

[8] See Chapter Four of John Ellis' *Documentary: Witness and Self-Revelation* (2011) for a fascinating summary of the history of technical innovations which have sought to dissolve the gap between reality and representation.

9.1 Absences, omissions, censorship and self-censorship

My research suggests that if a facet of a person's identity contradicts the coherence of the story being presented, documentary-makers will often choose to conceal or minimise the aberrant elements. Several of my interviewees told me that particular dimensions of their identities or stories were absented from the representations that were made of them, in order that others be emphasised. In *One Born Every Minute (2010-),* Sheona Beaumont is referred to in her role as a Vicar's wife, whilst her own substantial and impressive personal achievements – as an artist, photographer, and academic – go unmentioned. Ashleigh Williams told me the producers of *Louis Theroux: Selling Sex (2020)* were eager to present her as an abuse victim, but reluctant to identify her as being autistic. Writing in *Gal Dem* magazine, she claims: 'Many aspects of my identity were not respected by the documentary makers' (2020).

Significant events which take place during the production often go unmentioned within the text itself. Although Vicki Beckett spoke in extremely positive terms about her experiences of taking part in *Child of Mine (2018)* - a Channel 4 programme about stillbirth – she also told me about a scandal concerning its filming techniques, which were criticised in the national press. A *Daily Mail* article described the documentary as 'morally repugnant', quoting a doula who worked at the hospital who told them: 'Women are being exploited for profit' (Joseph, 2017).[9] The controversy surrounded the use of an unmonitored fixed-camera rigged in a private clinic room which was used by staff to break bad news to their patients. With the approval of the hospital trust, documentary-makers had set up the recording device in an attempt to capture on tape the moment when pregnant women were told their unborn babies had died. The agreement was that all footage would be destroyed without being watched unless the patient's consent was secured retrospectively.

I contacted the doula who spoke out in the *Daily Mail* article (who requested that I didn't republish her name in this thesis). She told me that the documentary-makers had said to the hospital staff they wanted to film 'the primal scream of a woman being told her baby had died…which in my opinion is so fucked up and twisted, I can't comprehend how anybody could be so voyeuristic.' Numerous complaints were made to management, who stood by their decision, saying it was important to raise awareness. Midwives were warned

[9] Doulas are non-medically trained childbirth assistants, who are contracted directly by patients, rather than employed by the hospital.

not to talk to the press, leaving the doula feeling that she – as someone not directly employed by the hospital – was one of the only people able to speak out. However, when she tried to use the media as an alternative recourse for complaint, she was misquoted and her comments were taken out of context. The *Daily Mail* article falsely claimed she had suffered a stillbirth herself, and she spent the day of publication fielding distressed phone calls from family and friends. When the documentary finally broadcast a year after the controversy, it was lauded by viewers and critics. The *Daily Mail* – the same paper that had previously led the criticism – now praised its 'incredibly sensitive' handling of the subject of baby loss (Corner, 2018). In the rush of praise, a conversation was forgotten about whether the ends justified the means. The views of those who had previously dissented were excluded from both the text itself and from the discussion surrounding it. The documentary itself is a partial record of events, extending voice to some whilst simultaneously denying it to others, breaking taboos on an issue of great public interest, but doing so whilst maintaining its right to censor any objections.

Filmmakers self-censor their work – not only to conceal criticism of their methods and protect their reputations – but also with an eye to how their productions are likely be received by the public. Peter A. Gordon told me he once spent three months in Bradford developing a programme idea about the immigrant community, working with a 'brilliant Muslim woman researcher [who] opened all these doors for me.' Despite his evident fascination, he ultimately decided not to go ahead with the film, worried it wouldn't 'portray the Muslim community in a very good way, and it might be used by racists to back their cause.' Gordon told me:

> There were obviously nice things about the community, and interesting things, but there were also so many negatives…The madrassa, where kids were beaten…women never leaving the house, coming from Pakistan and not speaking any English. There were [people] dealing drugs…There was racism from the Asian community towards the white community…You could either make a film that would whitewash it…or you can tell the truth.

Putting aside for a moment the argument about whether this stance is justifiable, it is interesting to reflect upon the organisational context underpinning Gordon's professional autonomy, authorizing him to make such decisions based primarily upon ethical judgements rather than commercial concerns. Since the advent of managerial culture in UK mainstream

television production throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the creative control of producers has now largely been dismantled in favour of a different set of corporate values, where ratings and reaction are the most meaningful metric of impact (Born, 2011, Saha, 2012). 'Nobody said to me you've spent three months on it and we need a return,' Gordon told me. 'It was easy then. I'd had a really interesting time in Bradford. I was under no commercial pressure to make the film, and nobody thought the worse of me professionally.'

The issue of how a predominantly white media should portray immigrant communities to their majority white audiences recurred several years later, when another Yorkshire-based filmmaker Anna Hall made *Edge of the City (2004)* for Channel 4, following the work of social services in Bradford. Its depiction of white working-class teenagers being groomed by Asian men was seized upon by the BNP – as Gordon might've predicted - who 'hijacked the programme's content as propaganda' in the run up to a local election (Jackson, 2004). On the day of transmission, West Yorkshire Police's Chief Constable asked Channel 4 to pull the documentary from their schedules, citing a risk of community unrest and public disorder. Yet by exposing an unpalatable truth, the documentary arguably played a part in the hardening of public attitudes against the sexual exploitation of teenagers. In the years that followed came further documentaries, a TV drama series, a string of convictions, and a condemnation of the culture of silence throughout public institutions and the media which had enabled such abuse to flourish.

On the most immediate level, this debate seems to boil down to whether it is preferable to tell an unpalatable truth or to self-censor – but perhaps it's also enlightening to peel back a further layer and observe how acts of self-censorship and disclosure are not only informed by ethical judgement but also by the political economy of television. The experiences which Peter A. Gordon shared with me describe an era in television production characterised by an extreme lack of diversity behind the camera, where white liberal values were in ascendancy, and betray a desire to present ethnic minorities in a way which conforms to these standards. When limited representational space is made available to tell stories about immigrant life, the conflicting pressure to portray it both completely and benignly creates irreconcilable tensions. More recently, Anamik Saha has argued that the increased quantity of British Asians both making and appearing on TV has failed to increase the quality of their representation, because of the underlying political economic imperatives which place the highest priority on 'generating noise' (2012, p.434). In many cases, the 'noise' so valued by commissioners is merely negative feedback – an overblown reaction the recycling of sensationalised

stereotypes: 'beards, scarves, halal meat, terrorists, forced marriage' (2012, p.424). Both examples give us an insight into the different ways that production practices have contributed towards problematic representations of race – either through their selective absence, or their sensationalised pathologization.

Absences and omissions are not only created at the behest of producers. Contributors also self-censor, negotiating boundaries around which elements of their lives they're willing to share, and which remain private. By allowing cameras to follow her gender transition, Jo Lockwood gave the documentary-makers access into some of the most challenging and intimate aspects of her private life and marriage; but whilst some truths were revealed, others were concealed. Lockwood told me that she agreed to take part under the condition that her children would not be part of the documentary:

> We were very adamant they weren't to be part of it. The relationship with my son is only recently OK…My daughter is a different kettle of fish. She's…completely rejected me, banned me from her wedding, told me I'm dead to her. It's been a struggle. That causes its own tension between [my wife] Marie and I as well. It's like a family with a broken arm…I won't be at my daughter's wedding, I won't be on the top table, I won't be giving her away. And Marie has to live with that pain as much as I do.

The evident suffering and distress Lockwood experiences as a result of this estrangement is unarguably one of the greatest consequences of her transition, yet plays no part in its on-screen portrayal. Yet my research suggested that this kind of selective omission is actually a prerequisite of disclosure. For most people, in order to feel secure in permitting access to the most private aspects of their lives, they will need to establish the limitations. Absence and revelation, therefore, are two sides of the same coin, and even the documentaries which seem the most intimate and personal are often carefully constructed in order to elide a critical truth.

Having described some of the various categories and reasons for omissions and other forms of censorship, I want to comment upon why patterns of absence are interesting from an analytical perspective. Perhaps the most salient point about absences is that the void they create must be filled with something else. If part of the story is missing, another element must stand in its place. An example from my data is *The Real Death in Paradise (2022),* the documentary which Kate Warrender and Steve Plaskitt participated in about the death of their son, Charlie, who was killed after a night out whilst on service with the Royal Navy in the

Seychelles. After Charlie's death, the family struggled to find answers about what had happened to him. Neither the Seychelles Police Force nor the Royal Navy launched an investigation. No witnesses came forward, and every CCTV camera along the route of his final taxi journey, until the point where his body was found, had apparently ceased recording simultaneously. Plaskitt told me:

> It's like when Charlie left that bar, nobody ever saw anything; that's where the story ends. They walked out of that bar, and the rest is history, and nobody's bothered to do anything.

The family had hoped the documentary's producers would hold the Navy and the Police to account, but they failed to get access to any of the institutions involved.[10] Warrender also suspected that the production company – who primarily specialised in making entertainment content rather than current affairs - were less willing to take on powerful institutions, with legal departments and the necessary resources to supress media criticism. She told me:

> There was a huge amount missed out – a huge amount of information, and mainly the information that puts criticism on the Ministry of Defence, or criticizes the Foreign Office.

Instead of interrogating the role of the authorities who had failed to protect him in the first place, and then failed once again to investigate his death, the documentary turned its scrutiny towards Charlie's own behaviour. At several times during the documentary, the commentary stated that Charlie had broken a Navy protocol known as 'shark-watch' – where sailors are instructed to stick together and travel in groups – and had therefore 'put himself in danger' (Orme, 2022). However, this claim was inaccurate. The sailors on Charlie's ship were in fact advised that the Seychelles was 'safe' and 'low risk'. The ship's log shows that several sailors arrived back at the ship alone on the night of Charlie's death, and the Navy clarified to the family that Charlie had broken no such rules.[11] Warrender told me:

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[10] Warrender shared the production company's initial approach email with me, which claimed they were making a documentary series examining 'some of the most tragic murder cases of British citizens around the world, asking how and why these crimes happened, and the ongoing impact.' This informed her expectation that they were interested in seeking the truth of what happened to Charlie.

[11] Warrender, furthermore, believes that the production company edited out a section of an interview in which a Navy Officer clarifies that Charlie was indeed following shark-watch rules, and explained how they have evolved since 2015 – partly in response to what happened to her son. They also chose to omit what the family feel is a highly significant piece of information in the story, which was that the UK Commander of the anti-piracy and smuggling operation was in the Seychelles that weekend, and happened to share the same surname, Warrender. This adds credence to her belief that the death of her son was neither random nor accidental.

> The 'shark-watch' thing was wrong. It was absolutely wrong. It wasn't that he disobeyed and put himself in danger…We realise they have constraints. They've got one hour, and they have to choose the bits that they want to put in. But they…repeatedly said Charlie broke the rules, and chose to edit out…any criticism of the MOD and the fact that the sailors were told [the Seychelles] was safe…They came from a particular angle that we knew nothing about.

Rather than fulfilling its 'fourth estate' role, and advocating in the interests of the public, the documentary chose to blame the victim, and circulate misinformation about his death. In this way, absences play a significant role in determining the nature of texts and their representations of people's lives.

9.2 Constructing and reconstructing presence

Having described the inevitability – and even the necessity - of absences and omissions in documentary-making, I want to consider some of the ways these gaps can be filled by documentary-makers, through reconstructions of events, or in some cases, by filming scenes which have been entirely constructed. This type of divergence from real events is interesting theoretically speaking, because - to borrow a phrase from John Ellis - these moments are the 'practical renegotiations of documentary's epistemological status' (2005, no pagination). What I mean by this is that the various methods documentary-makers use to effect the presence of a missing component in their texts are not simply solutions to technical shortcomings, but also reveal something about the epistemological inconsistencies posed by the documentary genre, and therefore, offer a means of comprehending why a degree of construction has proved impossible for filmmakers to dispense with.

Bill Nichols (2008) makes the point that, despite its associations with truth and real life, staging and re-enactment have consistently played a role in documentary since its inception (2008, p.72). A conventional account of documentary history is one of progression, enabled by technical advance, towards greater and greater authenticity of representation - but the argument I want to make here is that the appearance of seamless truthfulness can only be sustained by using a degree of artifice. It is this artifice which lends documentaries a veneer of authenticity, yet at the same time, undermines the genre's reliability.

The effected forms of presence which Nicholls and other scholars have tended to focus upon often involve whole constructed scenarios – such as the epic walrus hunt in Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North (1922)*, or the overnight journey of the Postal Express in the Grierson documentary classic *Night Mail (1936)*, which was recreated on a sound stage (2008, pp.84-85). However, I want to begin this discussion at the smaller end of the scale, by firstly considering a style of reconstruction common to single-camera documentary direction, where certain shots are repeated and filmed in a range of shot sizes or angles in order to make naturalistic editing possible. Many of my interviewees spoke about being asked to walk in and out of buildings over and over again, filming close-up shots of door handles being turned, cutaways of hands and feet, and 'noddies' (the industry phrase used to describe listening shots). Frequently, there will also be technical retakes, where action is repeated because the lighting was wrong, or there was a sound interruption. Jo Lockwood described her frustrations as the process wore on:

> So you want me to walk through the door, grab the handle, walk four paces and smile…'Can you do that again? Which hand are you using? Which door are you opening?' A plane would fly over. A car would drive past. 'Can you do that again?'

These types of reconstruction were typically characterised by my interviewees as an inevitable inconvenience – a minor annoyance which is part and parcel of the process of being filmed. Retakes and repeats have also, for the most part, escaped theoretical attention, but perhaps have an underappreciated significance in normalising a degree of intervention, both for crew and contributors, establishing the concept that direction is required to simulate the appearance of realism. However, as Paul Frosh claims:

> Every technique designed to bring viewers closer to the event…becomes conspicuous *as* a mediation, as a sign of our irreducible distance and separation from it (2006, p.268).

The next progression along the scale of constructed presence is when something that contributors would do in their everyday lives is scheduled or re-enacted for the benefit of the cameras. It might be entirely routine for a particular contributor to take their dog for a walk, or cook spaghetti for dinner, for example, but Nichols argues that in the process of re-enactment, the indexical link to the original event is forfeited:

> A shift in signification changes the name of the game. The re-enacted event introduces a fantasmatic element that an initial representation of the same event lacks. Put simply, history does not repeat itself, except in mediated transformations such as memory, representation, re-enactment, fantasy – categories that coil around each other in complex patterns (2008, p.73).

My data suggests documentary-makers have differing attitudes towards the acceptability of this type of re-enactment. Although she drew the line at out-and-out reconstruction ('Completely immoral. I would never ever do that'), Claire Lewis told me that *Seven Up (1964-)* director Michael Apted would often ask the contributors to repeat a regular activity for the purposes of filming. Even within such a prestigious production, constraints of budget, and the availability of cast and crew, mean that actuality often needs to be condensed into the shortest amount of time. On the other hand, Daisy Asquith said:

> I only want to film what you would be doing anyway, so therefore, I'm going to wait wait wait, for hours and hours, fit around you, and never ask you to be in a certain place at a certain time. I come to you and I wait. Do it when you do it…Otherwise, you get people performing a banal version of their reality. You have to wait and try to still be there when something interesting comes up. It takes so much time.

Asquith told me she would often come under pressure from production companies to shortcut all of this waiting by asking contributors to re-enact actuality. Her solution has been to take the fee for her time that is written into the budget, but invest the extra hours unpaid. The rationale she gave me was as much about creative goals as ethical ones:

> It's not about the authenticity of being purely observational. I just like it when I see things that are clearly filmed spontaneously. It looks totally different.

Jerry Rothwell expressed a similar preference, telling me: 'If you've scripted it before you go out, you're creating dead films.' There is a conflict here between organisational efficiency and the pursuit of an observational aesthetic, the tension between the two reflecting a mismatch between competing professional values. If one of the consequences of re-enactment is that it normalises a degree of construction, then it isn't a huge imaginative journey for contributors to be asked to perform scenes which have been suggested by the producers rather than inspired by their real lives. On-screen, the constructed sequences my interviewees spoke about might appear to viewers to be inconsequential or benign, but in some instances, were

filmed under duress or at a personal cost. Jo Lockwood told me that one of the low-points of making the documentary was when they filmed a series of seemingly innocuous shots of her and her wife walking around a garden centre:

> They tried to make it sound like they were very early on in the filming, but they were actually some of the last shots they took. It was two years later. They made me take my earrings out. They paid for me to have my nails taken off. They bought me this silly hat – this baseball hat – they had all my hair tied up under the hat, trying to pretend that it was two years ago...It was completely fake. They persuaded me to put my old self on camera at a point in my life when I hadn't been that old person for 18 months. It was quite an uncomfortable situation. I remember saying to [the producer], 'I don't want to do this. I really don't want to do this.'

In this instance, restaging an everyday event in a different temporality meant collapsing the psychic distance between Lockwood's former male identity and her current female identity – something which wasn't simply a matter of donning a different outfit, but reversing a hard-earned and sometimes painful transition, evoking understandable resistance and intense discomfort. It is both ironic and disappointing that this landmark Channel 4 documentary series, made with the explicit intention of educating and informing the public about trans rights, would not choose to honour them within its own production practices, demoting their importance if they inconvenienced production requirements.

In a technologically sophisticated era, we might presume that the kind of out-and-out construction that was necessitated by the technical limitations of the early era of documentary production would no longer be a feature of contemporary texts. However, many of the contributors I interviewed shared their experiences of being coaxed into filming staged sequences which were entirely concocted by the programme's producers. Jenna Presley told me, 'To be honest, most of it was constructed.' Gemma Rawnsley agreed: 'We were manipulated into doing something that was basically scripted.'

Emily Ingold told me that the majority of filming for *Shut Ins: Britain's Fattest People (2019)* was set up for the cameras. Having watched the preceding series, she understood and accepted this was what was required of her when she agreed to participate, but decided to go ahead nevertheless, as a means of accessing potentially life-changing surgery, which was otherwise unavailable to her through the NHS. Each episode of *Shut Ins* contains similar iterations of heavily formatted sequences showing people clearing out cupboards full of

unhealthy foods and throwing them in the bin; gratuitous shots of eating and nudity; and weight loss surgery resulting in a radical physical transformation. The sequence, however, which caused Ingold the most distress was when she was asked to take part in a 5km running event:

> They sprung it on me literally three weeks prior. I hadn't done any training. My fitness wasn't great. I'd only been out of surgery for a couple of months…I wasn't ready for it.

Ingold reluctantly agreed to film the scene, but ultimately resented performing an activity which bore little relationship to her real life. Although she told me her physical and mental health benefitted enormously from having the surgery, the sequence designed to convey this to the audience was actually detrimental to her wellbeing:

> They asked me multiple times, are you happy to do it? Well, yeah, because…there isn't an alternative…I couldn't walk for three days afterwards. I was just in agony. It was awful.

The final scenes of the documentary were entirely fabricated, but the producers judged this artifice was necessary to make Ingold's transformation believable to viewers. In these examples, where reconstruction tips into construction, and a manufactured presence supersedes their realities, contributors seem to bear a psychological cost, performing a version of self which lacks their own authority, being made complicit in their own misrepresentation.

The imperative to convince viewers of the truth by showing them something constructed was in evidence in another example from my data. Kulvindar Lall is one of the UK's top heart surgeons, who took part in Channel 5's *Operation Live (2018).* This ground-breaking documentary promised to give viewers unprecedented access to operating theatres by broadcasting an operation live and in real-time. However, much of the action needed to be constructed in order for the televised event to seem 'real'. Under normal circumstances, Lall's team would operate during daytime hours, but in order to broadcast after the primetime watershed, they had to schedule the surgery for 10 o'clock at night. Because the producers wanted to focus on a single protagonist, Lall had to conduct the operation single-handed, opening and closing his patient's chest for the first time in years. Under normal circumstances, he told me:

> To be quite honest, 60% of the operation is done by my juniors. I just come in and stand opposite them.

As well as having to narrate what he was doing for the benefit of the viewers, the typically relaxed atmosphere in the operating theatre was substantially altered. On an average day, the radio would be switched on, people would be coming in and out, taking phone-calls, chatting casually to one another:

> It is quite boring really. There's no excitement. Just people getting on with their jobs.

Lall told me he had to manipulate the timing of the most dramatic moments of the operation – such clamping the aorta, fitting the replacement valve, and removing the clamps – so they would each coincide with the different programme parts, and didn't take place during the adverts:

> If they were on an ad-break and I was about to take the clamp off, they would say can you wait 30 seconds?

In Lall's view, the reasons for these changes to his team's normal activities were technical rather than editorial, but from an analytical perspective, it is important to consider the impact as well as the intent. Perhaps one effect of this mediation is that a representation of surgery is created which conforms more closely to audience expectations than the actual truth. Mark Andrejevic claims the 'appeal of the real' speaks to a waning sense of reality symptomatic of the postmodern era, and a consequent longing for a taste of something authentic (2004, p.18). Paddy Scannell describes how 'liveness' has historically been utilised by the television industry to capture an effect of immediacy and impetus which is often illusory (1991, pp.183-4). In the case of *Operation Live,* the innovation of filming in real time appears to lift a curtain, allowing us a glimpse into an intriguing space from which the public is normally excluded – yet whilst some inner mechanisms are revealed, others are substantially altered, or even concealed. It is important to recognise the positive impacts of such programming, which Lall told me were noticeable in his consultations with patients and their families afterwards, whose knowledge-levels increased dramatically; and also in the morale of his co-workers, who found their friends and family had a new appreciation of the highly-skilled jobs they perform. Although I wasn't convinced by the documentary's critics, who argued that patient safety was put at risk by the programme, a greater public awareness of the production methods involved in this type of documentary-making would enable a more open debate

about the terms under which it is acceptable or desirable to allow the media to refashion such crucial public services to their own requirements.

Having utilised the perspective of contributors to illuminate patterns of presence and absence, and demonstrate why they are analytically interesting, I want to apply this discussion to the more concrete example of fixed rig filming. The rig is a recent technical innovation which purported to provide a solution to the unease around the use of reconstruction and construction, by offering documentary-makers the possibility of filming complete and unselective coverage of real-life events. Several of my interviewees took part in fixed rig documentaries, and their accounts give an insight into why issues of presence and absence will never be resolved by technical developments.

9.3 Fixed rig documentary production

The gap between representation and reality tends to be conceptualised as a primarily technical challenge, connected with the intrusive presence of cameras and crews, and their frustrating inability to follow different people in different places at the same time, which renders the process inherently selective and incomplete. A historical perspective reveals this argument has a lineage as long as the genre itself, with a succession of technical advances such as sync sound, or handheld digital cameras being proclaimed as the game-changing innovation with the potential to eradicate problematic absences and artificial presences (Ellis, 2011). The latest technology to excite these claims is the fixed rig, heralded as 'television's holy grail' by filmmakers who claimed it would offer unmediated access to real life (Littleboy, 2013, p.134). A number of my interviewees took part in documentaries which were filmed using a fixed rig, such as *Educating Yorkshire (2013), Educating the East End (2014), One Born Every Minute (2010-)* and *24 Hours in A&E (2011-).* Their accounts offer an opportunity to challenge these claims and reflect upon the reasons why problems of presence and absence are more epistemological than technological, and better conceived as an intractable tension in documentary production.

The use of fixed rig technologies in television production can be dated back to the period of time around the turn of the millennium. In parallel to the development of reality TV, popular discourse increasingly began to cast doubt over the authenticity of media contributors, accusing them of acting up to the cameras, performing extreme or exaggerated versions of the self. If the genre of reality TV posed such questions, then the production

methods of reality TV seemed to conveniently provide an answer. Fixed rig filming utilised the technology of *Big Brother (2000-2018),* embedding dozens of remote cameras inside a documentary precinct, and setting up a temporary on-site gallery, where thousands of hours of footage could be monitored and recorded. Despite their shared heritage, fixed-rig documentary filmmakers were keen to distance themselves from reality TV, strategically positioning their productions as traditional documentaries in the minds of viewers and participants alike (Littleboy, 2013). Whereas *Big Brother* made a feature of its innovative production methods, using cutaways of remote cameras panning and whirring as a visual motif, fixed rig documentaries usually made no on-screen reference to the way they were shot (2013, p.130). Although the tools were new, the aspiration tapped into a longstanding ambition of documentary makers, more traditionally associated with Direct Cinema and cinema verité in the 1960s: to capture real life as it is lived. By ostensibly removing the problematic presence of camera crews and producers, the rig appeared to offer the tantalising prospect of closing the gap between real life and representation. Without any visible trappings of media production - or in some cases, without even knowing they were being filmed - would the performers cease their performances, drop the mask, and allow viewers to see their true authentic selves?

Headteachers Jenny Smith and Jonny Mitchell both took the decision to have their schools rigged for Channel 4's phenomenally successful *Educating…* series. The filming was the outcome of months of negotiations between the production company, broadcaster, staff, governors, local authorities, parents and pupils. After persuading and appeasing any objectors, the production company then embarked upon a programme of building works: fitting out classrooms, offices, corridors and communal spaces with over 70 remote cameras and microphones, capable of recording thousands of hours of rushes from multiple locations simultaneously. The headache-inducing complexity of the logistical set up was conceived so that the filming itself could be minimally invasive – a technical accomplishment of the documentary ideal of the 'fly on the wall'. Yet because of their pivotal roles in the project, both Smith and Mitchell told me their personal experiences of the filming period were far from business-as-usual. Trying to run a school whilst meeting the needs of a major production meant performing a role within a role, and inhabiting multiple personas at once. Smith told me she was consciously 'self-filtering all the time':

> You don't ever become yourself completely…You always know the cameras are there. You always know you're wearing a mic.

In different production contexts, the interactions between contributors and crew were genuinely minimal. Sheona Beaumont agreed to be filmed giving birth to her second child for Channel 4's *One Born Every Minute (2010-).* Arriving at the hospital car park at 3am, she saw two technicians who gave her a mic, but then had no further contact with the production crew until she'd had the baby. Afterwards, she wasn't even entirely sure that she had been filmed. The intensity of giving birth meant Beaumont's awareness of the cameras was limited:

> My level of self-consciousness…was low. I was preoccupied with other things going on: the immediacy of feeling and the immediacy of emotion.

In most cases, therefore, it isn't the rig itself which encourages disinhibited performances, so much as the nature of the circumstances through which the contributor is participating. In another more extreme example from my data, it could genuinely be claimed that the rig elicited an unself-conscious performance – not because of the technology *per se*, but because of the use of hidden cameras in conjunction with an agreement between the makers of *24 Hours in A&E (2011-)* and the hospital where the production is based, which states that consent can be obtained retrospectively (see Chapter Six). The absence of a visible crew meant that many contributors were unaware they were being recorded until after the event. This was the case for Janet Morsy, who was rushed by ambulance to St George's Hospital after being stabbed. She told me:

> I wasn't acting up for the camera, I didn't know it was being filmed.

The minimal interaction between the crew and contributors transforms their relationships, positioning documentary-makers as voyeurs rather than collaborators (Littleboy, 2013). The original motivations for downplaying the production methods within the text itself might've owed more to a desire to distinguish these documentaries from the reality genre, but whether knowingly or otherwise, it has also served to stymy any criticism about the ethics of rigging private spaces within public institutions with cameras, and what could be inferred from these developments about a societal shift towards surveillance culture (Palmer, 2002). The ambition to close the gap between representations and reality tends to be conceptualised in wholly positive terms, but there is a flip side to removing mediation if it equates to the jettisoning of an assumed right to personal privacy (Littleboy, 2013, p.134). The potential for exploitation and disinhibited behaviour is particularly problematic in cases such as these, where it is the sick, injured, young or vulnerable who are drawn into focus. The pertinent

issue – and the issue which merits greater attention - is therefore not so much how the rig transforms the technology of filming, but how it reshapes the dynamics of relationships between contributors and producers.

The performance of media contributors has been a topic of public debate, but less attention tends to be paid to institutional performance. The example of the rig allows us to think about the nature of filming interventions, and the effects they might have upon their environment. Several of my interviewees commented upon how the proposition of filming created changes before the crew had even set foot through the door. Jenny Smith told me:

> [The PFI company] who own the building did a spring clean. They put some plaques up, trying to get them on camera…A lot more people wanted to come in during the filming, in the hope they might get on TV.

It's natural that contributors might want to tidy the house before the film crew arrive, but played out on an institutional scale, the prospect of filming raises largely unanswered questions about how public institutions manage their time and resources. I spoke to a midwife who took part in *One Born Every Minute (2010-),* who asked to remain anonymous. She told me that the hospital she worked for had been chronically understaffed for many years before the arrival of the camera crew, but was suddenly flooded with so many new recruits that there weren't enough mugs or chairs to accommodate them in the hospital staff room. One of her duties was to monitor dashboard statistics, which compared how the department was operating against national averages on the numbers of procedures such c-sections and third-degree tears. Usually, they were amber or red, but suddenly they had all turned green. *One Born Every Minute* is unapologetically not a format which seeks to expose and investigate the human cost of systematic under-investment within the NHS – but the danger is that we only see best practice, and that best practice is presented to us as the norm. Scholar-practitioner Helen Littleboy argues that the level of mutual dependency between such productions and public institutions leads to 'sanitized accounts' of public services, and 'delivers rosy pictures from the frontline' (2013, pp.141-2). Even more worryingly, the midwife I spoke to reported feeling pressurised to give the best rooms (the ones which had been rigged with cameras) to the patients who were being filmed, and allocate them the midwives who had given their consent to appear on camera. Sometimes, this meant the most experienced midwives were not assigned to women with higher risk pregnancies, who needed them most. This was not because of any direct input from producers, but the way the department was responding to the

pressures of having cameras there. On one occasion, a pair of premature twins who might normally have been transferred to a different hospital for specialist care were instead treated within the department. The midwife questioned whether the fact they were being filmed could have been a factor in this decision.

The inability of the rig to move with a story, to venture beyond the limits of the precinct where it's fixed, brings us to another contradiction about the technology. At some point, with any rig set-up, lies a boundary, and when the action inevitably spills beyond those limits, its capacity to follow the true events stops, creating insurmountable problems of absence and presence. *24 Hours in A&E (2011-)* gave a highly partial account of Janet Morsy's attack. Four women were injured, but the one who was most seriously wounded – a woman with learning disabilities who was stabbed 13 times - was taken by helicopter to a different hospital, and was barely mentioned in the programme. Before the ambulance arrived, Morsy told me, an onlooker saved her life by giving her first aid. As there is no footage, her rescuer didn't feature in the story. Outside of A&E, there is no record of Morsy's stay in intensive care, or later on the recovery ward, nor of the court case, where she mustered the courage to look her attacker in the eye as he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. So many aspects of the story which are significant to Morsy barely feature in the televised account, because the format is fundamentally shaped by the constricts of the technology, and they took place beyond its limits.

But crucially, these limitations are not purely geographical or temporal. Even within the scope of the rig's coverage, events took place which could not be shown. Jenny Smith told me there were continually incidences at the school where the version of the story presented to the cameras diverged from what was actually happening, because they involved children who were on witness protection programmes, who were subject to violence and abuse at home, who were implicated in criminality, or going through the court systems. After one episode broadcast, Smith was criticised on social media and in the press for her 'soft' handling of a boy who was acting out:

> The parents were having a really violent abusive horrible breakdown…He was kicking off and being horrible. Normally, you'd just exclude him, but I couldn't exclude him, because there was nowhere safe for him to go…The school was the only stability the kid had at that time…They can't see the full picture of what was going on.

These holes in the story had to be papered over with re-stagings of key moments, artificial conversations, and constructed presences which were sometimes bolted together in ways which were highly misleading, creating an inaccurate impression of what actually happened. There is a paradox at play, where the reach of the rig is so pervasive, but within such a confined space, and editorially-speaking, so beholden to the institutions it is embedded within. Ultimately, despite its popularity, it is a technology which shares the many of the same inevitable flaws as the representational tools which precede it, along with a few new ones of its own.

9.4 Narrative norms and representational limits

The actual events of real life are often random, contradictory, confusing and illogical, but documentaries follow a story structure, and adhere to the norms of narrative. Since Aristotle, the internal structure or schema of stories has been dissected and analysed by generations of scholars (see for example Campbell, 1949, Mandler and Johnson, 1977). At its most basic level, every story must have a sequential beginning, middle and end. Ellis describes narrative as 'a structuring of events towards a conclusion' (2011, p.70). There is, therefore, a fundamental clash between the ever-evolving nature of lived experience and the expository, consequential structure of stories, which accounts for much of the tension in documentary production.

The gap between life and life-story is not just a theoretical construct, but a practical challenge. Documentary-makers must approach every situation they document with an eye to how it can be ordered, explained, and mapped onto a narrative framework. Jerry Rothwell told me:

> You're storifying out of this set of amorphous experiences…You're trying to isolate a shape out of a particular moment in time…You're constantly projecting…You've got a shape that you're shooting towards.

Ellis claims that the imperative to construct stories from the recorded events represents a point where the interests of filmmakers and their subjects diverge. Whilst filmmakers must strive to create this sense of coherence, contributors have little control over how the content they film will be ordered within a narrative schema (2011, p.70). In this section, I explore the ways in which the disparity between events and their narrativization is experienced by

individual contributors, and then consider how it plays into our collective sense of order and identity.

During the making of *Ugly Me (2018),* Liane Piper had a growing awareness that the producers were seeking an inciting incident to make sense of her story. She felt they wanted to be able to offer an explanation to viewers about what had triggered her body-dysmorphia:

> Everybody always wants to know the root cause, and genuinely, there might not be a root cause. The more it was 'Let's find out what it could be', the more I found it uncomfortable.

Piper described how the filming process started to feel like a 'whodunnit', where producers would speculate about her past, initiating storylines involving her family and childhood with the hope of prompting a dramatic revelation. Newly diagnosed with BDD, and only just beginning to grapple with the dynamics of her disorder, this kind of insight was impossible for her to provide.

> I feel like – you're pushing me to reveal something that potentially isn't there, and you're pushing me to do something I wouldn't normally do.

Arthur Frank claims that when a person's experiences are relayed to us 'without sequence or discernible causality', the story becomes hard for the listener to hear: chaos is inherently threatening to notions of causality, justice and stability (1995, pp.97-98). To turn chaos into a story requires a reflexive grasp of events, which means it can only be told at a stage of remove. This gap between the tumult of lived chaos and its mediated representation was evident in my interview with Vicki Beckett, who took part in *Child of Mine (2018),* following the death of her unborn daughter, Ruby. Through a series of visual sequences - such as the birth itself, Ruby's funeral, grief counselling sessions - a storyline is created for viewers with a sense of narrative progression, but Beckett told me these moments did not necessarily have the same meanings for her as for the audience. Speaking about the birth, Beckett said:

> That was a hard day, but it was by no means the hardest…As much as it was the worst of times, it was the best of times. I loved meeting [Ruby]. I loved holding her. I loved being in that room with her - so a lot of those feelings I remember that day are really strong feelings of love.

Although the film appeared to portray grief in its most raw and visceral form, Beckett told me her most profound grieving took place in other, more solitary moments, away from the cameras:

> There were so many times when the camera wasn't there that were way more awful…The bits in between, when you're on your own with your thoughts…You don't want to get out of bed, and you cannot stop crying.

Beckett's deepest grief was ineffable, embodied, and intense, but it was not a visual spectacle, nor something which could be fully captured within a documentary:

> The reality is, when you're sobbing in your bed and struggling to do anything, and you're in a vacant state, you'd never be able to text the producer and say 'Come and film me'…I don't know how you'd capture that…It's all happening inside…You never really get a full idea of time either, of how long those feelings last…You never feel the true weight of it.

Anita Biressi discusses how documentary-makers utilise discourses of truth-telling, revelation and self-exposure in their attempts to render 'private traumas knowable via public narratives' (2004, p.405). She claims:

> In their drive to represent and explore personal trauma and sometimes shocking psychological damage, they adopt modes of interrogation and an aesthetics of representation that attempt to span the divide between presence and absence, history and memory…[attempting] to construct a topography of unrepresentable elements such as interior states: memory, trauma, fear. (2004, p.401; p.405).

Documentary gives an approximation of intimacy, but is only able to communicate in a limited register, and so, a deceptive sense of knowing is created for the audience: a temporary empathy. Beckett herself recognised this effect, telling me:

> I think it gives you a short-term false feeling of 'Oh my God': because you're there while you're watching it, but you're not living it. You wake up the next day and that emotion's gone.

Pressure to conform to a narrative arc is often most apparent and pronounced, however, when it comes to endings. Beckett told me her screen-ending was very different to her lived experience. In the documentary, Beckett and her partner Bruce are shown scattering Ruby's

ashes, expressing optimism about their future, and the possibility they might one day have another child – and since our interview, Beckett has given birth to another daughter, Lily - but as she explained, the sense of consolation depicted in the film wasn't something she felt in real life:

> Having another baby…it doesn't replace your lost child…Don't get me wrong, I get on with my life, I do normal things, I've definitely come through the worst of it. But…you don't ever get over your child dying, you're never going to be one day, like, 'I've made my peace with that now.' You're never going to be happy with the outcome…I don't think there ever is a resolution. It's just something you learn to carry a bit better.

Beckett understood her participation in the documentary as a form of activism, and as such, the documentary fulfilled her goals and she was happy with the result (see Chapter Four). Beckett supported the producers' choice to portray her ending in the way they did, telling me:

> If you're invested in the characters in that documentary, you want to know that people are OK at the end of it. You want to know that, because it's too horrible to think that people are still suffering…People want a closing. They want an ending. But there isn't really one… I don't think there's an end to grief.

Whilst Beckett was able to rationalise and endorse the decision to give her story an upbeat ending, for some of the other contributors I spoke to, the false sense of closure felt jarring and artificial. When Liane Piper's therapy sessions were coming to an end, the production was scheduled to finish, but her problems had not disappeared. Nevertheless, the story had to have its conclusion:

> At the end I had to film a sort of 'ending' – and I didn't feel good at all…I didn't want to, but they said we should end it on a high…I wasn't better. I didn't feel better…but they said it's good for people watching it to see there's a light at the end of the tunnel.

My research suggests that having their life experiences distorted to conform with the shape of a story can be problematic for contributors, leaving them with a discomforting sense of complicity in creating something dishonest or misleading. However, the significance of narrative conventions goes beyond the personal, becoming historical, collective, and normative. Holocaust scholar Lawrence Langer studied hundreds of oral histories and literary

representations before arriving at the conclusion that it was an event which defies storytelling. Langer observed a trend for interviewers to push survivors towards heroic tales of resilience and resistance, 'groping for ways to change them into limited versions of success. The result is a persisting myth about the triumph of the spirit that colours the disaster with a rosy tinge and helps us to manage the unimaginable without having to look at its naked and ugly face' (1996, p.3). When Peter A. Gordon directed *Children of the Holocaust (1995)* for ITV, he made a difficult editorial decision to cut an interview with one of the survivors he spoke to. Before being shipped off to a concentration camp, a Romanian woman he interviewed was imprisoned on a farm with her family, where they were forced to live in a pigsty. She told Gordon that a Nazi soldier shot her mother in the head, then ordered her to clean the remnants of her brains from his boots. Gordon said:

> This woman's testimony was so terrible – and she had a look about her as well. She was quite blank, almost. I thought the audience would say, 'This is too much' and turn it off.

Gordon and I discussed his decision in more depth, and how it was informed by his understanding of ITV's audience - 'not an academic audience, not a Jewish audience, but a very broad audience' - and his desire to 'get through to as many people as possible.' The rationale for the programme's commission was a piece of research he had come across which found that 40% of children growing up in the '90s knew nothing about the Holocaust. The imperative to reach a large audience was not only commercial but also had an ethical dimension. An aspect which is underexplored in Langer's account of narrative preference is the systemic structural forces underpinning these individual creative decisions – the mediating influence of platforms themselves, and the motivations of those who make and commission cultural products. Ultimately, these factors are of competing importance to historical veracity. Daisy Asquith shared a similar story about her documentary, *After the Holocaust (2012).* The commissioning editor told her: 'Make it cheerful otherwise people will switch it off.' Making genocide 'cheerful' might sound like a tall order, but in fact, Langer claims few accounts of the Holocaust have been able to resist this 'culture of consolation' (1996, p.9). In rendering events palatable for a mass audience something important is lost. Langer argues that approaching such horrors with open eyes is both necessary and dangerous; responding to 'the challenge of imagining mass murder without flinching' is a choice which leads to a diminished sense of our collective self, 'yet the

alternative is to build a society on the fragile foundations of naïve idealism and self-delusion' (1996, pp.4-5).

If the gulf between experience and representation means that we fail to see ourselves clear-sightedly, for the individuals involved, their consequent incomprehensibility to others can be deeply isolating. As a survivor of Auschwitz, Lydia Tischler told me about the difficulties she faced earlier in her life, of relating her experiences in a way which others could accept. She told me she developed a reliance upon distancing tactics such as gallows humour and sarcasm, her true feelings being filtered through multiple levels of individual and cultural denial:

> So much of what happened was beyond imagination. You couldn't actually allow yourself to believe that it could've happened…One denies the evidence of one's own eyes…How does one grasp that one human being can behave to another human being in this way?

Once again, it is the story's ending which marks the point of greatest tension, where the distorting influence of narrative imperatives are most identifiable and pronounced. Whilst popular culture seeks consolation in tales of individual heroism and limited success, Tischler told me that for many survivors, there simply was no ending:

> It lives with some people until they die, and in some cases, they even transmit it to the next generation.

This kind of enduring trauma, without resolution or learning, refuses to be bent into the arc of a story, and therefore lies beyond the limits of conventional representation (Caruth, 1991). As Langer concludes, 'If there is a history of remembering, there is also a politics of forgetting' (1996, p.14).

9.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set out to examine the patterns of presence and absence which are the hallmarks of media representation, seeking to understand what they reveal to us about the values of the media. My research suggests there are multifactorial causes for divergence between events and their representation - but crucially, any individual subjective or creative preferences are underpinned by a political-economic context, a commercial orientation, and

culturally-embedded norms, which manage narrative conventions and are strengthened with each reiteration. Any assumed responsibility the media has to represent everyday life authentically, or to circulate accurate testimony about the past, is fundamentally compromised by its overriding obligation to create stories which are deemed acceptable to a mass audience. These pressures conspire to resist 'the world's reduction to a prepared schema', producing 'representations that are more than imperfect and less than deceptive, representations that can't quite tame the world' (Comolli, 1999, p.43; p.42).

Re-enactment and construction are normalised through the established techniques of documentary production, and even the kind of out-and-out reconstruction which was typical of the early twentieth century is not so far removed from the experiences of contemporary contributors. On an individual level, the consequences of the failure to represent ordinary people with sufficient depth or accuracy can be a sense of mute isolation and disconnection, when experiences which are profoundly felt are incommunicable to others. On a broader level, there is a warping of our collective memory, a reduction of our capacity to understand, and a magnification of our willingness to seek consolation in ignorance and denial. Frosh argues the 'chasm between experience and discourse' is a matter of epistemology, and my findings add weight to this claim (2006, p.276). An illusion of verisimilitude is created through the concealment of absence with simulated presence, but in effecting this seamless appearance, a distance is created from the objects being represented. Presences and absences mean that real life can never be perceived in totality, but only alluded to in symbols and fragments.

10. Encountering the Text

The end of filming marks an important phase in the production cycle, when the interests and ambitions of documentary-makers and their subjects begin to diverge and become misaligned. Agnieszka Piotrowska describes this stage as a slow and inevitable process of 'falling out of love' (2013a, p.305). The foundation of intimacy and trust between them, upon which the film was created, can now become a barrier to the clear-headed objectivity required to make editorial decisions. During the editing process, documentary-makers must negotiate other – often conflicting – sets of imperatives: balancing various responsibilities to their employers, broadcasters, and audiences. Their perspective and priorities start to shift and change as they begin to view 'the film as material rather than an ongoing experience' (Ellis, 2011, p.67).

At the same time, another transition takes place. As the text is created, the documentary subject is transformed from a flesh-and-blood person into a representational object. As Ruth Palmer describes it:

> Viewable from the outside by the individuals themselves, and interpreted and appropriated by others…annihilated and preserved at the same time (2017a, p.128; p.130).

This chapter will focus on encounters between contributors and the text - exploring their feelings towards their mediated selves, the version of their realities constructed by the documentary, and its consumption by the audience – examining the conflict between the evidential quality of the representation that has been produced, and its inevitable failure to replicate the interiority of their experience.

Previous scholarship characterises contributors' first encounters with the text as the televisual equivalent of the hangover of the morning after, where poor decisions meet their consequences, and they learn what Janet Malcolm terms their 'hard lesson' (1990, p.3). My aim in this chapter, through foregrounding participants' perspectives, is to develop a more informed sense of their agency: What complicity do they share in the representations that are made of them – for surely they must expect some degree of constructed-ness? Are they naïve or disingenuous? Is being represented by the media validating, democratic, emancipatory - or merely painful? In section 10.1, I begin with a discussion about the relationship between contributors and their screen avatars. Scholars have variously drawn upon the psychoanalytic theory of Freud, or the social interactionism of Goffman, to account for the unsettling nature

of these encounters, but I'm equally interested in how the production arrangements are utilised to manage the politics of representing human subjects, and to lend authority to their depictions. Section 10.2 will explore contributor's reactions to the edited text, and what the editing techniques and choices that were used revealed to them about the values guiding the production process. As the documentary travels into the public domain, the text becomes part of a broader media ecology, and participants are exposed to the opinions and judgements of the audience. Section 10.3 will focus on the marketing and consumption of documentary texts – in particular, discussing the phenomenon of 'hate-watching': a distancing discourse used to provoke extreme audience reactions within an overcrowded and increasingly interconnected media landscape. In section 10.4, my interviewees reflect on aftermath of participation, and the extent to which their experience of documentary participation fulfilled their hopes and expectations. I offer my conclusions in section 10.5.

10.1 Encountering the mediated self

In *Camera Lucida (1981),* Roland Barthes writes about the transformation from photographic subject into object, sharing the story of what has become known as the 'Winter Garden' photograph of his mother. Searching through boxes of photos after her death, Barthes found that most were 'partially true, and therefore totally false' (1981, p.66). Only a single picture of her - as a five-year-old girl, standing in a conservatory alongside her brother - accorded with his memory, containing an essence of her ineffable realness, a quality he claims is deceptively elusive in recorded imagery. However, Barthes does not only associate photography with nostalgia and memory, but also more unsettlingly, with a loss of control, imposture, and mortality. In the transformation from living subject to inanimate object, the person in the imagery experiences a 'micro-version of death…comparable to certain nightmares' (1981, p.14; p.13)

Susan Sontag maintains that photographs are not the same as moving images, presenting 'a neat slice of time rather than a flow' (2001, p.17). Yet, similarly to Barthes, her writing evokes the representational violence that capturing an image entails:

> To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed…To photograph someone is a

> sublimated murder – a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time (2001, p.14; p.17).

Sontag's argument positions contributors as victims of this distinctive brand of violence, but by exploring their responses to being objectified and consumed in this way, I hope to develop a sense of their complicity or resistance to this process, which offers the potential for both empowerment and harm.

As described in Chapter Six, contributors only normally get the chance to watch their documentary at the same time as the rest of the audience, when it is broadcast. In this first encounter with the text, they often find the experience of seeing themselves represented as objects deeply unsettling – an unexpected and unfathomable adverse reaction, suggestive of more complex psychological processes (Piotrowska, 2013a). For many of the people I interviewed, their first reaction was an uncomfortable focus on physicality. Heather Ward described the first time she saw herself on TV:

> Oh my God, is my chin that big?...Is my nose that big? I wish I'd done my hair that morning, my roots are showing.

Jenna Presley had a similar reaction:

> Oh no, I look fat…I wish I'd worn some makeup! Vanity takes over first. The first time I watched it, I was just thinking *oh God*, look at me.

Even Julian Dismore, who had worked in TV production for many years before moving to the other side of the camera, was surprised by what he saw:

> I always imagine myself in my mind's eye at 21 years old, with a full head of hair, no wrinkles, looking bushy-tailed and full of life, and I just find it hard to not stare at my bald head and terribly aged appearance. It's hypnotic, to be honest.

These comments seem throwaway, but they are worthy of attention. Although usually spoken in jest, it was striking how frequently these sentiments recurred in my data, from people who after all, see themselves in the mirror every day and are entirely familiar with the way they look. Most of us are photographed, recorded and videoed relentlessly in our daily lives, yet the palpable sense of fascination and shock highlights something distinct about the process of being represented within a documentary.

Becoming objectified - in its most literal sense – involves a degree of emotional detachment. Jo Lockwood's gender transition was documented over the course of several years, but encapsulated visually in a single sequence filmed in a TV studio and used in the programme titles and idents:

> That took…half a day, standing on this rotating podium in different poses. They were taking head shots, waist shots, feet shots, zoom in zoom out, rotating 45 degrees – taking all these shots and they'd spin me around. We had an outfit change. Back out, do it again. They were trying to capture how I'd changed. They had a makeup artist, a hair stylist, a dresser there to deal with the clothing…I felt objectified…I felt like a piece of meat.

Feminist accounts associate objectification with passivity, resulting from being seen through the eyes of an Other – in this scholarly tradition, usually being seen through the male gaze (Gill, 2007, p.28). Becoming an object also entails a fixity which signifies a loss of possibility and a loss of control. In *Giving an Account of Oneself (2009),* Judith Butler describes the inevitable inadequacy of all attempts at representation – including self-representation. She writes:

> The account of myself that I give in discourse never fully expresses or carries this living self. My words are taken away as I give them (2009, p.36).

There is a necessary dispossession of narrative authority, where the 'I' gives way to something more provisional, shared and contested. In committing to a version of oneself, ambivalence, contradiction and complexity is disowned. For some contributors, this is experienced as a sense of unreality, or a rupture. A double has been created, who may look the same, but who feels fundamentally different. A psychic distance between the self and the representation opens up. My research suggests that a common response to the creation of this subject-object is to dissociate. Jenna Presley described her reaction to watching herself on the screen:

> It was my face but everything else was unrelated to me - as if I was an actress rather than it being a documentary.

Emily Ingold said, **'**I don't even refer to it as me. I always say 'her' when I talk about it.' For Liane Piper, the dissociation between herself and her screen-self was partial, and therefore even more confusing:

> It didn't feel like I was watching me. The emotions? 100%. But some of the things I was watching and some of the things I was saying, I was thinking, that's not me!

Both Ruth Palmer (2017a) and Agnieszka Piotrowska (2013a) have described this sense of dissociation by drawing upon Freud's essay *Das Unheimliche (1990 [1919])* – which is usually translated from German into English as 'the uncanny'. The uncanny describes a feeling when something familiar has become strange, and therefore threatening – a feeling contributors can encounter when they see themselves in the place that is usually occupied by the Other (Palmer, 2017a, p.135). Piotrowska links the 'horror' contributors feel at the creation of this 'doppelganger' with the re-emergence of repressed desires, and a loss of personal autonomy:

> The realization that 'the double' created by the film is neither a 'true' representation of the contributor as imagined by that person, nor is it in any way controlled and controllable by him or her, can feel temporarily unbearable. 'The double' created by the filmmaker and the broadcaster, like a Frankenstein's monster, has a life of its own, independent from the film's contributor's actual fluctuating ideas of who he or she might be (2013a, p.304).

Whilst these accounts offer fascinating and valuable insights about the psychology of screen representation, there is also something systemic and routinized about the disassociation between contributors and their representations which is underexamined by the industry and scholars of the industry. I wondered, first of all, how producers account for this discomfort? Most were familiar with the phenomenon, but claimed that what the camera revealed was beyond their control. Sue Bourne said, simply: 'Not my fault. That's who they are.' In Stella Bruzzi's book about *Seven Up*, Claire Lewis is quoted as saying: 'The problem we have is when the camera perceives people maybe accurately, but doesn't match people's perceptions of themselves' (2007, p.14). There is an implicit suggestion here that the camera has a kind of epistemological privilege, and is able to access a deeper level of insight than the people who operate it. Jean Rouch claims the camera is a provocation which reveals the truest self (Barnouw, 1983, p.253). However, this rhetorical transfer of agency from the filmmaker to his tool effaces the unequal resources, the asymmetries of power, and the entire institutional framework underpinning the reauthored identity. The presumed objectivity of the representation makes it all the more convincing for audiences. The evidential quality of the image, coupled with the reach and reputation of the broadcasting platform lends the

representation an excess of authority. Ruth Palmer found that the plausibility of her news subject's representations appeared to be so undeniable that it caused them to doubt themselves:

> In extreme cases, interviewees felt like their representation in the news actually had more credibility than *they* did, which was uncanny indeed (2017a, p.145).

Liane Piper told me she watched her documentary expecting she would, in some way, be unmasked to herself:

> How do I *actually* look? How do I come across?...I watched it with my hand in front of my face. I had to fast forward some parts of it.

As Palmer suggests, documentary representations are not only convincing to audiences, but also to the people who take part in them, potentially destabilising the internal perception of self. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz claimed that social performance is directed inwardly as much as outwardly – through performance, we tell a story *about* ourselves *to* ourselves (quoted in Alexander, 2011, p.20). The establishment of a competing interpretation disrupts this mechanism. It is not so much a clash between the real and the representation, therefore, but a misalignment between socially constructed selves. A screen double is created in their image with the power to depose its originator.

10.2 The edited text

As contributors play an active role in the filming process, any revelations arising from their encounter with the text are often less concerned with what was actually shot than the way it is edited together. Whilst much of the raw material should be familiar to them, they are not usually privy to the decision-making process guiding the edit. One aspect of the edited text which is immediately striking to contributors is its distinctive temporality - its relationship with time and place. Many of my interviewees commented upon the dramatic condensing of time, where action which took place over hours, days, or years is collapsed into minutes. Paul Dilley's near-death experience was a life-defining event, which was inevitably truncated to the limits of the available space and time within a strand of *Emergency Helicopter Medics (2019b).* He told me:

> It felt short. It was much longer...the fight to keep me alive was much longer than that.

Sheona Beaumont described her reaction when she recently rewatched her episode of *One Born Every Minute (2010-):*

> It doesn't have the same resonance I carry in my memory… Everything about my memory and experience of it is broader than that.

It isn't simply that time is shrunk, but also that its weighting is rebalanced. John Corner uses the term 'durational time' to describe the way that some shots are expanded and held on the screen, whilst others are contracted. He claims:

> The kind of 'seeing' we are offered by documentary, the way in which the world is rendered for our gaze, our understanding and our feeling, turns extensively on the amount of time allocated to the various elements of the portrayal (2012, p.21).

Watching the edited film offers contributors a way of reconstructing their past, unearthing moments which might've been entirely forgotten, or unobserved at the time, centring certain actions whilst simultaneously displacing others. Beaumont explained how her son's birth was reorganised in a way which emphasised the geographical locations which had been rigged with cameras:

> It's not just physically that they missed bits of that 12 hours, but there was more of the event that wasn't about the hospital.

For Beaumont, memories of the birth included summoning her husband and arranging childcare for her daughter, several hours spent labouring at home, and a journey to the hospital, all of which took place beyond the scope of the production - but even within the rigged delivery room, significant events were effaced from the narrative.

An academic herself, Beaumont was familiar with the scholarly debates surrounding the politics of televised birth, sending me a copy of an article by Sara De Benedictis et al (2019) before our meeting. This research found that TV portrayals tended to focus on medicalised birth, with clinical interventions routinised, and decisions taken by medical staff rather than mothers. In light of this knowledge, Beaumont told the documentary's producers she wanted her labour to be shown 'warts and all.' Beaumont was therefore disappointed to see that a

significant moment had been edited out of the final text, when she insisted the midwife give her an episiotomy:[12]

> I thought, well hang on, in my mind, that's a big wart that they didn't show…In my head, that's a politicised thing.

Beaumont and I discussed the apparent editorial inconsistency in the fact that graphic footage of injuries and body parts will be shown in documentaries such as *24 Hours in A&E (2011-),* and *Embarrassing Bodies (2007-),* not to mention *Naked Attraction (2016-)* - which features full-frontal nudity – but not in the context of childbirth. Beaumont argues this aversity seems to be gendered or sentimentalised in some way. Removed from the usual context of sex and violence, depictions of the female body are markedly less acceptable:

> Maybe there's a sense in which childbirth has a different filter…Is that a cultural shaping of the way we represent birth to ourselves? Probably. Probably there is a bit of that.

For contributors, watching their documentary is like entering a time machine where they meet an earlier version of themselves. Viewing the film isn't a simple retrieval of images and events, but will always be understood within the context of the specific moment from which it is viewed. Corner calls this alignment of time on screen with the time of watching 'phenomenological time' (2012, p.2). To share a temporal co-presence with their past selves can have ambivalent meanings for participants. A central storyline of *Ugly Me (2018)* was the relationship between Liane Piper and her boyfriend Mitch, who broke up acrimoniously shortly after filming finished. She told me:

> It has framed a moment in time. That's going to be there forever…I don't want it to be there forever with me and him, but that's something I can't change.

Editing techniques such as intercutting, music, and commentary can have a huge impact upon the way footage is received and interpreted. John Ellis describes editing as a process of attributing meaning to events using hindsight: a method of developing a sequential, consequential structure from disconnected moments to give them narrative force, 'a structuring of events towards a conclusion'. In this way, 'editing creates a frame of meaning around the material' (2011, pp.69-71).

[12] A surgical incision made between the vagina and perineum to aid delivery.

Sheona Beaumont's birth – with her cast in the role of the Vicar's wife – was intercut with the story of a teenage mum, riffing on themes of morals and respectability. The positive account Ashleigh Williams gave of her job as a sex worker was contradicted by the minor-key music playing in the background:

> I'm gassed because I'm going home with £200 in my pocket…I say I had a great time, and then the sad music and the darkness comes…It's like, she needs help. She can't see the truth.

But perhaps the most striking example in my data of the potential for the editing process to recontextualize real events was the CBBC programme which Julian Dismore participated in, *Danny the Bravest Boy in the World (2020)*. The documentary about his 13-year old disabled son reflected luminously on the care he receives from a dedicated team of nurses, doctors, and therapists, but withheld details of the medical errors made during an operation which led to him being paralysed in the first place, for which the hospital has since admitted liability. Dismore told me:

> It could've easily gone into a *Dispatches* or a *Panorama*, or a hard-hitting documentary about poor medical care within the NHS…The care Danny received at numerous points was atrocious….and that's one of the reasons – well it is *the* reason – why we are where we are today. But none of that was appropriate for children's TV.

The expectations of channel and audience place limits upon a documentary's capacity to tell the full story. In this example, the techniques of the edit (juxtaposition, music, commentary), along with the positioning of a programme (its placement on a particular platform, the branding, and the title), were able to turn a tragedy into a heart-warming tale. Yet Dismore maintained the documentary was still 'real', emphasising the most appropriate version of events for a young audience:

> We told part of the story…those are all realities.

A caveat to add is that editing is neither inevitably nor simplistically reductive. On occasions, the edited text can become more expansive than the raw material it is constructed from, making connections and drawing together ideas. After giving birth, Sheona Beaumont asked the hospital chaplain to give a blessing and recite a favourite bible reading - Psalm 62 Verse 11 – which had taken on an important meaning to her during her pregnancy, becoming 'like a

mantra' which she drew resilience from. When she watched the finished documentary, Beaumont was astonished to see what the producers had done with the scene, using the chaplain's words over images which brought together all of the different protagonists from the programme, commemorating the miraculous experiences they had been through in bringing new life to the world:

> Having someone…speak the words that I had been holding onto [was] a way of capturing the acceptance that I feel as a Christian, and a universal way of declaring that for others too…For me, watching that bit evokes and holds the whole thing…It has that unifying quality.

Mediated representation has the potential to transcend the individual and build connections with others. To be seen and heard is a powerful, life-affirming experience – and therefore, it is understandable that one of most damaging outcomes is when contributors make the decision to participate, only to be edited out.

Holocaust survivor Lydia Tischler invested substantial time in filming for BBC2's BAFTA-winning documentary *The Last Survivors (2019).* Several sequences were shot, including Tischler giving a seminar at the British Psychotherapy Foundation (where despite being in her 90s, she continues to teach every week), travelling up to Leeds to speak at her granddaughter's school, and an extended interview at a studio in East London. However, when she watched the final text, she found most of the material had been cut, and rather than telling her own story, clips from her interview were used to make general points about the impact of the Holocaust. She told me:

> I must say my first reaction when I saw the preview was one of anger, because there was so little of me…but then I realised that what they actually did was they used me as a reflective commentator on peoples' stories…Having got over the initial [laughs] narcissistic wound! Why so little of me, and all these other people! I realised it plays quite an important role in the film.

In his account of the making of the landmark 1970s documentary series *An American Family (1973)*, producer Craig Gilbert acknowledges how hurtful contributors can find being instrumentalized in this way, to serve the broader purposes of the text:

> Human beings do not like to be treated like guinea pigs. If you tell the subjects of a documentary their behaviour and their lives are being used to make a larger

> statement about human behaviour and human lives in general, they are more than likely to be highly insulted… The bottom line, as they say in television, is that we *are using human beings* to make a point (1982, p.44).

Martha Nussbaum claims that instrumentality is a core feature of objectification, defining it as 'the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes' (1995, p.257). The context, however, is crucial in determining whether the act of objectification is benign or damaging, as is the recognition of a person's autonomy. Whilst humans routinely use one other as a means to achieve their own goals, instrumentalization becomes problematic when it involves the denial of the other person's 'status of being ends in themselves' (1995, p.265).

Georgina Tyson agreed to take part in *Louis Theroux: Selling Sex (2020),* alongside her friend Ashleigh Williams, because she wanted to speak out about sex worker's rights. Initially, the production professed a shared concern with this topic, but in hindsight, Tyson feels their interest was disingenuous, as her attempts to discuss the politics of sex work were repeatedly ignored. Tyson found herself side-lined during the filming. She told me the director would position her on the periphery of the scene so she could be cropped out of frame. When the women voiced their suspicions, the documentary-makers reassured them they were both important contributors, who they recognised as a mutually supportive team. However, Tyson feels they decided not to be upfront about their intention to drop her as a participant in case it jeopardised their access to her friend. After the shoot had wrapped, their attitude towards her changed. Williams was invited to a preview, but Tyson she was told she could not attend because it was only for contributors. They asked her to sign a contributor's release form, but then disputed she had this status. When she pushed back, they agreed to let her watch the documentary, but she found her role had largely been cut:

> They kept saying, 'Do you want to be in it more?' I was like, 'No! I want you to take me out. If you're going to 'out' me as a sex worker, but I'm not offering anything valuable to the conversation, then you should take me out. I don't want to be outed for nothing.' I only wanted to 'out' myself to the entire country if it was going to be beneficial to sex workers and the conversations around it.

In the documentary, the authorship of artwork which Tyson and Williams had co-produced is attributed solely to Williams. The filming takes place in Tyson's home, with her social circle, but she herself is largely absent, rendered invisible in her own life. In an open letter of complaint to the BBC, she writes:

> At the end of it all I felt silenced, and I am questioning my worth and how my 'lack of charisma', accent, looks and sex work are always affecting how people want to platform my voice.

Broadcasters and production companies are under no obligation to broadcast material they have shot, but the experience of participating only to be dropped can be devastating for documentary contributors. These findings also suggest that it is not only the people who feature prominently within the finished text who might feel entitled to consider themselves to be contributors to the documentary, which has a significant potential impact in terms of discussions of duty of care, and how far the responsibilities of documentary-makers should extend.

10.3 Encountering the audience

Having discussed a range of individual responses to encountering the mediated self and the edited text, I now want to widen the frame of interest to consider the audience, the process of transmission, and the afterlife of the documentary.

Whilst being represented through the medium of visual imagery is a ubiquitous feature of contemporary life in much of the world, it is the very public nature of the way that documentary contributors are represented, before audiences of hundreds of thousands or even millions, which constitutes one of the most distinctive elements of participation. In this section, I detail how the marketing and promotion of the text figured within my discussions with contributors, and how their experiences shifted as their documentaries found their place within a wider mediated culture.

One of the first signals as to how a text will be presented to an audience is the title. Broadcasters have been frequently criticised for giving their programmes salacious or offensive titles to attract viewers – such as *The Undateables (2012-2020)*, *F*** Off I'm Fat (2006)*, and *Me and My Man Breasts (2007)* (McGeorge, 2015, Singh, 2008). In some instances within my research, contributors were told about the sensational title upfront, and this knowledge shaped their decision to participate and their expectations. Jeff White is a pro-life activist in California who agreed to host BBC presenter Stacey Dooley at his summer camp for teenagers. He told me:

> We did know the title was *Brainwashing Stacey*…which is, you know, kind of tipping the hand a little [laughs]! I was shocked they gave it that title. So we knew going in…this was not going to be a puff piece for us.

My research suggested it is also common for contributors not to be told about the programme's title until close to transmission. Whether this information is genuinely undecided during the production phase or withheld from contributors is hard to ascertain, but the disincentivising effect for potential contributors mean there is reason to be sceptical. Emily Ingold told me:

> I knew it was going to be called *Shut Ins*, but I didn't know it was going to be subtitled *Britain's Fattest People*. That was when I saw the first edit – I was like oh… That was hard. But it'd already gone past the part when I'd signed a contract so I couldn't say anything.

For some of my interviewees, the revelation of the title wasn't only a clue about the marketing, but the first occasion when they learnt what the actual content of the documentary they had taken part in would be. Jenna Presley and Gemma Rawnsley both agreed to be filmed for a documentary about home-schooling. Rawnley told me:

> We never got given a working title, it was just, 'Oh, we don't know what we're going to call it yet.'

The description of the programme on Channel 4's website makes no mention of home-schooling, but claims the documentary is about 'families who are raising their children under the off-grid parenting philosophy', and poses the question: 'Does a lack of rules make the children healthier and happier, or lead to behaviour issues?' (2017). Rawnsley recounted the conversation where the documentary-makers told her what they intended to call the programme:

> They said to us, we need a title for the show, how about *Feral Families?* I was absolutely disgusted… I just said we're not feral, you what? And he said we need a catchy title. I said you're not calling it that. So he went away and came back and said what about *The Bad Parent's Handbook* or *The Guide to Bad Parenting*, something like that. I said are you joking? We're not bad parents. We're really good parents.

For Rawnsley, to be publicly shamed in this way, and labelled as a 'feral family' or a 'bad parent' was particularly hurtful. Over a long conversation, she told me how after being raised in a household with a violent father and having left home as a vulnerable teenager, being a good mother to her own children was her first priority:

> I had no loving home…I'm so proud that after what I experienced, I raised my daughter completely differently. I didn't fall down the gutter. I've had lots of struggles over the years, but ultimately, I've prevailed.

Although permissive in some respects which were emphasised by the documentary-makers – such as letting her kids cut their own hair, help themselves to food, and set their own bedtimes – Rawnsley explained how in other respects she is 'actually very strict' – preventing her children from hanging around on the streets, and teaching them to be aware of their impact upon other people and the environment. The definition of 'feral' notes its derogatory associations, offering synonyms such as 'undomesticated', 'unused to humans' and 'threatening' (OED, 2022). By titling the programme *Feral Families,* the documentary-makers established a particular mode of reception for the audience. As Jenna Presley, who appeared separately in the documentary, told me: 'They set us up to be judged.'

The term 'hate-watching' has been attributed to the *New Yorker* TV critic Emily Nussbaum, who wrote about her compulsion to watch the over-hyped NBC Broadway drama series *Smash (2012-13),* if only to figure out why she found it so infuriating:

> I mean, why would I go out of my way to watch a show that makes me so mad? On some level, I'm obviously enjoying it (2012).

More recently, the term has gained an entry in the Oxford English Dictionary, who define it as to watch a television programme or performer 'in a spirit of mockery, as a form of entertainment' (2022). The term might be new, but the phenomenon it describes has long been associated with Bourdieu, who claimed the cultural products we consume are a way of identifying and distinguishing social status and values (1987). The distancing gaze with which we sometimes regard cultural objects emphasises aesthetic discernment and authority, and offers an oppositional means of generating markers of identity. A foundational text in the scholarship of 'anti-fandom' was Ien Ang's (2013 [1985]) study of the audience's differing emotional attachments to the American soap, *Dallas (1978-1991),* which described a diversity of viewing practices, including ironic distancing and parodic interpretation. Other significant contributions include Joshua Gamson's work on trash TV programmes, and how

lines of what is normal and deviant are drawn up around them (1998); and Skeggs, Thumim & Wood's paper on how the self is performed through reflexive retelling, immanent positioning and affective responses to reality TV (2008).

What is new and distinctive about the idea of a hate-watch is the way that the 'scopic pleasures of moral judgement' have been commercially exploited as part of what Sara De Benedictis et al call:

> The development of a parasitical media economy, whereby an increasing range of media agents are able to accumulate capital as the 'media storm' transfers from one field of production to another (2017, p.4; p.20).

In an attention economy, confected outrage generates Tweets, clicks, and momentum as the story travels through the tabloids and social media, fuelling ratings, and becoming a viable strategic basis for success. There is, therefore, a natural synchronicity between the hate-watch, social media, and sensationalised television. Writing in *The Independent,* Fiona Sturges claims:

> The hate-watch has also come into its own in the age of social media. We are no longer restricted to blowing raspberries at a film's failures in the company of close friends and loved ones. Instead, strangers are united online via billowing plot-holes and atrocious acting, and communities created out of mutual loathing and snark. Everyone's a critic now (2020).

The parallel economic agendas which intersect different media fields mean that broadcasters and producers are heavily incentivised to offer up protagonists and scenarios to be pilloried by a judgemental audience.

In *Anti-fandom: Dislike and Hate in the Digital Age (2019),* Melissa Click provides a framework for the study of hate, emphasising the importance of focussing not only on the technology, but also emotion and affect. Drawing upon Sara Ahmed's (2013) cultural approach to the study of emotion; emotions are recognised to have a significance which exceeds the individual and internal, also acting as a form of social capital, circulating cultural value by fixing power relations and shaping social identities (Click, 2019, p.15). Emotions such as hate and disgust are crucial to the formation of collective identities, which coalesce around the identification of a vilified Other by a 'community of witnesses' (Ahmed, 2013, P.94).

Whilst scholars have drawn attention to the divisive societal consequences of hate-watching, we know less about how it feels for the contributors themselves to be offered up as critical fodder to a scathing audience. Emma A. Jane (2014) criticizes the tendency of the scholarship to lose touch with the human subjects who are the targets of what she rather brilliantly terms 'e-bile', conflating them with texts which represent them:

> Unpleasant anti-fan activity is seen as simply a necessary – and to-be-expected – consequence of being in the fame game. This dynamic is complicated, however, by unprecedented rises in the celebritisation of 'ordinary people' via the internet and media genres such as reality television. Directing invective at these sorts of 'amateur' or 'accidental' celebrities raises different ethical issues because it is likely that such people are more psychologically, physically, and financially vulnerable to anti-fan campaigns, than seasoned celebrities (2014, p.184).

The implication that some targets should be considered worthier, or at least better equipped, to soak up audience hatred is problematic, but one of the more surprising findings of my research is that not all contributors should be straightforwardly considered as victims of this dynamic. My research found examples of contributors being harmed through their participation in a hate-watch, but also others who sought to harness its potential as part of their own communicative strategy.

As an anti-abortion activist, Jeff White has featured in many documentaries and media productions over the past thirty years. White told me his expectation is that the media will be hostile both to him personally and to his cause ('I've never known it to be other than that. I just haven't'), but nonetheless, he has a policy of saying yes to every request he receives. He explained:

> I don't expect to be treated nicely…that's the nature of confronting someone's beliefs or lifestyle. I think it's my low expectations that stop me from being disappointed, and the absolute confidence in the truth of what I am saying.

White has a pragmatic acceptance that his views are likely to be challenged and even mocked by the media, but calculates that the risk of being distorted is a price worth paying to gain access to their platforms. He told me:

> I'm not looking for a positive piece *per se*…What I am hoping for is a moment when I can say something that is thought-changing for somebody hearing it…I'm

> quite content to try and get a statement out there that causes people to think…You have to be thick-skinned.

White named his organisation *Survivors of the Abortion Holocaust* knowing the more contentiously he presented himself, the more likely he would be to gain publicity. He was once told by a reporter, 'The story is not interesting if there isn't something controversial.'

When contributors' views challenge social norms or orthodoxies, liberal values of free speech are tested. Free speech is often debated in terms of legalities and principles, but White's comments prompted me to consider the lived experiences of those who are trying to communicate opinions which other people might not want to hear. I went on to interview Philipp Tanzer, who took part in a BBC documentary, *I Am a Men's Rights Activist (2020).* Tanzer told me there were few opportunities beyond the Internet 'manosphere' to engage with issues such as custody rights and domestic violence from a male perspective. He claims:

> We are not invited to debates. Our voices are being silenced.

Tanzer held the BBC documentary-maker he worked with in high esteem, judging him to be scrupulously fair and honest, but he also acknowledged there are drawbacks to this more measured and thoughtful approach, given the small amount of mainstream coverage devoted to the men's rights movement, and the subsequent pressure to make his message punch through:

> Even in this documentary, I would say…there's very, very little time spent on men's issues. I was being heard, and I'm very grateful for that. I was being treated very fairly, but if I could - if I had the choice between being treated very fairly and sympathetically but little time being spent on men's issues, or me being portrayed as a weirdo and a lot of time being spent on men's issues, I would go for the latter.

Other people within my sample expressed similarly ambivalent feelings when the documentary they had imagined was going to be contentious did *not* turn out to be a hate-watch. Jo Lockwood told me:

> If you look at *Genderquake*, or *My Transsexual Summer*, they had a lot more pushback and reaction…[but] this was like – shrug your shoulders, it was lovely. And that disappointed me…It was such an anti-climax…Once it polarises people, you get discussion. It didn't polarise enough negativity. It never got any push-back, there was never any defence of it.

Contributors in hate-watches are usually seen as either victims or delusional, but my research suggested a degree of collusion, when communicative goals are prioritised more highly than reputational ones. These representational strategies only make sense in a media landscape where people with marginal views or life-experiences understand they have limited opportunities to get their messages across. The media radicalises those with marginal or extreme views by failing to give them airtime and a fair hearing. These insights complicate any simplistic notions of contributor exploitation, but also demonstrate how the public expression of ordinary people is distorted by the constrained forms of agency media participation affords them.

Navigating the difficulties of representing contentious subjects and controversial views is also a challenge for producers, and my research discovered differing approaches. Claire Lewis described how she would go about making a documentary with people whose views she disagreed with:

> What you learn is to be completely objective in terms of your questioning. You have to be as honest as you can. If I was making a film about Tommy Robinson and the EDL [English Defence League], I would go to him and say 'I'd like to make a warts and all film about you, what you believe and why you believe it, and I'll be asking you some very difficult questions. Are you up for it?'...If it's a contentious subject, you have to go in there completely neutral…What *I* think is immaterial…You don't ever let them know what you believe.

These norms might serve journalists well, but are inevitably harder to sustain over a prolonged documentary encounter, with its characteristically more intense and complex emotional engagement between producers and subjects (see Chapter Seven). Alternately, Daisy Asquith spoke about the importance of confronting contributors on camera to give them the opportunity to explain themselves:

> As a filmmaker, I think if someone's not aware of how people might view them, you have to tell them. It's part of your job…They should be aware of how you feel about their behaviour, and what you think the world will think.

Although these approaches may appear diametrically opposite, they both have a principle of fairness at their centre, which unfortunately was not experienced by other contributors in my sample, who felt their appearances in a hate-watch were secured by means of duplicity and misrepresentation. When their home-schooling documentary turned out to be 'mostly

constructed', Jenna Presley felt personally let down by the production team, who she had come to regard as friends:

> They didn't do what they said they were going to do…It was nothing like what they said it was going to be…I wanted to show the positives, but they made it look negative…It really felt like they had an agenda.

Recent research conducted by the Center for Countering Digital Hate found that 75% of the contentious discussion threads they analysed were about women, and of these, 10% accused them of being bad parents (Kale, 2021). In other words, the topic chosen by the makers of *Feral Families (2017)* aligned neatly with the repetitious themes of online hate. For Gemma Rawnsley, the 'most negative experience' happened during the process of media recycling, when her story was picked up and amplified by the secondary press. She told me:

> The newspaper reporter…came in she sat there like a vulture with these beady eyes – scanning, scanning, scanning. She did an interview with me and went away and wrote *the most* [sighs]…I sent her a text message saying I think you would've been better off in fiction-writing to be honest.

The resulting *Sunday Mirror* article claimed Rawnsley let her children get tattoos, play with axes and swear (Paget, 2017). A version of this story, including the out-and-out lie about the tattoos, was reprinted in other tabloids, including *The Sun, The Daily Mail* and *The Express.* Rawnsley said:

> It really *really* upset me, that people thought that. I couldn't even look at a newspaper. I got rid of all the newspapers that we'd read.

Once their stories were out in the public domain, contributors found they could be the subject of tabloid news features without their consent or involvement, and that any boundaries or sensitivities which might have been negotiated with the filmmakers were no longer heeded. Liane Piper mentioned an upsetting article where the headline claimed she thought she was 'too ugly to have sex' (Griffiths, 2018). 'My parents read that,' she said. 'I was so upset. Everybody saw it.'

Sue Bourne told me one of her contributors once woke up to find 100 journalists camped out on their front lawn. Instead of helping them, the broadcaster's press office instructed her not to have any further contact with the family, as she could be sued if she gave them bad advice:

> It was shocking, so shocking…they didn't care that the family had been thrown to the lions.

There is a direct relationship between tabloid press coverage and online hate. Presley told me:

> Their online articles had comments which were just horrendous…it all seemed like a circus. I didn't even feel connected to it. People were slagging us off based on a show which has portrayed us completely different to how we actually are. It's not like they're slagging me off for actually being me – it was an altered version of me, which I didn't like either! [laughs]

During the broadcast of *Educating Yorkshire (2013)*, Jonny Mitchell told me cruel memes were produced of overweight pupils. One fourteen-year-old schoolgirl was called a 'thundercunt' on Twitter. Contributors expect their share of negative comments online, but are nonetheless shocked at both the toxicity of social media reactions, and their distressing impact. Mitchell told me, 'It does have an effect on your mental health. Certainly in the short term.'

Production companies routinely instruct their contributors not to look at social media, but understandably, most people do. Emily Ingold told me:

> The night it went out – I went up to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I was like – I've got to look, I've got to. I promised myself I wouldn't, but I was like no, I've got to look. So I did.

Liane Piper, who as a body-dysmorphia sufferer might be considered to be at particular risk, was simply instructed to 'turn off' all of her social media, and 'not look at any comments.' She told me:

> I was really anxious when it went out. Obviously, people were going to watch it, and I was just scared of what would happen. I couldn't help myself. I did read the comments.

Ignoring social media is not a realistic strategy. It offers nothing more than a way to avoid engaging with the problem, which arguably benefits broadcasters more than contributors. Documentary-makers have no control over how a documentary will travel through the larger media ecology, but that doesn't imply they have no responsibility. Jerry Rothwell told me:

> I think in the end, you're responsible for everything that's a consequence of the film. So yeah, you are responsible.

As much as hate-watching is a strategy which can be gamed by both broadcasters and contributors alike, it has very real social and human costs. After taking part in *Feral Families*, Gemma Rawnsley was prescribed diazepam for anxiety, and was diagnosed with a chronic stress-related illness which forced her to her leave her job. She told me:

> If there's one thing on this earth that I strive to be, above all other, it's a good mum. To know that I've worked *really* hard at being a good mum…putting deep thought into every decision that I make with regard to the kids…to have that tarnished and perverted for the sake of entertainment was *really* upsetting.

10.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have detailed a variety of subjective responses which documentary contributors have to encountering the mediated self, the edited text, and the audience. My research emphasises the complicated agency of contributors, who are active and complicit in their representations – sometimes, even the negative ones – but paradoxically, lack control over the way their texts will be edited, marketed, recycled, and consumed by the public. There is a lack of oversight from broadcasters and production companies, who frequently fail to take responsibility for what happens to the people in their productions beyond transmission. Before moving onto my overall conclusions, I want to devote a little space to allow my interviewees to offer some conclusions of their own, and reflect upon what the experience of contributing in a documentary meant to them.

Irrespective of how positively or negatively they felt about participating, contributors often feel a profound sense of loss when the documentary comes to an end. This loss is partly related to the temporary nature of the place they occupy in the public eye. Jo Lockwood told me:

> At one stage I was in the papers, in the *Sunday Times*, the *Daily Mail*. I was in *RT* in Russia, *Christian Today* in America…Then suddenly, a day later, it's like boom. Tumbleweed. That's it. That's my stardom.

The sense of loss also relates to the ending of their personal relationships with the production team. Receiving this kind of intense, focussed attention can disturb a person's equilibrium, but losing it again can be even more disorienting. Agnieska Piotrowska writes:

> Sometimes people are not ever happy again with their ordinary lives: they want the excitement, the *jouissance,* of somebody making the film about them to continue (2013b, p.76).

Jo Lockwood described her ambiguous feelings once the documentary was concluded, her intense relief at the ending of the sometimes-gruelling filming process tempered with a kind of grief:

> After the filming was finished, we missed someone asking us how we feel all the time! We missed having these other people interested in our lives and talking to us all the time.

The withdrawal is often more of a fact than a process, simply happening, without proper acknowledgment or management by the production. For some contributors, the difficult psychological readjustment which takes place at the end of filming is somewhat eased by the realisation of their hopes and expectations. Although contributors often imagine their documentaries as a means of communicating with a mass audience of millions, my research found the impact tends to be greater closer to home. Omari Eccleston-Brown told me how his relationship with his mother changed dramatically as a result of his media appearances, and the knowledge these programmes have given her about body dysmorphia:

> My mum and I had a lot of fraught years in our relationship, with me not feeling understood. It's really put a strain on our relationship…When she [saw the documentary], it clicked for her suddenly. She got that it was a real thing. Hearing my words [on TV]…suddenly made the difference.

Heather Ward grew up with a father who was a hoarder, but it was only when her friends and neighbours saw the inside of his house on TV that they understood the extent of the problem, and were able to properly empathise with how his mental illness had affected her childhood. Similarly, after watching *Great Ormond Street (2010-15)*, Luisa Hammett's friends and family understood the trauma she and her husband had been through when their toddler needed brain surgery. She told me:

> Other people just didn't realise how serious it was until that programme came out, which was quite a long time after - after we'd been through everything…Everybody was crying [laughs]. They were saying, 'Oh my God!' So many tears.

In some cases, the material benefits contributors hoped for at the outset of the production did transpire. Emily Ingold received weight-loss surgery and lost ten stone. She explained:

> This experience has had such a positive impact upon my life. Yes, there's been lows as well, but…I feel like they've saved me, as cheesy as that may sound, that's honestly how I feel.

However, the televised transformations depicted on screen were often very different to the actual changes which took place in people's lives. Nikita Roberts was filmed clearing out the belongings she'd hoarded for Channel 5's *My Extreme OCD Life (2017).* She told me:

> I just made out, yep, I'm going to get rid of this, I'll keep that – but the bag was still there a year later…Anyone watching probably thought she's done really well getting rid of all that, but it was still there.

Heather Ward had a similar experience when her father's hoard was dismantled for *Can't Stop Won't Stop: Hoarding (2014)*. I asked her if anything had changed as a result of their TV appearance. She told me:

> He just carries on, straight after they'd been, and he's carried on since…It's back to how it was now.

But beyond the televised makeovers and material perks, documentary participation offered many of my interviewees more meaningful opportunities: to be seen, to be heard, and to be validated. Jo Lockwood told me:

> The documentary has given me permission to have an opinion, and be me. To talk about myself. I've shared me with five million plus people, and I'm proud of that. It's a public record. Anyone who's been in the public eye…that's part of who you are now.

Emily Speirs also told me that documentary participation had played a significant role in her ability to develop an attitude of self-acceptance towards having a disability:

> When you're young and you're disabled, you think 'God, I'm the only one'…You think there's nobody like me. You never meet people with similar conditions…But through *Born to be Different*, I've met a lot of people…It's definitely been really positive.

The people I interviewed who saw documentary participation as a form of activism were not disappointed by the lack of overnight results following the broadcast of their documentaries. Many of them exhibited a sophisticated and grounded understanding about the incremental nature of social change, and the small but important role their contributions could potentially play. Having spoken out about stillbirth, Vicki Beckett told me:

> There was never going to be change the following week…I knew that wasn't going to happen. It's just another thing in raising awareness and applying pressure...[and] it takes hundreds and hundreds of events, people working at things, doing different campaigns. It was the first of its kind as a documentary, and it didn't do any harm to the plight.

However, the transformative potential of documentary participation can light a fuse in people's lives. Amongst my sample are a notable number of divorces, family feuds and fall-outs; relationships which have broken down in the aftermath, and lives which have spun in completely new directions. Daisy Asquith was disowned by members of her family after making *After the Dance (2015),* about her mother's adoption in Ireland. She said*:*

> Telling my story has had a huge consequence for me. There are people who probably won't speak to me again in my family…I thought they might be cross. I had no idea of the extent of their rage. So no, that's a worse consequence than anyone I've made a film about has had. In a way, at least it's me that the worse thing has happened to. If that was someone I was making a film about I'd feel so terrible.

For many contributors, the enormity of the experience and all of its potential outcomes could only be fully comprehended long after the event. Jonny Mitchell told me, 'It was difficult. It was a journey. It was a proper adventure.' Jenny Smith agreed:

> I would never *ever* do it again. It was unique and it was special, and it was great fun. It was exhausting. It was stressful. It could've gone horribly, horribly, horribly wrong.

The diverse, contradictory and unpredictable stories my interviewees shared about participating in the media suggest that all kinds of experiences are possible, but perhaps the one point of consensus they endorse is the immense power of the medium to affect change. Omari Ecclestone-Brown perhaps summarised this best:

> I think it's powerful, I think TV holds a lot of power for people. As a cultural authority – people believe what they see on the TV, right?

Having now presented the findings of my research, in the next chapter I will bring together and summarise the thesis as a whole, and reflect upon what it reveals to us about the politics of the contemporary media.

11. Conclusions

This thesis has offered an account of the experiences of documentary contributors, and how they are informed by changing political-economic context of contemporary media industries. By exploring their perspective upon documentary production, my goal has been to extend the scope of scholarship on creative labour to include people on both sides of the camera. Having separated, coded and analysed their experiences thematically, my aim in this final chapter is to bring these ideas back together, considering the overall picture they create about what it means to participate in the media, and how they answer my primary research question, which is:

> *What can the experiences of documentary contributors tell us about the politics of media production?*

Having summarised my key findings in section 11.1, in section 11.2 I will conclude with some thoughts about positive practice, and future directions for policy and research.

11.1 Key research findings

i) The experiences of media contributors, producers, and working conditions are all inextricably linked, and have been fundamentally reshaped by neo-liberal working practices which have taken root within the industry since the launch of the independent sector in the 1980s. The transition towards a managerial working culture has created an organisational structure which divorces power from responsibility, resulting in a lack of accountability for decisions which have a material impact upon the wellbeing of participants. In Chapters Four and Nine, I demonstrated how the long-hours working culture of TV places strain upon contributors, and incentivises producers to construct actuality rather than shoot material observationally. In Chapter Five, I described how aspects of the reorganisation of labour in factual TV – from the transition to freelancing, to the fragmentation of creative roles, to the loss of producer autonomy – have led to a loss of consistency, and in some cases, a rupture in the crucial relationship of trust between documentary-makers and their subjects which underpins documentary production.

Media research to date has tended to focus upon the experiences of workers in the cultural industries, but the effects of dysfunctional working environments ripple out far beyond the paid workforce, to everyone who participates. Ordinary people and their wellbeing are major casualties of deregulation, yet their plight has largely escaped critical attention – in part, because they themselves are not aware that things were once done differently, and that many of the practices which impact negatively upon them have been ushered in alongside a process of political-economic reorganisation. Instead, their distress is expressed through a tragic picture of psychological harm and multiple suicides.

What this tells us about the politics of production is that the organisational efficiencies that have been gained from the neo-liberalisation of the media have come at a human cost. There is a necessity for new support structures to be put in place to replace those that have been unintentionally dismantled, but these developments have lagged behind, resulting in the creation of a working environment which is fraught with risks for all of those who operate within it.

ii) Media contributors have been dismissed as victims, dupes, and narcissists, but these lazy characterisations vastly underestimate the complexities of their motivations and the diversity of their experiences of participation. Contributors have an active involvement in the creation of texts, and - as discussed in Chapter Four - the bid to occupy a media platform can be understood as an inherently political act. Whether documentary contributors seek out opportunities to take part, or do so reluctantly, a common thread which unites them is that they are people who have *something to say*, and who want *to be heard*.

Similarly, my research complicates notions of exploitation – a concept which I address in Chapter Two - concluding that the view of them as exploited victims of the media fails to engage with their subjectivities, their pleasures, and their self-determination. However, the nature of their mediated agency is far from straightforward, and the messages they wish to convey are frequently distorted in ways which can frustrate them, or even compromise their welfare. The ability of ordinary people to use the media to play a role in public life is limited by a politics of participation, which positions them as deserving victims, and curtails public sympathy for them if the outcomes are not as they expected.

iii) The default outcome of many routinised production processes – such as the casting methods examined in Chapter Five, or the editing process discussed in Chapter Ten - is to perpetuate stereotypes, and amplify existing patterns of visibility and marginalisation. Media participation has the potential to forge bonds between people, connect fragmented societies, and share information and experiences – yet the people who have the most to gain from taking to a media platform are often the same people who find their communicative bids impeded the most by the production process. Despite their intentions, the very misrepresentations and misinformation they seek to correct are often repeated and reinforced.

This suggests that the politics of media production has an inherent conservatism in its orientation, reflective of the wider norms of the societies the media belongs to. An unintentional bias is imbricated within conventions, routines and procedures which has the effect of reinforcing dominant values and obscuring the marginalised. These tendencies must be acknowledged, understood, and actively resisted by documentary-makers to avoid unintentionally reproducing systematic bias and inequalities in their films.

iv) The relationship between the state and the media is usually conceived in terms of parliamentary politics and the news, but the public's perception of state institutions is very much informed by their portrayal within documentary productions. There is an in-built synchronicity between factual formats, which require a churn of predictable drama, and public institutions such as hospitals, schools, and the emergency services. However, being beholden to these institutions for access means that editorial independence is compromised, leading to a tendency for such programming to deliver 'rosy pictures from the frontline' (Littleboy, 2013, p.142).

In Chapter Nine, I demonstrate how the inner workings of public institutions are altered before producers even set a foot through the door, and in Chapter Six, how the consent process is tested when filming *in extremis.* There is a lack of transparency and public awareness about what goes into making these types of documentaries, their impact upon time and resources, and what rationale underpins decisions to permit or refuse access. Despite the legitimate public

interest in televising the functioning of institutions, the production of such documentaries also represents an unscrutinised conversion of public resources into the profits of private media organisations, and a mutual co-dependency which can undermine the integrity of both parties.

v) The making of documentaries is marked by irreconcilable tensions between the commercial and the ethical. To a significant degree, the politics of media production revolve around the bottom line. In Chapters Four and Five, I explore how commercial concerns play an important role in dictating the status of contributors within a production, and the value they are accorded. Rather than a moral or ethical sense of participants' worth, as human subjects, it is often economic or organisational imperatives which establish the dynamic between them. My research found an attitude of flexibility towards ethical norms, which can be applied in a self-serving and inconsistent manner, ceding priority to commercial goals. This is in evidence in the practices of sensationalised marketing and hate-watching described in Chapter Ten, where contributors are presented to the audience as targets for a confected outrage, which will power the circulation of the text through an interconnected digital culture. Although in some cases, contributors can be complicit in their controversial representations, in other cases, they are (as Sue Bourne puts it) 'thrown to the lions', with little apparent care about the consequences.

Broadcasters and production companies are reluctant to pay contributors, but their insistence that ordinary people's involvement should be uninfluenced by commercial interests seems hypocritical, when their own motives so clearly are. Matters of money also withheld from documentary-makers, who rarely know the details of, or share in the profits of their productions. Who makes money, and who has knowledge of financial affairs, tells us something about where power lies in the media. The obscuration of financial matters from the content creators perpetuates the idea that creative impulses are antithetical to money, whilst the media corporations quietly profit from their endeavours.

However, untrammelled commercial values are not slavishly adhered to, and my data found many examples of ethical behaviour, resistance, and genuinely meaningful relationships forged between documentary-makers and their subjects.

These contradictions can make media careers unsustainable, resulting in disillusionment and burn out in the longer term.

vi) Many of the most challenging aspects of media work are invisible and under-recognised by the industry, with worrying consequences for regulation, training and duty of care. This is particularly true of the relationship work explored in Chapter Seven, which documentary-makers identified as perhaps the single most important skill of their profession, yet which takes place on the peripheries of their jobs, unpaid and unrecognised by their employers. My research uncovered examples of documentary-makers working in truly harrowing situations, filming with people who are terminally ill, suffering from stark levels of social injustice, living with grief, or coping with life-limiting mental disorders. The potential for vicarious trauma is high. These factors, in combination with a dysfunctional working environment, can lead to stress-related health problems, curtailed careers, and even a worrying pattern of suicides, which parallels that of on-screen participants.

There is a distinctive form of emotional labour at play in documentary production, which requires documentary-makers to behave empathetically, building trust, and maintaining goodwill - but also, in some cases, to detach and make difficult decisions which might be in the best interests of the documentary, but not their contributors. Performing this type of emotional labour is a significant component to the practice of creative labour, with an impact which is comparable to the occupational risks that have been studied more extensively by scholars to date.

Whilst support for participants from external psychologists has been formalised and funded by the UK television industry after a highly-publicised policy review (Ofcom, 2020), the emotional labour of documentary-makers continues to go largely unacknowledged and unrewarded. Because the wellbeing of both parties is intimately linked, improvements cannot be made for one whilst the other is neglected. In the past, documentary-makers may have been able to rely upon the mentorship and support of senior colleagues, but now often find themselves unable to voice their concerns, for fear of damaging their professional reputations, and hampering their chances of securing future employment (Rees, 2019).

vii) Changes to the Broadcasting Code have enabled production companies to evidence that a process of due care has been followed, but have failed to encourage the provision of the type of meaningful duty of care that contributors need. In order to improve the proposition for contributors, improvements need to be made to working practices and conditions, making it a safer workplace for all who participate.

The amendments stipulate the need for special consideration for vulnerable contributors, but at the same time, their wellbeing is being jeopardised by a lack of training or professional support structures for the production teams who work with them. For many documentary-makers, 'the terrain of suffering may be their primary area of work', and yet the industry fails to equip them to perform this labour safely and responsibly (Rees, 2019, p.2). The consequences are evident in Chapter Eight, where I detail examples of people with mental health disorders being confronted with their worst fears in order to provoke on-camera reactions.

Additionally, there is a necessity for the media industries to give further consideration to who can rightfully claim the status of being a contributor, and how far their circle of care should extend. In Chapters Eight and Ten, I described how minor contributors are often excluded from existing support structures, along with people whose role in the production becomes more or less significant during the shooting or editing phases. There is no straightforward correlation between the amount of filming time contributors give, the amount of screen time they occupy, and the level of care they receive. A clearer rationale needs to be developed about where the limits of broadcasters' and producers' responsibilities lie.

These findings suggest that a politics of exclusion operates towards the resources of time and specialist care, which needs to be questioned and challenged. The new regulations have mandated that distribution of these resources is weighted towards 'vulnerable' contributors, but have done nothing to change other practices which have a detrimental effect on their abilities to participate, and put their welfare at risk.

viii) Documentaries are fundamentally shaped by narrative norms, and the necessity to effect an appearance of cohesion in order to be accepted as 'real'. The distinctive temporality of documentaries is contingent upon the development of patterns of

absence and constructed presence, which creates an irreconcilable dysfluency in their language of visual representation. The necessity for all stories to have a beginning, middle, and – in particular – an ending, establishes a reliance upon artifice, which has been characteristic of documentaries since their inception over a century ago.

The perspective of contributors is particularly illuminating upon issues of reality and representation, because it is their reality which is being represented. In Chapter Nine, my research demonstrates how the narrative requirements for causality and conclusions had the impact of detaching protagonists from their own life stories. In her open letter of complaint to the BBC, Ashleigh Williams writes: 'Being edited to be the person they wanted me to be left me feeling hollow' (2019). As Jean-Louis Comolli argues, in this arrangement both participant and spectator pay 'a certain price of reality' (1999, p.39).

The narratives which documentaries create feed into our collective identities, creating a method of interpreting the past which is ultimately flawed – compromised by cultural preferences, which include wilful selective ignorance, consolation, and denial. Although the media are a resource for remembering, their values are imbricated with 'a politics of forgetting', which renders their objectivity flawed (Langer, 1996, p.14).

ix) A persistent idea suggests that technological advances offer the possibility to bridge what John Durham Peters calls 'the difficult juncture between experience and discourse' (2001, p.710). In my discussion of fixed rig documentaries in Chapter Nine, I demonstrate why technology will never be able to 'solve' the problems of representation. The gap between experience and signification should not be considered as occasional instances of individual, or even systemic failure, but as an insoluble distance. These discussions are ever-relevant, as the next wave of technology – such as virtual reality and AI - becomes accessible to the public, accompanied by predictably overblown prophesising about the futures it promises.

Rather than critiquing the existence of a representation gap, my research suggests that scholarly efforts should be aimed at educating audiences, exposing and interrogating the mechanics of representation, and developing more sophisticated ways of understanding the material we are presented by the media.

x) And finally, perhaps the idea which comes across most strongly at the end of this research project is the sheer impact of documentary participation: the life-changing potential it has to transform ordinary people's lives.

Chapter Seven describes the intensity of the relationships which enable documentaries to be made, outlasting many marriages, and developing a pseudo-therapeutic dynamic as the basis for self-exploration and discovery. Chapter Ten shows how participation impacts upon the people closest to the contributors, as well as an anonymous mass audience, transforming familial relationships. In an interconnected media landscape, documentaries can have unexpected, uncontrollable afterlives as they travel through social and secondary media. Once contributor's stories are in the public domain, they create an indelible digital footprint, framing phases in their lives, and giving an effect of permanence to temporary happenings.

In Chapter Ten, I describe the psychological impact that the creation of a televisual 'doppelganger' can have, including a loss of control, and the potential to disrupt performances of self, through the creation of a replica, which in some cases, can appear to be more authoritative than the original (Piotrowska, 2013a). Documentary participation offers ordinary people the ability to contribute to the public conversation and effect social change, albeit incrementally. Recognition of this fact helps us to grasp the high stakes involved in this huge intervention in ordinary people's lives. Although the majority of my interviewees reported their experiences were positive overall, it is indisputably true that others are suffering. Lives have been upended, and even lost, and changes need to be made.

11.2 Future directions

I want to conclude by offering recommendations for how the experience of media participation could be improved for the benefit of contributors.

Firstly, it is important that power should be shared more equitably with participants. My research has suggested many pragmatic ways in which this could be achieved. Utilising an ongoing consent process would allow contributors to re-evaluate the terms of their participation as their stories develop. Employing paid consultants, or members of the production team with similar experiences to those being filmed, would minimise the risk of

Othering contributors, or instigating filming situations which could unintentionally harm them. Routinely offering previews of the text prior to transmission would make documentary-makers more accountable for their choices. Having to sit down next to their contributors to watch the documentary, and explain their choices face-to-face is a useful discipline in arriving at judgements of fairness. Crucially, there is no necessary compromise between creative freedom and ethical behaviour, as in most cases, documentary-makers understand these practices have the capacity to improve their work, rather than detract from it. Contributors are empowered to share more of themselves when they retain a degree of control over their representations. Therefore, establishing such a framework for participation enables them to engage more openly and honestly.

One example of good practice I came across, which is an established feature of independent documentary production, and commonplace in America, but has not yet been adopted throughout the UK television industry, is the use of impact producers, whose job it is to work with the communities they are representing to channel the documentary's impact into positive outcomes. Jerry Rothwell showed me the impact planning documents for his film, *Town of Runners (2012),* about three young athletes in the Ethiopian rural town of Bekoji, which has produced an astonishing number of Olympic and World Champion runners. Alongside the making of the film, the producers developed an outreach programme to encourage viewers to support the town and develop sustainable opportunities for its young people, refurbishing a library, and creating a foundation to fund the training of impoverished local girls, who were previously forced to leave their homes to pursue their careers. After the success of Rothwell's previous film *Heavy Load (2008)* - about a punk band comprising disabled musicians – the filmmakers and participants set up a charity called *Stay Up Late,* which aims to help people in residential care access a social life by pairing them with 'buddies' to go to gigs, and campaigning to have their bedtimes based on individual needs rather than the convenience of staff rotas. By acknowledging the impact of their films, and developing it strategically, documentary-makers can turn the end of their productions into the beginning of new possibilities. Impact planning is a means of harnessing the public reaction as a tool for social, political or environmental change.

Recent regulatory changes have taken a vital first step in recognising the need to strengthen regulatory support for contributors, but this support must be extended to production teams too. Without appropriate training and the development of a professional framework which enables them to work effectively with contributors, the wellbeing of both parties is placed at risk. My research findings cast doubt over the role of TV psychologists,

and whether the industry's investment in this type of care is meeting contributor's needs. Now these measures have been enshrined in policy, it is imperative they are evaluated, developed, and revised as necessary, in order to ensure they are fulfilling their purpose.

It is within the power of every production to make a commitment to developing and promoting a healthier workplace. The Film & TV Charity recently launched *The Whole Picture Toolkit*, as a blueprint for how the industry can improve mental health and wellbeing (2022). Many of the measures they claim are most effective are low-cost or even no-cost, such as issuing a statement of intent at the beginning of a production, communicating to workers that their wellbeing is a priority; or instigating a curfew for work-related calls and emails after an agreed time of day. Acknowledging the risks of harm, and their responsibility to safeguard everyone who plays a role in the making of documentaries, are necessary precursors to actioning positive change.

And finally, although my focus has been upon documentaries, it is important to recognise that many of the issues I have addressed are of equal relevance across other media genres. Further research is required to examine how the lived experiences of contributors are articulated through different contexts, including entertainment, reality, and drama. These experiences matter – not only because the individual welfare of participants is at stake, but also because *they represent us*, the ordinary public, and how we come to understand both ourselves and one another.

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