



# MONASH University

## **Examining Reality TV as Neoliberal Apparatuses that Govern Adolescents in Young Adult Fiction**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
Monash University in 2022  
School of Arts and Social Sciences

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## Abstract

Representations of Reality TV are increasingly appearing in Young Adult (YA) fiction. This thesis considers YA novels published in the twenty-first century that depict adolescents participating on Reality TV. The focus novels in this thesis are: Andrea White's *Surviving Antarctica* (2005), Jeanne Ryan's *Nerve* (2012), A.S. King's *Reality Boy* (2013), Heather Demetrios's *Something Real* (2014), Alexandra Oliva's *The Last One* (2016), and Kerry Drewery's *Cell 7* trilogy (2016-2018). Each novel represents a programme belonging to a Reality TV subgenre. I have identified three primary subgenres that will be the basis for my discussions: reality-crime, game-docs and family-docs. This thesis brings together an interdisciplinary study by applying concepts from Media Studies to analyse representations of Reality TV in YA novels. I approach the Reality TV programmes in the novels as neoliberal apparatuses that discursively and ideologically govern adolescent participants into neoliberal subjects. I argue that Reality TV's televisual conventions, techniques and practices are embedded with, endorse and enforce neoliberal ideologies and discourses that participants are compelled to embrace.

I investigate how the particular Reality TV subgenre represented in the novels utilises a unique configuration of televisual conventions to construct certain neoliberal identities for adolescents that are specific to that subgenre. For instance, the *Cell 7* trilogy represents how reality-crime uses punitive neoliberal discourses to criminalise incarcerated adolescents. Meanwhile, *Surviving Antarctica*, *Nerve* and *The Last One* demonstrate how game-docs use the neoliberal logics of play to bind adolescents' survival to competitive performances and identities. In *Reality Boy* and *Something Real*, family-documentary crews and experts enter private homes to pathologize adolescents before 'rehabilitating' them with disciplined or commercialised identities. Throughout my analysis, I also evaluate how the novels utilise narrative strategies like extraliterary genres and multi-focalisation techniques to textually

convey how adolescents are interpellated with and experience neoliberal ideologies and discourses from Reality TV. Furthermore, I discuss how the focus novels open opportunities for adolescents to resist Reality TV's power to govern them, and I conclude with an evaluation of how successful these adolescent protagonists are at reclaiming their identities from Reality TV.

## Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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## Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to many people who have helped me and enriched my PhD journey.

First, my thanks to my supervisor Dr Andrew Ng for his feedback which was instrumental to sharpening my abilities as a scholar and writer. He constantly pushed me to elevate the quality of my work in every detail. I also thank Dr Jonathan Driskell, my secondary supervisor, for his thoughtful advice and reassuring guidance.

I wish to thank Mrs Esuary Sivalingam for her dedication to the PhD candidates of the School of Arts. Her cheerful readiness to support us made every aspect of my candidature smooth sailing – from the day I decided to enrol, to each milestone, and finally to submission.

My heartfelt thanks to my friends from the SASS Literature group: Eugene Chua, Stephanie Tan, Jacqui Kong and Naish Gawen. Thank you for generously sharing your unwavering support and care, for being sources of wisdom as I navigated through the brambles of writing, and for being enthusiastic and excellent sounding-boards to test ideas.

To my good friend Esther Ho, thank you for sharing your time and technical abilities to teach me the ways of Zotero – you made refencing and formatting less daunting and saved me from manual citations.

The excellent English teachers throughout my life nurtured my love for language and literature. I wish to thank three in particular. To Ms. Cecilia, who made English class a delight and sparked my love for the subject. To Mrs Ruma Lopes, from whom I learned to love interpreting novels and films. To Dr Victoria Flanagan, whose classes at Macquarie University were a joy of discovery, and who is a role model in her kindness and dedication to her students.

I am immensely thankful to Dr Helen Day, my milestone panellist – her thoughtful feedback, support and enthusiasm for my work gave me confidence in the academic value of my thesis.

My deepest thanks are for the two most important people: Mum and Dad, thank you for taking care of me throughout this journey; thank you for always supporting my love for literature and for giving me all the opportunities to pursue it this far; thank you for the books, the experiences and wonderful life you give me. I dedicate this PhD to you and hope to make you proud.

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## Introduction chapter

“...let the Seventy-fourth Hunger Games begin!”

–Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* (2008)

“I’m sorry to tell you that you have been eliminated.”

–Phil Keoghan, host of *The Amazing Race*

The recognisability of these famous catchphrases attests to the connections between two genres that dominate the twenty-first century’s popular culture landscape: Young Adult (YA) fiction and Reality TV. Both genres parallel each other strikingly in their colossal commercial success and their popularity with young people. YA fiction and Reality TV are discussed heatedly in public discourse where they are often framed as lightweight mass entertainment. Meanwhile, the intellectual depth and value of both genres is well-recognised in academia. While adolescents have naturally always been the subject matter and target demographic of YA fiction, adolescents are increasingly participating on Reality TV programmes like *MasterChef Jr* (2013-present). Furthermore, especially since the 2000s, YA fiction has been exhibiting demonstrable enthusiasm for representing Reality TV. Over the last two decades, a growing number of YA novels have imagined cool, captivating, and cruel fictional Reality TV programmes. My thesis examines a selection of such YA novels published in the twenty-first century that depict various subgenres of Reality TV which young adults encounter, enter and experience. In each of these novels, Reality TV and the wider media are represented as overwhelming and coercive institutional apparatuses that forcibly govern adolescents and construct uncomfortable identities for them.

In this thesis, I examine how the selected YA novels represent the relationship between adolescents and Reality TV. In particular, I approach the Reality TV programmes in these novels as neoliberal apparatuses that extend neoliberal governmentality. These programmes

demonstrate power to ideologically and discursively construct and shape neoliberal identities for adolescents who participate on Reality TV. Furthermore, they use televisual conventions and techniques to compel adolescents to govern themselves with visible displays of neoliberal attitudes and conduct. I examine how neoliberal rationalities are enforced through the televisual conventions of three Reality TV subgenres that are represented across the focus novels: reality-crime, the game-doc (game documentary) and the family-doc (family documentary). Throughout this thesis, I also analyse how the focus novels employ narrative strategies like extraliterary genres and focalisation techniques to convey how Reality TV communicates neoliberal discourses and ideologies to adolescents, and how adolescents experience, accept or reject being interpellated as neoliberal subjects. In this Introduction chapter, I offer an overview of literary representations of Reality TV. Next, I identify gaps in scholarship and list my thesis objectives. Then I provide some background on YA fiction, Reality TV and neoliberalism. Following that, I establish my theoretical framework and explain key terms. Lastly, the outline of chapters section maps out the overall structure of this thesis.

### [Representations of Reality TV in fiction: A brief overview.](#)

When I began my PhD, I embarked on a wide search for representations of Reality TV in literature. I found that although Reality TV is a relatively young genre, its emergence, development and popularity were depicted in literature decades earlier. Arguably the earliest literary representation of Reality TV is Robert Sheckley's *The Prize of Peril* (1958). In Sheckley's short-story, participants play in deadly games like murderous speed-racing and bullfighting contests that are broadcasted live to a rapt audience. Around that time, gameshows like *Queen for a Day* (1956) were a far cry from the brutal competitions that Sheckley imagined. Sheckley's short-story preceded by four decades the development of the game-doc subgenre, and it captured the popularity of high-octane survival game-docs like *Survivor* (2000). Stephen King's *The Running Man* is another example of an early representation of

Reality TV in novels. Written in 1982 under the pseudonym Robert Bachman, *The Running Man* presents a brutal gameshow with distinctly crime-oriented and crime-anxious undertones. In the novel, poverty-stricken contestants become criminalised fugitives and are hunted for the nation's viewing pleasure. Shortly after the novel's publication, reality-crime emerged around the mid-1980s and made Reality TV mainstream programming. Popular programmes like *Crimewatch* (1984) captivated the public's attention with spectacles of real criminals and arrests.

While Sheckley and King were admirably prescient in anticipating Reality TV's rise and development, the genre has evolved significantly as it entered the new millennium. Although Reality TV encompasses a constellation of subgenres like reality-crime, the game-doc and the family-doc, Reality TV can be broadly understood as unscripted programmes that use the 'real' performances of ordinary people or non-professional actors. Today, Reality TV saturates the cultural landscape and social consciousness at impressive levels. As Reality TV became a culturally ubiquitous and dominant genre, representations of Reality TV began appearing with greater regularity in literature. Although the corpus of novels depicting Reality TV is still small, the trend of fictionalising Reality TV is steadily growing. Perhaps the most famous example is Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010), with its depictions of a brutal annual game-doc that sacrifices adolescents for public entertainment. The *Hunger Games* trilogy and film franchise achieved pop-culture stardom and has flamed palpable enthusiasm amongst the public for more depictions of Reality TV in fiction. A rising number of writers, particularly those working in YA fiction, have attempted to capitalise on this demand. Steadily throughout the twenty-first century, YA fiction has contributed a substantial number of Reality TV-themed novels.

For this reason, I made the conscious decision to focus my search parameters to YA novel published in the twenty-first century as I formalised my list of selected novels that I would be

analysing in this thesis. After much deliberation, I excluded the *Hunger Games* trilogy from my list. Precisely because of its wide popularity, Collins's trilogy has already received substantial academic attention. There are numerous YA novels that are less well-known, have yet to be fully explored, and which can offer fresh perspectives on adolescent experiences with contemporary Reality TV. Wanting to bring academic attention to such novels, I settled on the following focus novels: Andrea White's *Surviving Antarctica* (2005), Jeanne Ryan's *Nerve* (2012), A.S. King's *Reality Boy* (2013), Heather Demetrios's *Something Real* (2014), Alexandra Oliva's *The Last One* (2016), and first two novels from Kerry Drewery's *Cell 7* trilogy: *Cell 7* (2016) and *Day 7* (2017). Each novel features a Reality TV programme belonging to one of the following subgenres that will be central to my analysis: reality-crime, game-docs, or family-docs. The authors of these novels demonstrate degree of awareness, uneasiness and cynicism about Reality TV and the level of construction, media manipulation and power behind this seemingly 'unscripted' genre.

Since the focus YA novels were published after 2000, they occupy important cultural-temporal positions to engage in topical commentary on modern Reality TV's power and ideological influences on adolescents in contemporary society. One of the most significant themes that is apparent across these novels is the presence and effects of neoliberalism as a social ideology. I must note that neoliberalism is never explicitly mentioned in the novels. However, all the novels depict Reality TV programmes that are abundantly animated by neoliberal rationalities like competitiveness, self-responsibility and self-enterprise. The televisual techniques and conventions of these Reality TV programmes are distinctly encoded with neoliberal values and discourses. The focus novels all represent Reality TV programmes that function unmistakably as neoliberal apparatuses which endorse a variety of neoliberal expectations according to the Reality TV subgenre in question. As neoliberal apparatuses, these programmes govern adolescents to embrace and display neoliberal identities on-camera.

Another important trait that the focus novels share is their ample utilisation of narrative strategies such as extraliterary genres and focalisation techniques. These narrative strategies prove especially potent devices for textually and thematically conveying how neoliberalism has been incorporated into Reality TV and how Reality TV discursively constructs neoliberal identities for adolescents to embrace.

#### Gap in scholarship and identifying thesis objectives.

Upon commencing research for this thesis, I noticed a paucity of scholarship analysing representations of Reality TV in novels. Even when Literary Studies scholars have analysed Reality TV-themed novels, engagements with Reality TV as a *televisual* genre remain underexamined. In *Growing Up, In Theory*, Karen Coats observes that YA fiction publishers have capitalised on adolescents' fascination with Reality TV, as evidenced by the rise in YA novels tackling the impact of television on adolescents (320). However, while Coats mentions Reality TV, she does not specifically address YA novels with Reality TV as a central theme. In *Of Bread, Blood and The Hunger Game* (2012), Pharr and Clark present a collection of essays that provide invaluable insights into the trilogy from multiple themes, including gender, surveillance and simulacra. However, a detailed examination of the *Hunger Games* itself as a Reality TV programme with neoliberal functions is conspicuously absent in these essays. Similarly, Douglas Texter (2007) and Craig Mann (2017) offer incisive discussions on Stephen King's *The Running Man* (1982) and the novel's socio-political context marked by the Vietnam War and Reaganism. Still, neither raises the possibility that the novel's televised competition can be analysed as a representation of Reality TV.

Furthermore, even though these discussions are conducted by Literary Studies scholars, they do not consider the capacity for novels to use narrative strategies to represent Reality TV in novelistic discourse. This lack of critical attention from Literary Studies is curious in light of

the recent boom of novels with Reality TV themes and the robust interest in Reality TV from other academic disciplines. Reality TV has received considerable attention from scholars in fields as diverse as Law, Education, and Political Science. Naturally, scholarship on Reality TV from Media Studies has been the most prolific. Nevertheless, the wealth of scholarship on Reality TV that has been generated remains largely untapped by scholars in Literary Studies. Without interdisciplinary inroads into Media Studies, Literary Studies scholars who examine Reality TV-themed novels may find themselves compartmentalized and unable to forward more nuanced examinations. Therefore, I propose an interdisciplinary approach that merges the available but often disparate scholarship on YA fiction and Reality TV. My thesis aims to bridge both disciplines to facilitate theoretical exchanges and academic exploration into the exciting frontiers of contemporary YA novels that imagine how adolescents will navigate their identities in a media-centric and neoliberal twenty-first century.

The analysis and arguments I make throughout this thesis are informed by the following three objectives. The first objective is to explore how the focus novels represent the relationship between adolescents and Reality TV. I examine the degree to which the formation of adolescent identity in the novels appear discursively and ideologically shaped and governed by Reality TV as neoliberal apparatuses. The second objective is to understand the particular televisual operations of different Reality TV subgenres in the novels to produce neoliberal identities for adolescents that are specific to those subgenres. I will examine how subgenres like reality-crime, the game-doc and the family-doc utilise televisual conventions and techniques like the host, the expert, and the confession to compel adolescent protagonists to govern themselves as neoliberal subjects. The third objective is to demonstrate the potential for narrative strategies to textually represent Reality TV's neoliberal ideologies and discourses in YA novels. I analyse how the novels utilise narrative strategies like extraliterary genres and focalisation techniques to depict how Reality TV's televisual conventions and techniques interpellate adolescents with

neoliberalism. As YA fiction, Reality TV and neoliberalism are the foundations that my arguments are built upon, in the following sections I provide background on each of them.

### Background on YA fiction.

A logical starting point for anyone trying to understand YA fiction as a genre is to consider the matter of age. Numerous scholars have attempted to settle the genre's definitional parameters by establishing age ranges, both for the primary protagonists and the genre's targeted readership. Falconer believes one reliable constant for YA fiction is that the main protagonist and implied readers are "between 11 and 19 years of age" (90). Varying slightly, Bean and Moni define YA fiction as literature "intended for readers between ages of 12 and 20" (638). Others have classified YA fiction as intended specifically for high school-aged readers (Trites 7; McCallum 20). Age provides an indication to determine and delimit what is appropriate for YA fiction and *who* it is appropriate for. Age categories affect how writers, publishers, parents, and adolescents themselves imagine how youths are represented in YA novels and understand how young readers relate to the genre. Naturally, the focalising characters and narrators in YA novels can be of diverse ages, and YA novels are consumed and enjoyed by anyone regardless of age. Nevertheless, the fact that adolescents are the intended reading demographic significantly influences how YA narratives are expressed thematically, ideologically, and even structurally (Risku 9-10).

For adolescents in Western societies, growing up in the twenty-first century has been marked by a rise in terrorism and radicalism following the 9/11 terror attacks, the economic insecurities of the Great Recession, and widespread surveillance, mediation and technological advancements. These events have been accompanied and accelerated by neoliberalism and the subsequent deregulation and commodification of the spaces that adolescents occupy. The challenges and precarities of the twenty-first century "have left behind a legacy of fear that has



seeped into YA literature...” (Coats 323). YA fiction is very much a product of its times and the genre simultaneously reflects and influences the prevailing sentiments of its cultural contexts (Coats 320). Even when YA narratives are set in futuristic or dystopian worlds, the scenarios and societies that they depict are recognisable reflections of contemporary concerns (Wolk 668; Ames 4). YA fiction tends to demonstrate a postmodern inclination for narratives that depict “the often harsh and unforgiving reality of adolescent lives” (Hayn, Kaplan & Nolen 177). For this reason, YA novels are sometimes considered “problem novels” in the sense that they tackle the social issues and dilemmas adolescents find troubling but must still face (Koss & Teale 567).

Among the themes that are popular in twenty-first century YA fiction are the adolescent’s struggle against overbearing institutional authorities and the dominant social ideologies that encroach on their personal freedoms. Contemporary YA fiction is also highly responsive to the nature of living in mediated and techno-centric environments saturated by surveillance and screen culture. The genre’s fascination with depicting the mass media makes YA narratives like my focus novels particularly well-suited to examining Reality TV’s ideological impact on adolescents. As demonstrated by the focus novels, YA fiction in the twenty-first century is interested in questioning the effects of mediation and the potential abuses of surveillance technologies may have on adolescents. Megan Musgrave says that YA novels can serve as a “platform for a public conversation” regarding technology and its consequences, risks and benefits in adolescents’ daily lives (xi). Koss and Teale argue that “[t]eens today need to discover who they are in relation to these new media – do they accept them or reject them?” (569). The hyper-mediated environments adolescents live in today confront them with the daunting task of judging how to engage with the media while acknowledging the power that media technologies have to influence their relationships with themselves and with others (Koss & Teale 570).

Despite the inclination of many YA novels towards bleak themes, the genre is commercially lucrative (Koss & Teale 563). In fact, Hayn, Kaplan and Nolen believe that YA fiction has “much market and artistic viability” precisely because the “volatile and angry voices” of its adolescent protagonists confront the problems of their societies head-on in ways that resonate deeply with young readers (177). The fact that many young readers enjoy such narratives indicates adolescents’ desire for cultural products that provide them safe spaces to emotionally and cognitively engage with the difficulties and dangers of coming-of-age in the twenty-first century (Ames 7; Bean & Moni 638). Ames argues that encouraging adolescents to read YA novels is an important step towards sparking their interests in social issues and political engagement (3). YA fiction is arguably one of the most effective means to connect young people with social challenges and ethical questions on an enjoyable and personally relevant level (Wolk 667-668). The genre encourages readers to question authority, challenge their society’s entrenched ideologies, and consider other alternative perspectives and voices. YA novels like those analysed in this thesis raise important questions about how adolescents can live as responsible, self-aware and engaged citizens within neoliberal and hyper-mediated societies in which Reality TV dominates.

### Background on Reality TV

Like YA fiction, Reality TV is a pop-culture heavyweight and the genre dominates mainstream television as staple programming. Reality TV is an umbrella term covering a vast variety of programmes that share core generic characteristics. Sometimes referred to as ‘factual programming’, Reality TV’s defining feature is its claim of representing reality and quotidian life, which thus distinguishes the genre from scripted dramas and fictional narratives (Bignell 61). Reality TV strives to simulate ‘reality’ in various ways. Reality TV programmes generally recruit ‘real’ or ‘ordinary’ people to appear as themselves on camera (Skeggs & Wood 80; Hill 41). Reality TV narratives revolve around inserting these regular individuals into unscripted

(but often pre-planned) scenarios that are designed to elicit authentic reactions and ‘real life’ performances from them. Reality TV’s meteoric ascension can be understood by contextualising how the genre’s historical development was profoundly shaped by neoliberalism and neoliberalism’s influence on television’s economic and production practices. When Reality TV first emerged during the 1980s, television broadcasters were facing growing pressure to operate and compete in ever more neoliberal and globalized markets. This fight to secure viewership and ratings has only continued to intensify into the twenty-first century.

In order to survive and thrive in increasingly deregulated and competitive markets, television broadcasters have been compelled to embrace neoliberal pro-corporate and profit-oriented business strategies. In response to the heightened competitiveness and commercialisation underlying television production, “all established TV genres have...become commodified” (Kilborn 8). Broadcasters began gravitating towards inexpensive formats and actively sought and prioritised television content that would appeal consistently with a steadily fragmenting audience (Bignell 19). In almost every regard, Reality TV as a genre seemed perfectly suited to television broadcasters’ needs, for the term ‘reality’ is often a shorthand for “cost-effective production” (Redden 400) that offers the commercial advantages of “easy replicability” (Skeggs & Wood 1). As the genre is preoccupied with representing ‘the real’, Reality TV programmes can be produced relatively quickly and at substantially lower production costs compared to other television genres. By employing non-professional performers whose unscripted performances remove the need for paying for unionized scriptwriters, Reality TV helps broadcasters to substantially reduce production costs. (Redden 400). Furthermore, Reality TV usually does not require elaborate sets or expensive special effects, but can still reliably capture huge viewership numbers by merging spectacle, emotion, and viewer interactivity into entertaining formats (Kavka 47, Bignell 19; Kilborn 24).

Reality TV encompasses a cornucopia of subgenres that emerged in force around the late 1990s with game-docs ranging from survival competitions, singing contests to cooking challenges, and later during early 2000s, which saw the rise of family docusoaps and personal makeovers (Biressi & Nunn 10). Retrospectively, Reality TV also covers law-and-order formats and reality-crime that first arose during the 1980s (Biressi & Nunn 10). As the broad breath and diversity of its subgenres attest, Reality TV is hybridic and evades attempts to pin down its generic and definitional parameters. Skeggs and Wood acknowledge the “impossibility” of expecting homogeneity from this fluid genre (81). June Deery calls the term Reality TV “a floating signifier possessing different meanings for different people in different historical moments” (3). As popular cultural sites, Reality TV programmes embody and encourage the cross-fertilisation of discourses, styles and techniques from across television culture (Bignell 171; Biressi & Nunn 23). Reality TV is adept at actively adopting and appropriating the conventions, structures, styles, and technologies of other television genres in its endless quest to maximise its audience appeal (Kavka 2; Bignell 176). Among the genres that Reality TV takes generic traits from are the documentary and talk show.

Reality TV draws partly on the documentary’s educational interests in depicting reality, including the realities of ordinary people’s lives; however, Reality TV subverts the documentary tradition’s didacticism through narratives overtly driven by levity, drama and emotionality (Dovey 16). This has led to criticisms that Reality TV ‘dumbs down’ its content by turning the documentary’s more sober style of relaying information into light entertainment bent towards human interest stories that often offer little meaningful social commentary (Biressi & Nunn 24). The talk show has also significantly influenced Reality TV by imparting the compulsion for confession as a performative imperative for participants on Reality TV. Reality TV has made the confession an integral aspect of its narratives by elevating the confession into a television convention that is simultaneously therapeutic and entertaining.

Like talk shows, Reality TV delights in spectacularly opening the formerly private and interior worlds of ordinary individuals for public consumption and amusement. The act of self-disclosure, involving verbalising one's deepest thoughts, personal life, and struggles in front of in-studio audiences and on-camera, is presented as cathartic and healing for participants. For viewers, the confession can allow glimpses into the normally hidden 'real' world of others in ways that are potentially scandalous and sensational.

Academic interest in Reality TV is vast, spanning from the genre's historical, economic and aesthetic developments, to its material and ideological influences on viewers and participants. The following topics are prominently discussed in scholarship on Reality TV: the potential for realism and hyperreality in Reality TV (Kavka 3); the genre's blurring of boundaries between personal and public experiences (Bignell 106); how advances in recording techniques and surveillance technologies have shaped the genre (Kilborn 19); and Reality TV's relationship and responsibility to quality public service broadcasting (Holmes & Jermyn). Reality TV is also a deeply polarizing genre that has been both praised and criticised. The genre is credited for 'democratising' the media industries by offering everyday individuals with more avenues to participate on television (Andrejevic 3). By putatively making mediated fame more egalitarian and open to all, Reality TV represents "a new kind of access to, and interest in, ordinary people on television" (Bignell 4). Yet for similar reasons, the genre is often also condemned as a catalyst for voyeurism, exhibitionism, exploitation and crass consumerism (Bignell 4). Most pertinent to my analysis of YA novels' representations of Reality TV is that most scholarship on Reality TV positions the genre as demonstrably *neoliberal* in its business practices, televisual conventions, discourses and ideologies.

[Background on neoliberalism.](#)

In my reading of the focus novels, I have identified neoliberalism as a dominant ideology that permeates the societies in the novels. Just as with actual Reality TV, the televisual conventions of Reality TV as depicted in the novels appear to support neoliberal ideologies. Much like their ‘real world’ counterparts, these represented programmes operate as neoliberal apparatuses that govern participants into neoliberal subjects. As neoliberalism is too vast a concept to fully cover in this thesis, my application of neoliberalism throughout my analysis is by necessity specific to neoliberalism as it manifests within and through Reality TV. To contextualise my analysis, I provide an overview of neoliberalism and its common characteristics and implications, before moving to a consideration of the scholarship that positions Reality TV as a neoliberal genre. Defining neoliberalism is admittedly daunting. Similar to attempts to define YA fiction and Reality TV, there exists an enormous bulk of at times idiosyncratic definitions for neoliberalism. As such, Peck, Brenner and Theodore aptly characterise neoliberalism as a “flexible credo” that has “no officially sanctioned status” (3). Although multiple interpretive strands of neoliberalism exist, they are nevertheless united in an understanding of the market’s importance in governing both the state and the individual.

Simply understood, neoliberalism refers to a broad spectrum of political, economic, and social ideologies that prioritise the centrality of the free market in government decisions, policy-making, and in the everyday life of the individual. Mitchell Dean calls neoliberalism “a free-market philosophy” (150), and Wendy Brown says neoliberalism is “equated with a radically free market” (Brown 37). Similarly, Wendy Larner describes neoliberalism as a mode of “political-economic governance premised on the extension of market relationships” (5). Proponents of neoliberalism forward “the superiority of economic logic” (Schram 308) in their arguments that “free-markets alone should provide for the welfare of human beings” (Giroux 7). Neoliberalism credits the unfettered market as the best mechanism to stimulate competition, performance efficiency, and profitability for the state, while the market putatively enhances the

individual's consumer choices, economic prosperity, and personal happiness (Larner 5; Schmidt 70; Birch 572). Given the market's perceived importance, neoliberalism strives to nurture pro-market societies by extending economic rationalities into all modes of governance on the levels of the state and the individual (Davies 274; Brown 40). Neoliberalism prominently supports laissez-faire economic rationalities and policies such as deregulation and privatisation, market competition, and the decentralization of the state's powers (Peck, Brenner & Theodore; Navarro 53; Ventura 2).

Neoliberalism is typically understood to be adamantly opposed to state-centralized authority, advocating instead for minimal government intervention (Larner 7). Neoliberalism's suspicion towards 'big government' can be traced partly to Cold War era anxieties of communist ideologies and a disapproval of overt government interference in public and private affairs (Peck, Benner & Theodore 3). However, it is crucial to remember that contrary to popular opinion, neoliberalism does not actually call for the complete separation of the state from the market, nor does neoliberalism necessarily diminish the state's power (Davies 273; Larner 12). This is because the state remains important to furthering neoliberalism and its market agendas (Davies 273). Neoliberalism ironically relies on a strong state capable of growing the market by governing through market-oriented policies (Schmidt 71). In neoliberal societies, the state must be willing "to enforce the rules of the market 'game'" (Davies 274). Hence, the state needs to be sensitive to the market's needs because under neoliberalism, the state's legitimacy is closely linked to its capacity for maintaining the economy's optimal performance (Brown 40). Neoliberalism's influence on state policies and decisions has far-reaching effects that shape how individuals are governed and how they in turn govern themselves.

Neoliberalism and its market rationalities have expanded far beyond economic and political domains, and now dominate society through "the commodification of social life" (Peck, Benner & Theodore 6; Schram 308). As neoliberalism makes porous the boundaries between the

market, the state, and the individual, all dimensions of human life have become subject to and shaped by neoliberal governmentality. In neoliberal societies, “individuals’ ability to make market principles the guiding values of their lives” has become the basis for determining one’s social and economic value and personal wellbeing (Ventura 2; Brown 39). Under neoliberalism, individuals are pushed to actively embrace and display neoliberal mentalities such as competitiveness, self-discipline, self-enterprise and self-responsibility. If they wish to succeed, individuals must align their identities, aspirations, and conduct with these neoliberal mentalities. Neoliberal individuals are expected to govern and conduct themselves as rational and self-enterprising citizens who make competitive and strategic choices in a free market society. Anyone unable or unwilling to live by neoliberalism’s rationalities risks being cut-off from participating not only in the marketplace but in wider society. Worryingly, in neoliberal societies, personal struggles and hardships may be considered evidence of deviant and possibly criminal failures on the individual’s part to embrace neoliberalism.

#### Theoretical framework: key terms and connections.

In this section, I introduce the key terms that I utilise throughout this thesis and I establish the theoretical framework that forms the basis for my analysis of Reality TV as neoliberal apparatuses that govern adolescents in YA novels. I begin with the concept of governmentality. In *On the Government of the Living*, Foucault raises the fact that “government” does not refer exclusively to the state’s administrative powers and political activities. For Foucault, government has a broader sense that encompasses the “mechanisms and procedures intended to conduct men, to direct their conduct, to conduct their conduct” (12). In *Powers of Freedom* (1999), Nikolas Rose argues that government “embraces the ways in which one might be urged and educated to bridle one’s own passions, to control one’s own instincts, to govern oneself” (*Powers of Freedom* 3). Rose elaborates that governance “refer[s] to any strategy, tactic, process, procedure or programme for controlling, regulating, shaping, mastering or exercising



authority over others” (*Powers of Freedom* 15). From these perspectives, individuals can be governed through various state and non-state efforts that direct individuals to govern *themselves*; individuals are guided, trained and compelled to conduct their own behaviours and lives in accordance to certain ideological expectations.

Governmentality is indispensable to neoliberalism. Patricia Ventura states in *Neoliberal Culture* (2012) that “neoliberalism is also a governmentality” through which the free market and its economic rationalities govern all dimensions of life (2). Wendy Larner points out that although neoliberalism is usually understood to advocate for less government, this does not mean less *governance* (12). Todd May argues that neoliberalism actually favours a governmentality that actively intervenes on the free market’s behalf (180). On the level of the private individual, neoliberal governmentality “focuses on people...in their role as participants in a market economy” (May 180). To extend market rationalities and ideologies across society, neoliberal governmentality engages a “collection of practices, techniques and rationalities used to govern” individuals into neoliberal subjects (Ventura 2). In *Edgework* (2005), Wendy Brown argues that “the signature technique of neoliberal governance” forgoes political force, preferring instead to govern by guiding and directing “the soul” of the individual towards neoliberal self-governance (39-42). Neoliberal governmentality compels individuals to govern themselves according to economic rationalities and to align their identities, behaviours and relationships with the free-market. Neoliberal governmentality thereby produces individuals who are capable of conducting themselves as enterprising and competitive citizens in their daily lives.

How does neoliberalism use the media to govern individuals as neoliberal subjects, and how are Reality TV programmes exceptionally efficient apparatuses for neoliberal governmentality? Such questions are important to consider because neoliberalism and its associated market rationalities are not naturally occurring but must be continuously circulated

across society. Neoliberalism therefore relies on various apparatuses as channels to extend, naturalise and reinforce neoliberal ideologies and to govern individuals without force. Foucault argues that around the mid-twentieth century, modern capitalist societies transitioned from employing traditionally “heavy” methods of discipline like corporal punishment towards “much looser form[s] of power” to govern citizens (*Power/Knowledge* 58). Institutions and authorities realised the importance of “progressively finer channels” for their power to reach out and govern all sections of society (*Power/Knowledge* 151). Rose mentions “a microphysics of power acting at a capillary level within a multitude of practices of control that proliferate across a territory” (*Powers of Freedom* 17). The power to govern is capillary in form when it is not “imposed from above” but flows throughout the social body to reach the individual on more personal levels (Palmer 3). Consequently, “‘new micro-physics’ of power” are constantly being developed to govern the individual’s identity, life and conduct more directly and intimately (*Discipline & Punish* 139).

Neoliberal societies govern their populations through numerous apparatuses. The state and its institutions are complemented by and have even been surpassed by the private-sector in its efforts to develop new and innovative apparatuses to govern citizens. Foucault remarks that “the procedures of power that are at work in modern societies are much more numerous, diverse and rich” (*Power/Knowledge* 148). To meet the contemporary challenges of governing, societies require mechanisms of governance that are “polymorphous” and “extraordinarily inventive” (*Power/Knowledge* 106). Hence, there has been a notable “proliferation of new apparatuses, devices and mechanisms for the government of conduct and forms of life” (*Powers of Freedom* 164). These apparatuses allow for “meticulous, often minute, techniques” to monitor, supervise and direct individuals (*Discipline & Punish* 139). I argue that in today’s media-centric world, Reality TV programmes are creative and polymorphous apparatuses that allow neoliberal governmentality to flow through in ‘finer’ channels. The genre has

demonstrated itself to be extraordinarily inventive, with formats rich in televisual techniques that convey neoliberal ideologies towards participants. The multitude of channels and diverse programmes dedicated to Reality TV have opened countless capillaries for neoliberal ideologies to intimately reach, govern and train participants into neoliberal subjects in every aspect of life imaginable.

Reality TV programmes are especially useful apparatuses for neoliberal governmentality in the twenty-first century and Media Studies scholars often position Reality TV as a neoliberal genre. In *Is Reality TV neoliberal?* (2018), Guy Redden points out that the genre came into existence contemporaneously with modern neoliberalism. Reality TV essentially ‘grew up’ during a time when media industries witnessed “the normalization of neoliberal common sense” in television production and broadcasting (Redden 405). Reality TV’s close relationship to neoliberalism can be traced to the genre’s historical developments. For context, I cite Vicente Navarro who pinpoints the 1980s to 2000s as a time “when neoliberalism reached its maximum expression” (51). This time period is significant in Reality TV’s history. Reality TV’s formative development occurred around the mid-1980s with the rise of crime-and-emergency style programmes. The genre experienced accelerated growth and immense popularity during the 1990s and early 2000s with the rise of game-docs and family-docs. As mentioned earlier, when media industries grew more neoliberal and competitive from the 1980s onwards, broadcasters turned to Reality TV because the genre’s low production costs and high popularity make Reality TV programming financially competitive. Reality TV has from its inception been inextricably enmeshed in neoliberal rationalities and market practices.

The neoliberal pressures on media industries means that television studios invariably produce narratives that are ideologically “consistent with the economic basis” of neoliberalism (Redden 399). Redden elaborates that “neoliberal logic is evident in [the] main recurring textual features of reality programming” (399). David Grazian appears in agreement, noting that “[w]hile the

production of reality television employs neoliberalism's economic principles, the genre's narrative conventions reflect its morals" (69). Neoliberal ideologies and expectations have been indelibly integrated into Reality TV's televisual conventions, discourses and styles. For example, the reality-crime subgenre weaponizes the confession as a televisual convention to expose featured suspects as neoliberal 'failures'. Reality-crime programmes ideologically present the confessions of suspects as evidence of their personal and economic failures to live as neoliberal subjects. The game-doc subgenre is arguably the most aligned with neoliberalism and the market. The arenas, competitions and rewards systems that characterise game-docs "articulate the key neoliberal ideas of enterprise and competition" that participants must embrace in order to win the game (Redden 407). On family-docs, families are subjected to the neoliberal disciplinary techniques of TV-appointed experts who teach the family to embrace neoliberal values such as taking personal responsibility for improving their own family life.

Hence, neoliberalism and Reality TV are closely intertwined. Neoliberalism has so thoroughly suffused all aspects of Reality TV that its programmes routinely represent heavily neoliberal versions of reality. Redden asks us to consider "if neoliberal cultural forms, potentially including reality TV, play a role in [neoliberalism's] legitimization" (400). The scholars who have perhaps most comprehensively answered this are Laurie Ouellette and James Hay. Their book *Better Living Through Reality TV* (2008) forwards convincing arguments that position Reality TV as a televisual cultural form which extends neoliberal governance over its participants and viewers. Ouellette and Hay's approach to Reality TV as a neoliberal genre largely informs how I analyse the Reality TV programmes depicted in my selected YA novels. Ouellette and Hay describe Reality TV as "the quintessential technology" for neoliberal governance (4). They forward that Reality TV has facilitated a "reinvention of government" by allowing "governing at a distance" (2). Reality TV reinvents government because its many programmes are apparatuses that complement more traditional modes of government used by

the state. Reality TV allows for the ‘remote’ and indirect governing of individuals because its programmes train participants to govern *themselves* as neoliberal subjects.

Reality TV supports neoliberal governance because the genre trains participants and viewers both to embrace neoliberal ideologies and actively conduct themselves according to these ideologies (Ouellette & Hay 4). Reality TV exerts surprising ideological power and influence to govern participants’ daily lives (Ouellette & Hay 2). For example, subgenres like the family-doc routinely “insert guidelines for living into the nooks and crannies of everyday life” (Ouellette & Hay 4). By gaining intimate access into domestic spaces, family-docs govern participants’ private conduct and relationships even at home, and the experts sent by family-docs putatively guide families to learn how best to optimise their neoliberal selves through improved consumer choices and lifestyles. Hence, Reality TV epitomises Foucault’s argument that power seeks to circulate “through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions” (*Power/Knowledge* 152). Ouellette and Hay extend their argument by proposing that Reality TV uses the “pleasures of play and suspense” to make learning neoliberal values seem entertaining (4). The playful environments, challenges and tasks on Reality TV programmes are specially calibrated to train and produced desired neoliberal conduct like self-responsibility and competitiveness, thereby preparing participants to emerge as fully actualised neoliberal subjects.

Having established how Reality TV governs participants into neoliberal subjects with neoliberal identities, I now review scholarship on YA fiction’s thematic and ideological interests in representing the formation of young people’s identities. Robyn McCallum and Roberta Seelinger Trites are of particular importance to my discussion here. In *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction* (1999), McCallum analyses how YA novels represent the social and ideological processes that influence adolescent identity. In her seminal book *Disturbing*

*the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000), Roberta Seelinger Trites discusses the relationships and power dynamics between adolescents and institutions in YA fiction. Narratives for young adults demonstrate a preoccupation with identity politics and self-development, and the genre has a strong interest in interrogating the social processes and ideological conditions that shape identity (Wyile 186; Daley-Carey 468). McCallum explains that the reason representations of identity are so prevalent across YA fiction is because adolescence is a life stage of intense development during which people attempt to define themselves and understand their relation to their social and ideological environments (3). Identity politics matter in YA novels because how adolescents define themselves and how they are defined by others determines the degrees of power that adolescents can access (Trites 47).

Adolescent identity in YA fiction is predominantly represented as “fluid, fragmentary, and constantly evolving” (Daley-Carey 468). Since YA fiction typically positions people “as socially constructed subjects rather than as self-contained individuals...” (Trites 16), the genre challenges liberal humanist notions of the insular self who remains unchanged by his/her world (Coats 319). McCallum argues that although the individual’s personal identity is that sense of him/herself “as distinct from other selves”, the individuals’ identity is also determined by “occupying a position within society and in *relation* to other selves...” [my emphasis] (3). McCallum explains that the relationships between adolescents and others in YA fiction can be conceived of as a dialogue (3). Dialogue in its simplest sense involves “an exchange of words, ideas and viewpoints” (McCallum 262). The dialogic relations between the adolescent protagonist and others occur on various levels. These dialogues may be actual conversations between interlocutors, and can also include the broader discursive and ideological exchanges between adolescents and the society that they inhabit. The adolescent protagonist’s identity is therefore formed through complex and ongoing dialogues in which the adolescent as individual

is addressed by others and interpellated by his/her socio-ideological and socio-linguistic milieu (McCallum 3).

Adolescents in YA novels encounter a wide variety of others who affect and influence the development of their personal identities. These others may include the young protagonist's friends and family, as well as more formal institutional others such as school, organised religion and the media (Trites 52). These institutional others play important roles in the governing of society because they help to train adolescents to develop acceptable identities and demonstrate socially approved conduct. As Trites notes, these "[s]ocial institutions are determined by discourse" and they draw upon discourse in order to legitimise their power and authority to govern and regulate adolescents. For this reason, the ideological training that institutions dispense to adolescents will always involve discourses (Trites 22). In the act of interpellating and training adolescents with discourses, institutions invariably reinforce and extend to adolescents the dominant social ideologies (like neoliberalism) that are embedded in these discourses. Hence, the dialogic relations adolescents have with institutional others exposes them to ideologies and ideological expectations that can significantly affect the development of their identities. For example, the adolescent protagonists in the focus novels exist in dialogic relations with media institutions that perpetually interpellate them with neoliberal discourses, ideologies and identities.

At the heart of YA fiction are issues of power and what the adolescent learns about power (Trites x). When adolescent protagonists in YA novels realise how institutions have power to discursively and ideologically shape who they are, adolescents also come to the painful "recognition that social institutions are bigger and more powerful than individuals" (Trites 3). As such, Trites says that YA fiction tends to "problematize institutions", and all YA novels represent tensions between adolescent protagonists and the institutions around them (23; 52). These tensions are typically situated discursively and they come from the real or perceived

differentials in power that exist in the dialogic relations between adolescents and institutions. As in any dialogue, conflicts may arise when certain parties exert their ideological intentions over others because this causes discursive and ideological imbalances between interlocutors. Across YA fiction, the relationships and dialogues between adolescent protagonists and institutions are where the differences in ideologies and conflicts in discourses are intensely experienced and vividly represented. As institutions possess greater power than adolescents, and as institutions draw power from discourse, adolescent protagonists in YA novels develop their identities in ideological and discursive struggles with institutions (McCallum 11).

Nevertheless, the adolescent protagonists in YA novels are not helpless against institutional power. In fact, Trites points out that "...the social power that constructs them bestows upon them a power from which they generate their own sense of subjectivity" (Trites 7). It is because adolescents exist in relationships of constant force with the power of the institutions surrounding them that adolescents can empower themselves to determine their own identities. Furthermore, adolescent protagonists are not passive recipients of the social ideologies and discourses that institutions address them with. As McCallum points out, identity is formed "through the selective appropriation and assimilation of the discourses of others" (11). For precisely because institutional power is discursively situated, and because the relationship between adolescents and institutions is dialogic, adolescents can express degrees of power over which aspects of social discourses and ideologies they incorporate into their identities. However, it is important to remember that although YA fiction appears to celebrate adolescent empowerment, the genre is usually rather conservative in its ideological outlook. YA fiction emphasises that adolescents mature only by accepting that they must inhabit the same cultural environment as institutions, and they therefore learn to compromise with rather than fight institutional power (Trites 20).



Since YA fiction represents both adolescent identity and institutional power as discursively determined, examining narrative strategies can yield interesting insights into how YA novels express on linguistic and textual levels the operations of power upon adolescent protagonists. The novels I analyse in this thesis abundantly feature narrative strategies like extraliterary genres and focalisation techniques. While literary scholars have extensively discussed the literary functions of focalisation techniques, extraliterary genres have received less attention despite their regular appearances in novels. Since extraliterary genres play a significant role in my analysis of the focus novels, I discuss this narrative strategy at some length here. Mikhail Bakhtin was arguably the first to conceptualise extraliterary genres. Bakhtin proclaimed that “[t]he novel permits the incorporation of various genres” (*Dialogic Imagination* 320). Although Bakhtin did not formally name these “incorporated genres”, McCallum refers to them as extraliterary genres, a term I will use. For McCallum, “extraliterary genres are incorporated as discrete embedded textual elements” and are literary representations of ‘external’ texts (205). Bakhtin lists “the confession, the diary, travel notes, biography, the personal letter” as external genres that have been incorporated into novels. (*Dialogic Imagination* 321). Other examples of extraliterary genres are literary depictions of newspapers, magazine articles, shopping lists and even e-mails.

The variety of extraliterary genres demonstrates their inherent playfulness and creativity in mimicking other genres within novels. Extraliterary genres typically signal their presence in novels through noticeable shifts and experimentations in linguistic, typographic and stylistic conventions (McCallum 209). Extraliterary genres can also affect the spatial arrangement and display of the printed text itself on the novel’s physical pages. Italicized or bolded words, changes in font size and font style are common; headings, epigraphs, paratexts, footnotes are *de rigueur* flourishes; sentences might be arranged in bullet points, and handwritten scribbles or even doodles might sometimes appear. By so visibly highlighting the physicality and

presentation of the text, extraliterary genres can catch the reader's attention and encourage readers to consider how discourses operate. As such, extraliterary genres are utilised for more than ornamental purposes. As Bakhtin notes, "[s]uch incorporated genres usually preserve within the novel their own structural integrity and independence, as well as their own linguistic and stylistic peculiarities" (*Dialogic Imagination* 321). By textually capturing and incorporating the idiosyncratic linguistic stylisations of the genres that they represent, extraliterary genres convey and make visible the socio-linguistic and socio-ideological baggage that are commonly associated with and used by these other genres.

The integration of extraliterary genres "has become a trend in recent adolescent fiction" (McCallum 205). While Bakhtin doubted that there are any genres that have still to be represented in novels (*Dialogic Imagination* 321), contemporary YA novels are representing genres that did not exist during Bakhtin's time. The ludic and inventive quality of extraliterary genres allows this narrative strategy to evolve alongside the continuous development of mass media, digital communication technologies and popular culture. Through extraliterary genres, YA novels represent how adolescents are affected by modern techno-centric changes. McCallum specifically identifies the importance of television being textually represented. For McCallum, when television programmes and content are represented in novels as extraliterary genres, this allows readers to encounter "[t]he generic codes and discourses associated with the mass media" (208). Such representations give opportunities for readers to consider how dominant social ideologies and discourses are embedded into television's conventions, and how these conventions in turn allow such ideologies and discourses to be mediated, broadcasted and then received by adolescent protagonists. As Reality TV exploded across the pop-culture landscape, YA novels such as the ones that I analyse demonstrate growing fascination and sophistication with thematically and textually depicting Reality TV subgenres and programmes.

Aside from Reality TV, each of the focus novels also represent a remarkable range of other media-related genres like recorded interviews, talk shows, playscripts, transcripts, tabloid articles, online forums and text messaging. Like Reality TV, these other media are saturated with neoliberal discourses and ideologies, and these media also accompany, support and extend Reality TV's presence and power. Reality TV and assorted media genres and communication platforms are popular with adolescents and are frequently consumed and used by the adolescent protagonists in the focus novels. As McCallum points out, novels can textually capture television's generic codes when novels represent television programmes. I analyse how the focus novels use extraliterary genres to bring into novelistic discourses Reality TV's wide range of televisual codes and conventions. By so doing, the novels prominently signal on a textual level that Reality TV's televisual conventions are deeply entrenched with neoliberal ideologies and discourses. These novels show how Reality TV and its supporting media genres open dialogues with adolescents that directly address and interpellate adolescents with neoliberal ideologies and discourses. Importantly, these novels also use extraliterary genres to represent how adolescents manipulate and exploit Reality TV's televisual conventions to resist the genre's discursive and ideological power to govern them as neoliberal subjects.

My analytical approach to the focus YA novels is based on the theoretical framework that I established. In each of the novels, adolescent protagonists participate on Reality TV programmes and they experience first-hand the institutional power of media institutions that are explicitly or implicitly in support of neoliberalism. I will investigate how the novels represent adolescent identity as formed in relation to Reality TV as neoliberal apparatuses that extend neoliberal governmentality. I will discuss how Reality TV's televisual codes, conventions and techniques such as the confession, the host, and the expert each play a role in constructing and enforcing neoliberal identities for participants. Adolescent protagonists who participate on Reality TV are guided, trained, rewarded or disciplined to visibly govern

themselves with neoliberal identities, attitudes and performances. Throughout my analysis, I consider how the novels utilise narrative strategies like extraliterary genres and focalisation techniques to textually convey how neoliberal ideologies and discourses are embedded into Reality TV's conventions and techniques. Furthermore, these narrative strategies also capture how adolescents experience being constantly addressed with neoliberal discourses and ideologies from Reality TV. By examining narrative strategies, the complex relationships and power struggles between adolescents and Reality TV can be understood more richly on thematic and textual levels.

### Outline of chapters.

In chapter one, I explore the representation of reality-crime in Kerry Drewery's *Cell 7* (2016) and *Day 7* (2017). The novels depict a ruthless reality-crime programme called *Death is Justice*. I examine how the programme reflects the consequences of the neoliberal privatisation of the law and the outsourcing of criminal justice to corporate broadcasters. The novels exemplify how reality-crime thrives in at-risk societies by amplifying prevalent social fears of crime and suspicion towards adolescents. Furthermore, the programme manipulates and heightens moral panics by constructing criminalised identities for adolescents. I also discuss how *Death is Justice* draws upon televisual conventions like the host, the expert and the confession to generate moral panics and reinforce narratives of adolescents as criminally dangerous. These televisual conventions direct condemnatory discourses and punitive ideologies towards adolescents while validating and magnifying the hostility and moral outrage that viewers feel about crime. Finally, these televisual conventions not only legitimise but also encourage support for retributive punishment against adolescents who have run afoul of the law. I consider how *Death is Justice* as reality-crime repurposes the spectacle of punishment for entertainment and profit, while putatively helping viewers to assuage their anxieties and anger through witnessing young criminals being punished on television.

While reality-crime as represented in the *Cell 7* trilogy takes a punitive and condemnatory stance by criminalising youths, the game documentaries (game-docs) in the YA novels that I focus on in chapter two have a distinctly ludic quality which disguises the danger their games hold for adolescents. In chapter two, I investigate how the game-docs in the focus novels function as neoliberal apparatuses that use play to train adolescents into competitive neoliberal subjects. The three YA novels I analyse in this chapter are Andrea White's *Surviving Antarctica* (2005), Jeanne Ryan's *Nerve* (2012), and Alexandra Oliva's *The Last One* (2016). The game-docs in these novels train adolescent participants with the neoliberal mentalities needed to govern themselves as players who can survive not only the game itself, but who can presumably thrive at playing the dangerous game of life. These game-docs are played in neoliberal societies marked by widespread privatisation and the precarities of the free market. I examine how these neoliberal conditions are translated into the competitions of game-docs and how precarities are transformed into entrepreneurial opportunities for adolescents to learn neoliberal mentalities. Adolescents must actively practice and display neoliberal mentalities like self-responsibility, ruthless self-enterprise and cunning competitiveness to succeed or even just survive on game-docs.

While the game-docs discussed in chapter two take adolescent protagonists to exotic environments far from home, the family documentary (family-docs) comes directly into the home. In chapter three, I explore the representations of family-docs as neoliberal apparatuses that brings neoliberal governmentality intimately into the personal lives of the adolescent protagonists in A.S. King's *Reality Boy* (2013) and Heather Demetrios's *Something Real* (2014). In both novels, an all-American family opens its home to Reality TV to film and broadcast their family antics on television. To 'help' the family, family-docs send experts like TV nannies and lifestyle coaches to manage the family's misbehaving offspring. I evaluate how these experts assess, diagnose and pathologize the behaviours and bodies of the family's

children as dirty, deviant or unstable. Next, these experts train the family to impose disciplinary techniques, managerial household regiments and consumer lifestyles steeped in neoliberal ideologies. These techniques, regiments and lifestyle are designed to help the family govern their children more efficiently. While family-docs strive ostensibly to rehabilitate and remake youths into healthy and functional individuals, the adolescent protagonists in *Reality Boy* and *Something Real* experience being openly pathologized and shamed on camera so traumatic that they develop fragmented selves rather than rehabilitated identities.

Having established in the previous chapters that the focus YA novels represent Reality TV as neoliberal apparatuses that construct neoliberal identities for adolescents and that govern adolescents as neoliberal subjects, in chapter four I examine the possibilities for adolescent empowerment and resistance against Reality TV. I analyse how the focus novels represent adolescent protagonists discovering opportunities to empower themselves and fight Reality TV. Each of the adolescent protagonists in these novels grows aware of power on various levels. They learn to identify how media institutions use power to discursively and ideologically construct neoliberal identities and forcibly impose these identities upon adolescents. Importantly, these adolescents also realise that they too possess power. In all the novels, adolescents discover ways to use Reality TV itself as a public stage to make visible their resistance against Reality TV. I discuss how these adolescents become adept at exposing and exploiting the televisual conventions, discourses and ideologies of Reality TV to disrupt Reality TV's neoliberal power to govern them as neoliberal subjects. They empower themselves by using their adolescent voices to open dialogues with others, openly articulate their rejection of Reality TV's power, and demand their right to reclaim their identities.

## Chapter 1

### Crime and Punishment: Reality-crime and the Criminalisation of Adolescent Identities in *Cell 7* and *Day 7*.

In chapter one, I examine the representation of reality-crime as a disciplinary neoliberal apparatus that criminalises and punishes adolescents in *Cell 7* (2016) and *Day 7* (2017), the first two novels in Kerry Drewery's *Cell 7* trilogy. In *Cell 7*, sixteen-year-old Martha Honeydew is incarcerated within *Death is Justice*, an immensely popular and aggressively punitive reality-crime programme held in the U.K. As the programme televises the incarceration and execution of those accused of crime, Martha becomes both a prisoner and a Reality TV participant. *Death is Justice* displays tough-on-crime ideologies and it possesses enormous power to discursively and ideologically construct a criminalised identity for Martha, which seriously jeopardises her survival. *Death is Justice* operates as a media apparatus where the penalties of neoliberalism and the fearful ideologies of an at-risk neoliberal society are expressed. *Cell 7* and *Day 7* raise charged questions about the power of the media when criminal justice and law enforcement are replaced by televisual justice. The novels speculate about the retributory consequences for adolescent offenders when the media is entrusted by the state to serve as a privatised and punitive disciplinary apparatus that spectacularises punishment for public entertainment.

To contextualise my analysis of *Death is Justice* as a reality-crime programme that operates in the U.K., I consider the socio-political environment from which reality-crime arose. I discuss the development of reality-crime in the U.K. during the Thatcher years, and examine how the subgenre reflects the era's neoliberal penalty and general support for harsher crime controls. I also examine how social perceptions have increasingly come to view and treat adolescents with suspicion and unease. Adolescents have been situated in the centre of moral panics that fixate

negatively on adolescents and their supposed predisposition for criminality. I explore how *Cell 7* and *Day 7* depict *Death is Justice* as a reality-crime programme that not only reflects but actively stimulates fears of crime which directly contributes to moral panics about the criminal dangers of adolescent. I consider how neoliberal privatisation led *Death is Justice* to repurpose the spectacle of punishment on television for entertainment, profit and national security. I also evaluate how *Death is Justice* utilises the host, the expert and the confession as televisual techniques to direct condemnatory discourses and punitive neoliberal rationalities that criminalize adolescents. Furthermore, these techniques sustain moral panics and support retributive punishments against adolescents who are in trouble with the law.

### Neoliberal punitivism in the U.K.

The ascension of neoliberalism in the U.K. coincided with widespread social anxieties about crime. Neoliberalism also contributed to a marked increase in punitive crime control policies from the state and corresponding retributive attitudes toward those who commit crime. The roles that neoliberalism plays in fuelling fears of crime and punitivism towards criminals may be understood by considering neoliberalism's ideological expectations. Garland believes that middle-class unease towards crime arose from a "bad conscience" because the middle-class consistently voted throughout the 1980s and 1990s for neoliberal governments which drastically restructured the economy (156). Neoliberal governments actively support extensive privatisation and a dramatic reduction of welfare (156). Meanwhile, the private individual is expected to be competitive, entrepreneurial, and take personal responsibility for ensuring their own economic growth and security. The erosion of welfare combined with the neoliberal pressure on individuals to be self-responsible thus diminished support for the vulnerable and marginalised (Garland 156). These groups constitute the neoliberal underclass and are regarded as market failures because they have seemingly "lost the will" to support themselves and succeed economically (O'Malley 288). Such failures are easily scapegoated into criminal



threats that the state and the middle-class perceive will endanger the economy and safety of neoliberal societies.

Western societies have grown increasingly alarmed by the threats that “dangerous classes” may pose domestically (Tyler 59). Prevalent social anxieties about crime have shaped the state’s policies for managing crime and administering punishment (Garland 139). Western justice systems like the U.K.’s have embraced a distinctly “punitive turn” towards what Pat O’Malley calls “neoliberal penalty” (284). Neoliberal penalty is characterised by an intensification of retributive tendencies that openly support and call for more repressive forms of criminal justice and zero-tolerance policies for criminals. Reformation programmes have been increasingly side-lined because rehabilitating offenders does not align with the punitive treatment of criminals that neoliberal penalty promotes (O’Malley 285). Furthermore, because the neoliberal expectation of individual responsibility places the blame for committing crime squarely on offenders, neoliberal penalty holds that those who commit crime are responsible for bearing their punishment. Neoliberal penalty therefore promotes a “just desserts” mentality that sees severe punishments as something which criminals deserve (O’Malley 285). Meanwhile, aligned with neoliberalism’s market orientation, the number of private-owned prisons has risen, along with mass public surveillance from corporate contractors. Such pervasive and increasingly punitive crime controls are presented as essential services to protect citizens from becoming future victims of crime (O’Malley 285).

In the U.K., neoliberalism’s involvement in crime management and the disquieting turn towards penalty and punitivism can be traced to Margaret Thatcher’s administration (O’Malley 284). Thatcher Conservative Party laid an enduring foundation throughout the 1980s for a neoliberal society that strongly feels itself to be at-risk and vulnerable to criminal threats. Mick Ryan points out that Thatcher’s 1978 election manifesto had a section entitled “The rule of law” which promised to bring “[t]he fight against crime” to the guilty (35). Such

discourse signals the state's openly militant attitude in dealing with criminals. Thatcher adopted a tough-on-crime stance that evidenced a clear inclination towards neoliberal penalty. Her administration pushed for a wide variety of punitive crime controls such as harsher sentences, longer prison terms, and an emphasis on actively policing youths (Ryan 35). The more visibly punitive the state's crime control policies are, the more the state requires the public's support (Garland 141). One reason that Thatcher was successful at promoting her law-and-order politics was because her administration tapped into the fears of crime that marked the cultural climate of 1980s Britain. Thatcher's Conservative party positioned its hard-line approach to crime as representing and expressing the popular will of the people (Ryan 35).

Over time, the public has developed a "crime consciousness" that sees crime as a constant threat (Garland 106). This heightened consciousness of crime has led to a generalised fear of being at risk, and has spurred a corresponding vindictiveness towards the source of this anxiety: criminals. There is an undeniable "bottom-up pressure from an angry public" who are frightened about crime, upset about their insecurity, and who want the state's reassurance of harsher punishments against criminals (Mason 1). Since Thatcher, politicians have continued capitalising on these pervasive fears by focusing many of their policies on crime management and by promising more aggressive crime controls (Garland 13). Political debates and the mass media have become charged with an alarmingly high degree of condemnatory discourses against criminals (Garland 13). The invective inherent in these discourses resonate with members of the public who already feel aggravated about being at-risk. Such politicised and mediated condemnatory discourses against criminals not only inflame anxieties about crime, but can also deepen and direct the public's retributive feelings towards criminals. As a result, crime conscious at-risk neoliberal societies have increasingly developed zero-tolerance attitudes towards crime, and have largely welcomed harsher crime controls in order to assuage their fears about crime.

## Fearing and criminalising adolescents.

Adolescents occupy precarious social positions in at-risk neoliberal societies. While children are often figured as innocents to be nurtured and protected, adolescents are sometimes perceived with ambivalence and even suspicion as they approach adulthood. Adolescents are simultaneously “cherished” while being treated as “dangerous and alien” (Grossberg 3), and are positioned as “both a potential threat and a great resource” (Ritchie 13). Grossberg notes the emergence of “pedaphobic” discourses that influence how adults perceive and talk about adolescents with anxiety (4). Similarly, Giroux says that adolescents are largely defined and dehumanised by “discourse[s] of fear, guilt, and punishment” (20). The young are simultaneously regarded as in trouble, as troubled, and as sources of trouble (Jewkes 81). Adolescents have become collateral damage to the market logics and punitivism of neoliberal societies which have aggressively privatised or even remove the public services that many youths depend upon (Giroux 20). Youths from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are vulnerable to being transformed into a neoliberal underclass that is routinely scapegoated as “a generation of disorderly and dangerous youth dependent upon government entitlements” (Giroux 20). As neoliberal societies prize self-responsibility and self-enterprise, youthful behaviours that appear irresponsible, lazy or even free-spirited are thoroughly condemned as anti-social and potentially criminal.

The prevalent perceptions that adolescents in general are out of control, criminally predisposed, and frequently in trouble with the law has made adolescents the focus of moral panics. Simply understood, moral panics are powerful emotional and ideological reactions arising from perceptions that important social norms, moral codes and ideologies are being disrespected and violated (Jewkes 76). As the transgression of these values is felt to imperil the stability of society, those who transgress naturally alarm and outrage society’s sense of security, propriety and morality (Jewkes 76). Youths are placed in the centre of moral panics

by “moral guardians” like politicians, the police, psychologists and school administrators (Biltreyst 94). These moral guardians have power to discursively and ideologically define and identify youthful behaviours that they find troubling and threatening. Specific aspects of youth culture such as punks and drug use are regularly branded as threats to social values and even to society itself (Biltreyst 94). More generally, Harris points out that there is significant panic regarding “youth unemployment, free time, and delinquency” (114). In neoliberal societies, youths who are idle, lack ambition or are perceptibly disinterested in work are considered not just unseemly but also possibly deviant and criminally dangerous.

Crime-conscious and at-risk neoliberal societies are particularly prone to criminalising and punishing their young. The punitive turn has resulted not only in more severe sentencing for adult offenders but also a significant rise in “retribution in juvenile court and the imprisonment of children” (Garland 142). Jewkes notes a disturbing trend in which adolescents are being pathologized as troublemakers at increasingly younger ages (104). Another trend that Jewkes observes is that adolescent offenders are being prosecuted in adult courts, with the U.K. leading with one of the highest youth incarceration rates (Jewkes 104). Similarly, Harris says that adolescents, especially girls, are being arrested, detained and imprisoned with shocking regularity in Western societies. Nevertheless, Harris stresses that this trend may not necessarily imply a rise in criminal behaviour amongst youths themselves; rather, it indicates “a new vigilance” in watching and punishing adolescents (110). A multitude of political and legal regulations have emerged that are intended specifically to “get tough” on adolescents who display anti-social behaviours (Harris 29). Adolescents today are subject to more sophisticated and extensive systems of surveillance, scrutiny and security that make their whereabouts, behaviours and bodies increasingly visible, controllable and ultimately punishable (Grossberg 52; Taylor & Rooney 1).

As the media does not just represent but also constructs identities and subject positions, the media plays a significant part in amplifying and reinforcing moral panics about adolescents. Giroux points out that the media has historically associated adolescents with rising crime (14). The media provides a key public platform for moral guardians to express their condemnatory discourses against adolescents and to push forward their narratives of adolescents as dangerous and criminally predisposed (Biltereyst 94). Furthermore, when the media reports on stories of adolescents who have disregarded or violated social norms, the media's tendency to use hyperbole, emotive language, sensationalism, and simplification can stereotype, stigmatize and scapegoat adolescents into figures of fear (Biltereyst 95). The constant media stream of images and discourses that negatively depict adolescents as crime-prone deviants can coalesce to shape the public's perceptions of reality and legitimise moral panics towards adolescents. Alarming, the media can go beyond fuelling moral panics and actively involve itself in crime management and control by supporting a law-and-order stance, and by publicly expressing demands for more punitive action against criminals (Biltereyst 95). Reality-crime is one prominent media subgenre that openly articulates condemnatory discourses towards criminals and which spectacularises crime and punishment as entertainment.

#### The reality-crime subgenre.

Reality-crime holds a deeply significant place in Reality TV's history. In fact, it is Reality TV that traces its origins to reality-crime (Hill 2). Jonathan Bignell says the term 'Reality TV' was first used to describe reality-crime programmes (5). Cynthia Bond believes that it is not a coincidence that early Reality TV programmes favoured law-and-order themes (19). Bond explains that this is because the law is generally perceived as "the quintessential realm of the real"; in the public's imagination, the law has a certain gravitas that grounds it in reality (19). Reality-crime emerged in the mid-1980s on both sides of the Atlantic with programmes like *Crimewatch* (1984) and *America's Most Wanted* (1988). Since then, entire channels dedicated

to law-and-(dis)order programming have been established to feed the public's appetite for true crime stories. For example, Court TV was launched in 1991 to give viewers a continuous stream of criminal trials (Phillips 666). Reality-crime has also been called true-crime, crime-appeal programming, and crime-and-emergency television. As its many names demonstrate, the subgenre spans diverse narrative formats that cover different aspects of criminal justice, from the arrest of suspects to police investigations, from courtroom cases to prison-themed programmes that showcase life behind bars.

As one of the earliest examples of Reality TV, *Crimewatch* was also a pioneer programme for reality-crime. *Crimewatch* premiered on BBC One in 1984 and continued until 2017. In each episode, viewers were offered glimpses into the operations of police work and into everyday people's terrifying encounters as victims of crime. *Crimewatch* depicted the various stages of crime and law enforcement, from criminal acts captured on CCTV footage, to dramatized reconstructions of police investigations, to official recordings of suspects being apprehended and detained (Biressi & Nunn 118). Victims and their families also routinely gave interviews recounting their traumatic experiences with crime and criminals (Bignell 74). Not only did the heightened emotions of bearing witness to testimonies of real people's suffering make for exciting Reality TV, *Crimewatch* also emotionally aligned viewers with victims. The ingenuity of *Crimewatch* lay in offering viewers who might themselves feel anxious about their own potential victimhood the opportunity to actively involve themselves in 'fighting' crime through the programme. *Crimewatch* appealed to the power of the ordinary individual by essentially 'recruiting' its sizable share of viewers as police allies who would vigilantly call-in to report suspected criminal sightings as part of their civic duty (Kilborn 68; Jermyn 75).

While *Crimewatch* focused on arrests and criminal investigations, *60 Days In* focuses on the end of the law-and-order spectrum – incarceration. *60 Days In* (A&E) first premiered in 2016 and is a prison documentary-styled reality programme. Groups of participants volunteer to be

imprisoned and filmed as undercover inmates for sixty continuous days in actual prison facilities like Clark County Jail. Page and Ouellette describe *60 Days In* as “the prison-television complex” because the programme strikingly exemplifies the convergence of prison systems and their carceral logics with the business practices and entertainment drive of television (122). Page and Ouellette situated the programme in the context of neoliberal governmentality; they explain that the economic pressures neoliberalism exerts on every sector has likewise forced prisons to find opportunities to operate like business-minded corporate enterprises (122). By allowing programmes like *60 Days In* to film inside their facilities, prisons can turn incarceration into a profitable enterprise (Page & Ouellette 125-126). Riofrio argues that although the bodies of prison inmates are normally hidden from the public’s view, spectacles of incarceration on television demonstrate that prisons are willing to take advantage of the financial rewards of ‘selling’ their inmates as entertainment material for television (143).

While most individuals do not witness criminal activity first-hand on a regular basis, reality-crime programmes offer a steady flow of dramatic and exciting glimpses into the normally hidden world of crime. The subgenre is replete with binaries of good-versus-evil and them-versus-us (Phillips 668; Cavender 80). Reality-crime positions the police as heroic and ordinary citizens as would-be victims imperilled by criminal forces (Proise & Johnson 74). Depictions of criminals as pathological and as irredeemably and dangerously other can potentially reinforce damaging stereotypes and myths about criminals (Proise & Johnson 74). Hence, reality-crime routinely accentuates and justifies retributive feelings towards criminals (Phillips 668). With its heavy fixation on true crime stories that depict criminal activity, violence and the threat of victimisation, it is important to consider the degree to which reality-crime can aggravate or even induce viewers’ fears of crime and their sense of being at risk (Ouellette & Hay 135; Biressi & Nunn 122). In fact, reality-crime does not soothe viewers’ fears of crime but instead thrives on heightening their insecurities. Reality-crime producers are motivated by

the neoliberal pressures of the market to capitalise on sensational criminal content that will excite and outrage viewers' emotions (Palmer 58).

Reality-crime in the U.K. emerged during the mid-1980s in a cultural environment shaped prominently by the neoliberal penalty and ideologies of Thatcher's tough-on-crime Conservative government. This was a period marked by the public's growing fears of crime, a surge in retributive feelings towards criminals, and corresponding wide approval for harsher criminal justice. Reality-crime programmes like *Crimewatch* are aligned with neoliberal penalty and crime control ideologies, and are even complicit in actively endorsing the state's aggressive law-and-order approach to crime (Jermyn 75; Phillips 665). By depicting the arrest, judgement and incarceration of criminals, reality-crime not only demonstrates the consequences of criminal behaviour but also justifies the necessity for zero-tolerance law enforcement and the desirability for more retributive and punitive punishments for criminals. Reality-crime is therefore capable of generating powerful moral panics about crime. Its programmes are heavily inflected with condemnatory discourses that demonise criminals, disinclines viewers from empathising with them, and heightens viewers' punitive attitudes towards criminals. Unfortunately, because reality-crime is predisposed to sensationalising and spectacularising crime stories, the genre offers little opportunity for in-depth critical focus that encourages discussions on the larger causes of crime or that question the appropriateness of openly punitive criminal justice systems.



## Reality-crime in *Cell 7* and *Day 7*

In Kerry Drewery's *Cell 7* trilogy, England has undergone drastic socio-economic and judicial transformations. London is divided between the wealthy Avenues and the impoverished High Rises. The Avenues are apathic to the High Rises' crippling poverty and fearful of the potential criminality of the poor. To ensure national security, the state has replaced the courts and criminal justice system with a Reality TV programme called *Death is Justice*. Anyone accused of murder is immediately incarcerated on death-row within *Death is Justice*. The state claims that the programme is a more democratic justice system because all citizens can now vote to decide whether criminals are freed or executed. Nevertheless, the High Rises know that *Death is Justice* is a media institution and apparatus intended to target and police the poor while allowing the rich to go free. The programme routinely executes the poor to entertain and distract the Avenues from questioning the flaws in their society and justice system. Sixteen-year-old Martha Honeydew lives in the High Rises and is angered by the apathy and injustice plaguing her society. Encouraged by her boyfriend Isaac Paige, a former High Rises boy now residing in the Avenues, Martha fights for a fairer justice system.

*Cell 7* (2016) opens with Martha holding the gun that killed Isaac's adoptive father, Reality TV superstar Jackson Paige. Martha and Isaac had earlier discovered damning evidence of government corruption involving influential citizens like the Prime Minister and Jackson himself. When Jackson realised the young lovers were going public with their evidence, he attacked Martha to silence them. Isaac was forced to shoot and kill Jackson to defend Martha. To save Isaac, Martha falsely confesses that she killed Jackson. Martha is incarcerated on *Death is Justice* and she intends to use her mediated incarceration to publicly expose the government's corruption. She also dreams that when the viewers witness her unjust execution on television, they will be inspired to demand that *Death is Justice* be replaced by a genuinely fair justice system. Right before Martha's scheduled execution, Isaac confesses that he is the

true killer, thus forcing *Death is Justice* to release Martha. In *Day 7* (2017), Isaac is incarcerated on *Death is Justice* and his confession guarantees his execution. Meanwhile, Martha's continued attempts to fight the government makes her a wanted fugitive. While hiding from the law, she must also rescue Isaac by campaigning for his release from *Death is Justice*.

Kerry Drewery represents *Death is Justice* as an amalgamation of various reality-crime formats with clear parallels to programmes like *Crimewatch* and *60 Days In*. *Death is Justice* operates not only as a prison but is also a prison documentary and courtroom reality-crime programme. It incarcerates prisoners in TV studio prison cells monitored by CCTV cameras which provide viewers with 24/7 media coverage. On a prisoner's seventh day, *Death is Justice* invites the public to text or call-in and vote "Guilty" to release prisoners or "Not Guilty" to execute them by electric chair live on national television. Prisoners essentially become Reality TV performers whose incarceration and possible deaths are spectacularised and commodified into entertainment. *Death is Justice* also functions as a news source for viewers to keep abreast with on-going criminal cases. It offers talk show segments for experts to discuss the criminality of prisoners and for viewers to publicly express their moral outrage. *Death is Justice* is thus a sprawling media institution where the condemnatory discourses and neoliberal penalties of the law converge with the entertainment imperatives of reality-crime. The programme generates moral panics towards criminals and then satisfies the retributive desires of an at-risk society with spectacles of televised executions.

That a reality-crime programme like *Death is Justice* can command political and public support as the nation's justice system might seem absurd until one considers the convergence of several factors. These include the evolution of punishment, the influence of neoliberalism, and television's expansion into crime management. I begin first with punishment. In Western societies, the socio-ideological functions of punishment as a disciplinary instrument have changed dramatically. For example, public executions were common punishments during the

eighteenth century. Foucault explains that because crime was perceived as a direct affront against the sovereign's power, the death penalty "constituted the reply of the sovereign to those who attacked his will..." (*History of Sexuality* 137). Thus, the sovereign exercised the right to defend his authority by commanding the criminal's execution as retribution (*Discipline & Punish* 48). The criminal's body became a site upon which the violence of punishment inscribed and articulated the sovereign's will and displeasure. For this reason, executions during the eighteenth-century were held conspicuously on a scaffold in the town square. These executions needed a public audience, for witnessing the criminal's manner of dying was a communal event that communicated the sovereign's power and induced fear to disincentive criminal inclinations in all onlookers (*Discipline & Punish* 58).

The nineteenth century experienced important changes towards "[t]he age of sobriety in punishment" (*Discipline & Punish* 14). As the dynamics of the "punishment-body relation" evolved, the primary purpose of punishment became less about the expression of the sovereign's power and revenge upon the offender's body (*Discipline & Punish* 11). Increasingly, punishment was conducted with less recourse to visible bodily torture and more towards "penal intervention" which sought to touch the body only minimally and emphasised instead correcting and improving the conduct of prisoners to secure their recovery and salvation (*Discipline & Punish* 74). The retributive moralism of punitive techniques was gradually replaced by more scientific corrective methods intended to rehabilitate prisoners (O'Malley 286). Unfortunately, the emphasis on rehabilitation was not to last. The commitment to reformatory and therapeutic techniques for prisoners was eventually abandoned because of their perceived high cost and their purported lack of results in rehabilitating convicts (O'Malley 285; Garland 108). By the 1980s, there was also a "clear sense of the failure of criminal justice agencies" (Garland 108). At-risk neoliberal societies gripped by fears of crime were

increasingly of the opinion that the penal system was too lenient and that the punishments it administered upon criminals needed to be enhanced and seen.

The market pressures exerted by neoliberalism forced the state to ensure that institutions like the police and courts were ‘upgraded’ with corporate managerial practices so that their operations were more competitive, enterprising and profitable in delivering crime management (Garland 116). Rose notes that there was growing consensus that “national governments should no longer aspire to be the guarantor and ultimate provider of security” (*Government & Control* 323). As a result, the private-sector has come to provide their services as legitimate partners in criminal justice. The management of crime and punishment are now increasingly directed by the commercial interests and consumer-oriented agendas of corporations and private agencies (Garland 116). Corporate television broadcasters have benefitted from closer partnerships with law enforcement. Reality-crime in particular has helped to naturalize the appropriateness and even viability of “the mass media as one private sector solution to the ‘law and order’ crisis” (Kohm 194). Reality-crime does not just report or represent crime but is also imbricated in criminal justice. Programmes like *Crimewatch* have positioned themselves as “extensions of the law” because they allow viewers to follow criminal cases and actively encourage viewers to support the police to combat crime by calling-in and reporting criminal sightings (Biressi & Nunn 119).

In the *Cell 7* trilogy, *Death is Justice* owes its creation both to a pronounced neoliberal preference for privatisation and to an at-risk society’s widespread loss of faith in the ability of traditional institutions to defend citizens from criminal threats. The criminal justice system and its judicial and legal institutions were dissolved and replaced with *Death is Justice*, which was installed as the U.K.’s sole law enforcement agency. In *Day 7*, when the Prime Minister discusses Martha and Isaac’s incarceration on *Death is Justice*, he reminds the nation why the former justice system sorely needed to be abolished: “Indeed, one of the many reasons the

courts were dismantled was the constant threat of corruption that could, and did, stop the guilty from being brought to justice” (*Day 7* 28). Similarly, during an interview on *Death is Justice*, ex-judge Cicero admits that the justice system was changed because “Among other arguments the government thought it too expensive to have someone on death row for that length of time” (*Cell 7* 68). Martha and Isaac must pay the ultimate price for their society’s decision to remove the traditional institutions of the law because the delivery of justice by such institution were deemed too untrustworthy and uneconomical.

Martha’s legal counsellor, Eve Stanton, reflects on the path their nation took towards the ‘better’ justice system that *Death is Justice* reputedly embodies:

EVE:...It reminds me also of how, and why, the death penalty has evolved over the years: from the firing squad, to hanging, to electrocution; from years, months and weeks spent in cells to a slim-line seven days...to a sleek, efficient system.  
(*Cell 7* 303)

Eve’s description encapsulates the history of punishment from the eighteenth-century spectacles of executions on the scaffold as Foucault discussed, to penal interventions for reforming prisoners, to the neoliberal market pressures that demand economically efficient punishments through the privatisation of crime management. As *Death is Justice* is owned and produced by the private media company An Eye for An Eye Productions, England’s justice system is now entirely outsourced and managed by the private-sector. *Death is Justice* offers the nation a “sleek, efficient system” that punishes criminals in the most cost-effective manner. The programme replaces the unreliable courts, has compacted prison sentences down to a “slim-line seven days”, and provides quick (and putatively democratic) justice through popular vote. It administers incarceration, interrogation, and execution at television speeds without wasting time or money rehabilitating prisoners. *Death is Justice* exemplifies how the television justice offered by courtroom reality-crime are positioned as legitimate and even desirable privatised alternatives to the law. As Kohm argues, because courtroom reality-crime can

dispense legally binding justice quickly and without recourse to lengthy and expensive court trials, the justice and punishment offered on TV may appear more 'efficient' and appealing compared to the traditional justice system managed by the state (12).

### Punishment as performance.

From the spectacles of public executions to more discreet reformatory penalties, Western society initially appeared on a trajectory away from overtly visible display of vengeful penalties. However, neoliberalism and its associated market pressures and penalties have expedited the return of spectacular punishments through television. Foucault observes that “[t]he art of punishing, then, must rest on a whole technology of representation”, and he elaborates that “[t]here is a whole new arsenal of picturesque punishments” (*Discipline & Punish* 104; 114). Television is one such technology of representation that has made an art of displaying punishments picturesquely (and profitably). As Garland notes, the more extreme penalties like corporal punishment have a distinctly “‘made for television’ quality” (133). As punishment possesses exciting telegenic qualities that have found new purpose on television screens, punishment is not only represented but also “performed” in media culture (Mason 2). Of all television genres, reality-crime arguably plays the most significant role in reviving and commodifying the spectacle and performance of punishment for public consumption and enjoyment (Phillips 671). At-risk societies find catharsis for their fears of crime and emotional validation for their punitive attitudes by watching spectacles of punishment such as the arrest, incarceration and trials of suspects and prisoners on reality-crime.

In *Day 7*, Isaac reflects on the nature of punishment and its intersections with mediation during his own incarceration on *Death is Justice*: “Thousands watched gladiators fight to the death in Rome, flocked to the guillotine in France...Here and now it’s the same, except with a little show business. Some pizzazz and style and a hint of glamour...” (*Day 7* 314-315). Isaac’s observations capture how reality-crime has updated the public display of punishment for the

modern era. By making conspicuously visible those who are in trouble with the law and the punishments they face for their crimes, reality-crime revives and modernises the eighteenth-century pleasures of witnessing public punishments (Jermyn 81). The surveillance and broadcasting technologies of reality-crime now extend the visibility of punishment beyond the scaffold and into every household. The crowd that once gathered in the town square to witness executions has now been replaced by the equally captivated television viewers (Jermyn 81). Isaac's description of *Death is Justice* as "show business" is a reminder of the neoliberal market logics and entertainment imperative of reality-crime. *Death is Justice* acts as a modern theatre for punishment which incorporates style and glamour to make a lucrative business out of screening incarceration and execution.

Nick Couldry strikingly describes neoliberalism as a "system of cruelty" (3). Among neoliberalism's cruelties are its punitiveness and penalties in regards to crime and crime control. Couldry goes on to argue that that "[e]very system of cruelty requires its own theatre", and he identifies Reality TV as one such theatre (3). Couldry explains that the show of playful performances on Reality TV disguises neoliberalism's cruelty as entertainment (3). *Death is Justice* exemplifies how the theatricality of reality-crime can elevate and legitimise the display of neoliberalism's cruelty, punitivism and penalties upon prisoners. The programme's prison system appears modelled on Bentham's panopticon. Foucault describes the panopticon "like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible" (*Discipline & Punish* 200). Imprisoned and rotated through seven cells equipped with a network of surveillance technologies, prisoners on *Death is Justice* are individualised as intensely hyper-visible objects of theatre for the television viewers. When Martha and Isaac enter *Death is Justice*, they become not only the programme's prisoners, but also its Reality TV participants. As Foucault might say, Martha and Isaac experience

“[v]isibility [a]s a trap” (*Discipline & Punish* 200) because on *Death is Justice*, imprisonment is mediated and mediation is imprisonment.

It is in the seventh and final cell that the spectacle of punishment reaches its cinematic climax on *Death is Justice*. Cell seven is equipped with an electric chair and serves as the execution chamber. Inside cell seven, prisoners are encased behind a glass screen and are openly visible to an in-studio viewing area for invited audiences to watch the execution. During Martha’s final hours inside cell seven, she observes: “It’s like a cinema and I’m the film. Live action, hey?” (*Cell 7* 279). Isaac forms a similar impression when he glimpses cell seven’s door: “It looms at the bottom like a gate to heaven. Or hell. Or a theatre door...the public, our audience, wait on the other side for our performance” (*Day 7* 111). Isaac’s observation in particular is reminiscent of Foucault’s description that “the torture of the execution anticipates the punishments of the beyond...it is the theatre of hell” (*Discipline & Punish* 46). Like Foucault’s reference to the hellish theatricality of punishment, *Death is Justice* has designed its apparatuses of punishment to deliver maximum cinematic effects. In their references to cinemas, films and theatres, Martha and Isaac recognise that *Death is Justice* capitalises on transforming into theatre the performance of their ‘final act’: dying.

Besides being a prison documentary and courtroom reality-crime programme, *Death is Justice* incorporates talk show segments filmed in TV studios. On the talk show, the programme’s hosts Kristina and Joshua discuss on-going criminal cases with invited guests, experts, and the in-studio audience. Drewery textually captures *Death is Justice*’s inclination for theatricality and performance through her use of the playscript format as an extraliterary genre. Throughout the trilogy, all chapters depicting the talk show segments of *Death is Justice* are notably structured in playscript format. The conversations between characters are arranged into literal dialogues, while descriptions of actions, emotions and expressions are placed in parentheses. The playscript format also incorporates stage-directions like camera angles, voiceovers and



lighting. Drewery's use of the playscript format to represent *Death is Justice*'s talk show has numerous textual functions and ideological and symbolic implications. Using the playscript format, Drewery textually captures a polyphony of social voices, ideologies and discourses interacting and struggling for dominance on the programme. As part of my analysis of the playscript format, I will discuss the significance of 'play' and 'script'. With reference to the scene below, I analyse how the playscript format reinforces the playful theatricality of *Death is Justice*, and the consequences that this playfulness has for minimising justice.

On weekends, Kristina and Joshua host *Judge Sunday*, in which the theatricality of *Death is Justice* is brought to absurd levels. Sitting in a former courtroom and dressed in mock glasses and a long judge's wig, Kristina explains the rules of *Judge Sunday*:

KRISTINA: Of course, Joshua, in our court on *Judge Sunday*, you must wear a wig.

She passes him a white judge's wig – shorter than her own.  
He smiles, puts it on his head and turns to the camera.

JOSHUA: What do you think, viewers? Does it make me look dapper?

Wolf whistles sound. Joshua strikes poses for them.

KRISTINA (loudly over the whistles): On a serious note, viewers...

(*Cell 7 206*)

Courtroom reality-crime programmes are typically set in simulated courtrooms, use legal paraphernalia, and integrate the judicial system's iconography to confer an appearance of verisimilitude and realism (Phillips 667; Ouellette 152). Similarly, the talk show segments for *Death is Justice* are filmed inside the Old Bailey courthouse. Kristina reminds the viewers that when the courts were closed, the Old Bailey was 'saved' and repurposed into a pseudo-courtroom television studio for *Death is Justice*. The programme's hosts use courtroom items as props to visually reinforce the legality of the programme's staged televisual justice.

However, as the courts were disbanded and replaced by *Death is Justice* itself, the programme must also assert its superiority. The use of stage props and staged performances, from Kristina's mock glasses to Joshua's playful posing, simultaneously demean the legal processes of the former courts while allowing *Death is Justice* to disguise its deadly power behind playacting. Despite their theatrical settings and performances, the injunctions passed in the TV studio of reality courtrooms are "legally enforceable" and so carry genuine authority (Kozinn 4). Similarly, despite its playful hosts and mock settings, the judgements that *Death is Justice* passes upon Martha and Isaac are serious, as Kristina reminds the audience.

Meanwhile, the ideological functions of 'script' in the word 'playscript' can be gleaned from the scene below:

CICERO: (shouting): This makes no sense at all and you are not trying to find out!

Kristina thunders her gavel against the wooden post.

KRISTINA: Order, Mr Cicero, please, order! Or I'll have you ousted from the court!  
(*Cell 7* 212)

Significantly, because the interactions on Reality TV are often perceived as 'unscripted', the playscript format in *Cell 7* helps to demonstrate on a textual level the degree of directorial control that characterises Reality TV. Notably, as the playscript format textually arranges characters in a dialogue, it demonstrates that the dialogues on *Death is Justice* are not truly *dialogic*, but are in fact inflected with power differentials, as ex-judge Cicero experiences. Cicero is one of Martha's allies and he appears on *Death is Justice* to defend her. He criticises the programme for not following the proper legal procedures (or script) in investigating Martha's case. Since Cicero's accusation challenges the validity of the programme's investigation and its justice system, Kristina draws upon the symbolic authority of the court by using the prop gavel to silence him. Kristina as host ensures that all participants conform their

articulations to *Death is Justice*'s neoliberal punitivism. Hence, Kristina threatens to expel Cicero from the 'court' if he continues to stray from the official 'script' by challenging the power and ideological authority of the programme. The playscript format captures how the host of *Death is Justice* exerts control by scripting the justice system with a theatricality that is simultaneously playful and retributive.

### The host.

The host is arguably the most familiar and visible Reality TV convention. Bignell describes the host as a "ringleader" (127); similarly, Lowney compares the host to circus "ringmasters" (16). In his/her role as a performer, the host serves as "an organizing, if not commanding presence" helping to 'set the stage' for the programme (Kilborn 61). The host acts as an ideological agent who facilitates dialogues by encouraging, prompting, and even commanding the invited guests, experts, and in-studio audiences to speak. The host is also a disciplinary presence who polices, intervenes, silences, and even castigates those whose performances and articulations conflict with their programme's core ideologies. To this end, the host not only exerts discursive control by directing and guiding the articulations, confessions, and performances on stage and on camera, the host also controls which ideologies can be acceptably expressed. The host thereby serves as the mouthpiece not only for the programme but also putatively as representatives of popular opinion (Kilborn 69). The host is positioned as offering viewers with "authoritative, credible account of events" to help guide viewers towards making the 'right' ideological judgements and conclusions (Kilborn 117). Nevertheless, the opinions espoused by many hosts tend to be limited to dominant social ideologies or perspectives.

As reality-crime takes a neoliberal tough-on-crime and zero-tolerance stance against criminals, the hosts of reality-crime programmes typically espouse punitive worldviews that support harsh punishments while discouraging tolerance and empathy for criminals. Hosts

draw upon what Lowney calls “facile dichotomies” to heighten the ideological differences and tensions between innocent victims and their criminal victimisers (36). Hosts use such dichotomies to position an oppositional them-versus-us framework with simplistic and morally charged narratives “wherein good versus evil is on stark display” (Phillips 668). As a rule, hosts tend to discursively emphasise victims’ inherent goodness, attractiveness and their vulnerability to evil and sinful perpetrators (Cavender 160). While hosts utilise evocative and emotional language to prompt viewers to identify with victims, they also actively articulate condemnatory discourses and punitive ideologies when describing and framing criminal subjects. Hence, hosts on reality-crime discursively and ideologically position victims and the viewers “as legitimate members of the community”; outside this community are the irredeemable criminals who have violated moral and ideological boundaries (Cavender 160). As their programme’s mouthpieces, hosts guide viewers to distance themselves ideologically and emotionally from criminals. As a consequence, criminals who are represented on reality-crime are further condemned, vilified and marginalised by their societies.

*Death is Justice* is co-hosted by celebrity hosts Kristina Albright and Joshua Decker. Joshua is more sympathetic and tries genuinely to understand Martha and Isaac’s motivations. Joshua eventually becomes one of Martha’s key allies. Meanwhile, Kristina is openly hostile towards Martha, who holds the distinction of youngest prisoner ever incarcerated on the programme. Kristina passionately identifies with *Death is Justice*’s vindictive neoliberal ideologies and she advocates for the punitive treatment of prisoners. As host, Kristina articulates a stream of condemnatory discourses rich with imagery and metaphors that fixated on Martha’s poverty and the supposed corporeality and inevitability of Martha’s adolescent ‘evil’. Kristina constructs a frightening narrative of Martha as a destructive ‘teen killer’ who deserves to be executed. In this sense, Kristina amply fulfils Jon Dovey’s criteria that the broad purpose of the host is to condemn deviance and deviants (117). Another key ideological role that the host

serves is to establish “a moral framework” (Dovey 117). Kristina builds such a moral framework by comparing Martha to her ‘victim’ Jackson as an ideological counterpoint. To heighten the public’s perceptions of Martha’s criminality, Kristina juxtaposes Martha and Jackson as socio-economic, neoliberal and moral opposites. Kristina starts by building an idealised narrative of Jackson’s life:

KRISTINA: He invested his winnings wisely, worked hard  
and took himself out of poverty and became an  
inspiration to all...  
(Cell 7 22)

To reinforce her neoliberal narrative, Kristina plays for the viewers a recording of the eulogy the Prime Minister delivered for Jackson:

PM VOICEOVER: Jackson Paige could have stayed like this, but he chose not to. He grew up in the most terrible circumstances imaginable, but worked to take himself out of squalor and live the life he truly deserved.  
(Cell 7 247)

In their descriptions of Jackson’s life, Kristina and the Prime Minister use decidedly neoliberal language. Words like “invested”, “worked hard” and “chose” are loaded with neoliberal ideologies that promote ambition and personal responsibility. In neoliberal societies, values like hard work, self-responsibility and self-enterprise are highly prized and valorised as desirable traits. Conversely, individuals who are unable to maintain these values risk being perceived as violating not only neoliberal but social and moral boundaries of good conduct. In her role as host for *Death is Justice*, Kristina ideologically elevates neoliberal and upper-middle-class standards, lifestyles and performances as worthy for neoliberal citizens to aspire towards. She valorises Jackson’s autonomy and his determination to improve his life and transcend his poor circumstances through judicious life choices. Reality TV has a tendency to “dazzle people with shortcuts” and so presents “the more dramatic trajectory of people who’ve become suddenly successful or rich” as legitimate pathways that anyone can follow (Deery

151). Ominously, Kristina uses Jackson's rags-to-riches life narrative as a counterpoint for Martha to assert that if attaining wealth is within the individual's power, then remaining in poverty like Martha is indicative of defects in moral character that are dangerously criminal.

By constructing a narrative that celebrates Jackson as a national (and neoliberal) hero, Kristina is able to discursively and ideologically position the working-class and adolescent Martha as the epitome of evil and criminality. The condemnatory discourses and commentaries used by hosts on reality-crime "helps paint a one-dimensional picture of criminals" that position them as essentially evil (Palmer 61). Kristina tells the viewers: "Martha Honeydew may look as sweet as her name suggests, but in reality, is she a cold-hearted killer who has stolen from us one of the most famous and well-loved characters of our time? She says she is" (*Cell 7 28*). While Kristina's question appears open-ended, she ideologically forecloses any possibility for viewers to interpret Martha's identity and actions sympathetically. Instead, Kristina's leading questions invariably guide viewers to perceive Martha with foregone judgements that Martha is naturally and inevitably a "cold-hearted killer" to fear and hate. Kristina exacerbates the at-risk society's fears of crime and victimisation by emphasising that the boundaries between good and evil have been breached. As host, Kristina narrativizes Martha's 'victimisation' of Jackson as proof that good and hard-working neoliberal citizens from the affluent Avenues are under attack from ungovernable and dangerous criminal adolescents from the High Rises.

KRISTINA:...Is she truly guilty as she claims she is? Did she truly steal one of our national treasures from us?

The studio falls quiet. The camera zooms in on Kristina's face – wetness to her eyes, a tremble to her mouth.  
(*Cell 7 207*)

Here the playscript format is especially useful for conveying the host's performative and ideological functions. Like a good ringmaster, Kristina as host delivers an artful performance by making visible on television the nation's communal pain over Jackson's death. Kristina's

tears and trembling mouth are most certainly calculated performances intended to be read as indexical of the nation's shared loss and grief. Significantly, the playscript format conveys the camera's mechanical act of zooming towards her face, thus exposing the production team's strategic editorial choice to sensationalise the host's performance of grief. Kristina's performance and the camera zoom help to direct viewers' interpretations of events by establishing a causal link between the host's visible display of sorrow to Martha as the source of pain. Kristina reiterates that Martha has 'stolen' Jackson from the whole nation. Such criminogenic language emphasises that Martha's crime of murder is compounded by an act of theft. Martha has therefore not only stolen Jackson's life, she has also robbed the nation of their hero and treasure, thus reinforcing that Martha's criminality is grounded in moral *and* financial poverty. To support and reinforce perceptions of Martha's condemned and criminalised identity, the hosts consult various experts as credible authorities on criminal behaviour.

#### The expert.

The law requires that the criminal become "a definite object in the field of knowledge" (*Discipline & Punish* 102) in order for law enforcement and judicial systems to process, discipline and punish criminals more efficiently and economically. Since expertise broadly confers experts with respectability, experts are empowered as credible authorities who can assess and judge the ways in which individuals violate society's ideologies and its standards of normality and morality. Today, experts from diverse disciplines are sought by law enforcement as consultants who contribute their expertise and insights to make the criminal a knowable subject. Experts help produce an "empirical ethnography of crime" so that the police and courts can better judge criminal behaviour from a more scientific basis (*Discipline & Punish* 259). One of the major contributions experts make to the law is identifying, classifying and dividing those with the potential for reform from the criminally incorrigible. Furthermore, in their role as consultants to the law, experts can make recommendations for the incarceration of those

whom they judge “unable to self-govern” (*Powers of Freedom* 147). Hence, experts provide valuable information and risk assessments about the potential threats that criminals pose, which help the state and relevant judicial authorities to decide the fate of criminals.

One group of experts that have developed close working relationships with law enforcement and criminal justice are psychologists. As the psychological sciences have been accorded greater legal-judicial presence, many experts in psychology have moved beyond their medical purview to serve as consultants to courts, prisons and the police (Taylor 404-405). Psychologists provide various law enforcement agencies with scientific evaluations of criminal behaviour and offer insights into the dimensions and pathology of criminality. Hence, in determining the normal from the abnormal, psychologists also articulate, reinforce and police their society’s norms and moral values (Taylor 408). Foucault finds that “[t]he psychiatrist really becomes a judge; he really undertakes an investigation” (*Abnormal* 14). Significantly, psychologists are no longer restricted to merely evaluating but may well also judge an individual’s guilt. In advising law enforcement, psychologists carry significant ideological influence to consign those in trouble with the law to even greater punishment, surveillance and control. Furthermore, experts in psychology are increasingly appearing on the news, talk shows and reality-crime to discuss criminal cases and behaviour (Taylor 405). Troublingly, the prominence of popular psychology and discourses on criminality in at-risk neoliberal societies can confer scientific respectability and legitimacy to moral panics that pathologize criminals.

In *Cell 7*, the hosts of *Death is Justice* invite various experts to discuss, scrutinize, criticise, and pass judgement on Martha:

KRISTINA: Tonight, exclusive to our channel, we are bringing you a panel of experts discussing teen killer Martha Honeydew’s case, and helping you to make an informed decision on how to cast your votes.  
(*Cell 7* 207)



Experts are often invited to speak on Reality TV because their expertise confers a legitimising credibility to Reality TV programmes (Palmer 132). Reality-crime routinely asks experts like psychologists and law enforcement to offer their professional examinations of the criminal's personality and behaviour to make the criminal a legible and knowable subject to viewers. In line with reality-crime's punitive ideologies, experts usually ensure that their discussions on criminality invariably position criminals as violators of social norms and morality. Since *Death is Justice* is a hybrid complex of prison, court and television, experts from different backgrounds are assembled by the programme to speak about Martha's case and explain her criminality to the viewers. On this panel of experts are Penny Drayton, a celebrity "psychologist to the stars" (*Cell* 7 207). There is also corrupt Detective Inspector (DI) Hart of the City's serious crimes squad. These experts are asked to discuss various aspects of Martha's personality and criminality as a teenaged killer. In so doing, they discursively and ideologically pronounce and produce an intensely criminalised identity for Martha. Their expert opinions and punitive attitudes towards crime have serious ideological ramifications for how the public will perceive Martha as they vote 'Guilty' or 'Not Guilty' at her execution.

When celebrity psychologist Penny Drayton is asked to comment, she assesses Martha's past to locate damning proof of Martha's inherent criminal tendencies:

JOSHUA: What do you think could be this young lady's motivation to kill Jackson Paige?

DRAYTON: One does not need to reach far back in time to discover what is most likely Miss Honeydew's motivation for such an act. If we examine her childhood we can see the chaos she has had to endure. A father who disappeared before her birth, a mother who left her to fend for herself day after day... claiming to be working when in fact she was out meeting men.

(*Cell* 7 211)

As Foucault notes, psychiatrists "have made the family the privileged locus...for the disciplinary question of the normal and the abnormal" (*Discipline & Punish* 216). Similarly, Anita Harris explains that environmental factors like broken families, inadequate parenting,

and low-income communities are largely attributed and blamed as factors that can corrupt good behaviour and breed criminal inclinations (24). In the public's imagination, youths who inhabit such environments are at risk of being conditioned to become a criminal risk to others (Harris 24). Worryingly, girls who live in such conditions are especially vulnerable to being sweepingly designated as "bad" (Harris 147). Modern understandings of normality for femininity still retain Victorian standards which expect virtue from girls and women; any departure from these norms is characterised as 'deviant' and hence elicits "hostile censure" from moral authorities like experts (Jewkes 123). Penny Drayton's choice of word "examine" in relation to Martha is particularly significant. Drayton is ideologically empowered by her expertise as a psychiatrist "to reconstitute all the sordid details of a life in the form of knowledge", as Foucault might say (*Discipline & Punish* 252). She therefore embarks on an examination of Martha's life history to excavate the sordid roots of Martha's 'criminality'.

Drayton's examination of Martha's personal history and family background is discursively and ideologically laden with neoliberal punitivism and condemnation. Drayton forwards "a biographical knowledge" (*Discipline & Punish* 252) of Martha as an adolescent delinquent whose 'unsavoury' upbringing produced criminal tendencies that violate neoliberal standards of good conduct and personal responsibility. In Drayton's expert opinion, the poverty-stricken High Rises community that Martha hails from is a hotbed primed for producing criminally violent adolescents. Furthermore, Drayton directs neoliberal condemnation towards Martha's deceased mother, Beth Honeydew. Although Drayton's claims that Beth left Martha unattended to have sexual affairs while pretending to work are patently false, Drayton's assessment is nonetheless damaging to Martha's identity. Arguably few behaviours are more odious to at-risk neoliberal societies than a mother pretending to work to cover her sexual licentiousness and neglect, and Martha is positioned as a product of such monstrous upbringing. By blaming Beth, Drayton helps the viewers to establish a causal link between Beth's 'abnormal' maternal

and neoliberal failures and the inevitability of Martha's adolescent criminality. Concluding her assessment of Martha, Drayton declares: "All leading to a tremendously unstable young lady... How all these events must have affected her personality is fascinating" (*Cell* 7 211).

Foucault remarks that experts speaking on penal cases tend to focus on aspects of criminals' lives which are not technically unlawful, but which are nonetheless transformed into narratives to explain delinquent behaviour: "...the aim is to show how the individual already resembles his crime before he has committed it" (*Abnormal* 12). Similarly, although none of the aspects of Martha's homelife that Drayton discusses are technically illegal, Drayton asserts that Martha's poor upbringing significantly pre-disposed her towards immorality and later murderous criminality. Drayton's position as expert gives her ideological authority to pronounce a criminalised biography for Martha and by so doing, she gives scientific credibility and support to the criminalised identity that *Death is Justice* is constructing for Martha. Drayton supplies an explanation to those viewers seeking answers for how a young girl like Martha could be driven to murder: "...she saw the lifestyle of the rich and the famous and focused her attention on them. She lured Jackson Paige there to his death" (*Cell* 7 211). Drayton creates a terrifying narrative of predatory working-class adolescents from the High Rises murdering Avenues residents, further fuelling the fears of an at-risk society that is already anxious both about crime and adolescents.

Another expert on the panel assembled by *Death is Justice* to discuss Martha's criminality is Detective Inspector Hart, who is the lead police investigator on the Honeydew-Paige murder case. Officers of the law are naturally a prominent presence on reality-crime programmes. The subgenre is a cultural site where the "police-media" symbiosis is not only abundantly evident but is also openly celebrated (Palmer 45). The close ideological alliances between law enforcement and reality-crime ensures that reality-crime programmes are a "safe haven for the police" to share their views and ideologies about crime (Jewkes 175). Law enforcement

understand that no matter how punitive the opinions they articulate are, reality-crime programmes will rarely question or undermine police authority and perspectives on crime. The police have learned to capitalize on television as a platform for teaching the public about criminals, including how to identify criminals, the security risks criminals pose, and to harden the public against criminals (Palmer 16). DI Hart uses his appearance on *Death is Justice* as an opportunity to openly verbalise anti-crime discourses and zero-tolerance ideologies that encourage public support for harsher punishment for juvenile criminals like Martha. When Hart enters the stage on *Death is Justice*, he is described thusly:

A broad man in a crisp, blue uniform, shiny epaulettes and a row of medals strides out and takes his place. His expression is blank. His eyes are cold. The applause from the studio audience quietens slightly.

(*Cell 7 207*)

Dressed in his blue uniform to represent the ‘thin blue line’ of the law, Hart’s commanding presence exerts an immediate effect over the normally vocal studio audience, whose silence acknowledges his disciplinary authority. Interestingly, law enforcement who appear on Reality TV are increasingly adopting the discursive practices of entertainment by speaking in ways that emphasise the drama, spectacle and excitement of crime-fighting. Hart asserts a shockingly bloodthirsty neoliberal ideology of just desserts that approves of Martha’s spectacular and impending execution. He declares that “Martha Honeydew is as cold-hearted as they come and she deserves to die!” (*Cell 7 213*). He also promises the viewers that “...I’ll be there in two days’ time watching the electricity ripping through her and frying her brain like she *deserves*” (*Cell 7 212*). Hart’s repetition of and emphasis on the word “deserves” clearly articulates that by the punitive neoliberal rationalities of the at-risk society, criminals like Martha must be made responsible for their actions, and she deserve to receive the full weight of the law’s discipline and punishment. Hart’s authority as law enforcement and his neoliberally charged

invectives against Martha have the dangerous power to ideologically sway how the public will vote at Martha's scheduled execution.

Aside from the panel of experts, *Death is Justice* invites other distinguished guests to offer their expert insights on Martha. Hosts Kristina and Joshua introduce to the viewers the editor-in-chief of the popular newspaper *National News*, Albert DeLonzo. As a prominent media figure, DeLonzo has power to shape Martha's public image and identity. He also influences public opinions and feelings towards Martha by tapping into the at-risk society's fears of crime and of criminal adolescents. Social fears of adolescents as prone to criminality stem from "stereotypical depictions of unruly youth" who are represented as "dangerous predators and incorrigible career criminals" (Garland 10). There is a prevailing anxiety that society is in dire need of protection from badly behaved youth and delinquent girls in particular (Harris 29). DeLonzo aggravates the growing moral panics surrounding Martha by describing the murder of Jackson Paige as "A senseless killing by a *child*, no less – a *girl*, who, by society's expectations, should be in the prime of her innocence" (Cell 7 162). As youths are traditionally cherished as innocents, DeLonzo establishes for the viewers that Jackson's murder is especially heinous precisely because it was committed by a female adolescent. Martha's actions thereby violate all social expectations and standards for 'good' girlhood.

Next, DeLonzo has *Death is Justice* project on-screen two images of Martha for the viewers to compare and contemplate:

On the screen two photographs appear. On the left, Martha in her school uniform: freckles, a smile, and her long hair tied back. On the right, a police mug-shot of her: white prison overalls, a tear-streaked face and a newly shaven head.

(Cell 7 162)

DeLonzo refers to the two photographs of Martha as "school-girl Martha and Murderer Martha" (Cell 7 163). By juxtaposing the two photographs, DeLonzo makes visible for the

viewers Martha's apparent and alarming devolution, which reinforces what Lawrence Grossberg calls the "assum[ption] that the default position for kids was violence/prison" (4). DeLonzo verbally and visually frames Martha as a delinquent girl whose life trajectory has led her from an innocent schoolgirl into a violent adolescent super-predator who is now behind bars and destined for execution. His descriptions of Martha are full of condemnatory discourses and punitive ideologies which support the moral panics that *Death is Justice* is building and directing towards Martha. He uses Martha as a broad stereotype for youths from the High Rises and he asks the viewers this question: "...what does the future hold for us?" (*Cell* 7 163). DeLonzo urges the viewers to think seriously about what will happen if society allows such a generation of dangerous youths to grow and grow up. The implication of DeLonzo's question is that unless the viewers take decisive action to vote 'Guilty' for Martha to ensure her execution, society will forever be held hostage by the threat of adolescent criminals.

Later in *Day 7*, *Death is Justice* host Joshua admits to the viewers that even after consulting various experts, he still feels conflicted about Martha and Isaac's morally complex case. To help clear any similar confusion of ideology and perspective that the public may share, Joshua welcomes the Prime Minister (PM) onto the programme: "And where better to look for clarification than to the top, to our leader, our Prime Minister..." (*Day* 7 79). Although the PM may not be a traditional expert, he is the highest authority in the nation, so his official discourses and personal opinions about crime help guide the public towards making the 'right' decisions as they vote for Isaac, who is now on death-row on *Death is Justice*. Garland remarks that when politicians speak about crime on television, they tend to present themselves as "more populist, more emotive, more evidently in tune with public feeling" to gain public support (157). Speaking to the nation on *Death is Justice*, the PM promises that "...the safety of the public is paramount, and I will do whatever it takes to ensure that" (*Day* 7 83). His passionate

declaration that his administration will protect the public from criminals appeals directly to the at-risk society's fears.

PM (louder): Who wants to live in a society where our children cannot walk home safely from the shops?...Where gangs of youths sit on street corners terrorising passers-by? Not me, I say. And not on my watch!  
(*Day 7* 83).

Although the PM addresses the nation, his speech is calibrated towards stoking the moral panics felt by the Avenues. The PM skilfully exploits their growing anxiety and anger towards adolescents like Martha and Isaac. To galvanise political support from the rich citizens of the Avenues, the PM expresses punitive crime-management ideologies that resonate with their fears of crime, and he intentionally uses emotive language to paint youths as terrifying threats whose mere presence endangers innocent citizens on the streets, as happened to Jackson when he fell 'victim' to Martha and Isaac. The PM then makes abundantly clear to the viewers that his administration takes a hard-line and zero-tolerance stance against juvenile criminals. He declares that youths will not be allowed to terrorise others on his "watch", which is a particularly telling word. As numerous scholars have noted, adolescents today find themselves increasingly enmeshed in more pervasive networks of security and surveillance that are designed to make their movements, habits, and bodies trackable and visible to the authorities (Grossberg 52; Taylor & Rooney 1). *Death is Justice* serves as an important crime-management apparatus because it makes prisoners like Martha and Isaac perpetually watchable so the state and the public will always know their whereabouts.

The PM also frightens the public with the grave risks to society if they vote to release Isaac from death-row, or if they allow the newly released Martha to remain free among them:

PM: Would you set a tiger free from the zoo, telling people that it may well have teeth but it most probably won't use them? And would you then let that tiger wander the same streets as your family? Would you take a spider from the confines of its vivarium, knowing it to be lethal but trusting it to always be calm even as it crawls over you and and your children? No, you would not.

(Day 7 83)

In most moral panics about crime, connotations of deviance are typically grounded in the bodily nature of the criminal's presumed "animality" (Jewkes 86). Similarly, reality-crime programmes tend to use "[c]onnotatively rich corporeal descriptions" that locate malevolence in the criminal's body (Glynn 36). Page and Ouellette have likewise found that official commentaries and narratives on prison-themed reality-crime regularly compare inmates to zoo animals (130). Speaking on *Death is Justice*, the PM's discourses are rich in adjectives that describe an identity of ungovernable and untameable adolescent animality inherent to Martha and Isaac's nature. To amplify the already palpable moral panics, the PM conjures images of Martha and Isaac crawling over and consuming the public. *Death is Justice* is likened by the PM to a zoo or a vivarium that safely contains criminal predators for the public's protection and even viewing pleasure. The PM then asks if the nation is willing to free criminals, before answering on the public's behalf: "No, you would not" (Day 7 83). As the nation's highest authority, the PM sets the ideological and moral agenda: good neoliberal citizens who take responsibility for themselves, their families and communities will never free adolescent criminals whose bestial impulses situate them beyond redemption, rehabilitation, and release.

#### The confession.

The confession plays a pivotal role in criminal justice, is featured prominently on reality-crime, and is another major disciplinary technique on *Death is Justice*. To contextualise the historical importance and functions of the confession, I turn to Foucault's discussion of the confession. Foucault observes that "[w]e have since become a singularly confessing society" (*The History of Sexuality* 59). Foucault explains that the confession is a key component for both "the production of truth" as well as "the procedures of individualization by power" in Western societies (*The History of Sexuality* 58). In most confessions, the confessor as speaking subject "is also the subject of the statement" (*The History of Sexuality* 59). Through the act of



confessing about themselves, the confessor putatively produces and articulates truths and knowledge about their selves. As the confessor reveals his/her private and psychological interiorities to others, the confessor avows and authenticates his/her own experiences. Hence, the act of confession individualises the confessor and renders him/her a knowable subject to those others listening to the confession. Confession can occur in private or in public, and one can confess about practically anything: “one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles...” (*The History of Sexuality* 59).

The confession is held in high esteem by criminal justice. Foucault argues that through the confession, “the accused himself took part in the ritual of producing penal truth” about him/herself (*Discipline & Punish* 38). In this sense, the confessor is made to “herald” their own guilt by proclaiming the truth of their crimes (*Discipline & Punish* 43). Hence, the confession compels the confessor to implicate him/herself through their own articulations and in the sharing of personal information and secrets. For those authorized by the law to listen to confessions, such as the police, judges, and legal experts, the confession is an invaluable technique of power that helps them to uncover secrets and determine truths and guilt so that they might pronounce salvation or judgement upon the confessor. Dovey notes that “the legal injunction to speak” has become so integral to the U.K.’s legal system that in the 1990s, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act rescinded the suspect’s rights to silence and privacy (103-104). This development was troubling and problematic because the refusal to speak has been reworked to imply guilt, thereby prejudicing law enforcement, the media, and the public to associate those who want to keep their silence as guilty of hiding truth.

The confession is arguably the most damning televisual technique that *Death is Justice* employs to discipline and punish its prisoners. This is because the confession involves prisoners discursively incriminating themselves, thereby legitimising their incarceration and execution. In *Cell 7*’s prologue, Martha is caught holding the (literally) smoking gun that killed

Jackson. When the police arrest her, their body-cameras record her confessing: “‘I did it!’ I shout. ‘I shot him! I killed Jackson Paige’” (*Cell 7 2*). *Death is Justice* acquires the police recording and broadcasts it for the public to witness evidence of Martha’s admission of guilt. However, Martha challenges the confession’s power and purpose by strategically choosing what to reveal and conceal. The confession and its production of penal truths are problematised by Martha precisely because Martha’s avowal of her ‘crime’ is actually the only crime she is genuinely guilty of: a false confession. If the guilty must openly proclaim the guilt of their crimes, then Martha problematises and manipulates the confession as a disciplinary technique of power. Her avowal not only conceals the truly guilty (Isaac), it is also intended to ensure her incarceration, which she plans to use to publicly confess the real truth: the government’s rampant corruption. In Chapter four, I will discuss more fully how Martha integrates the confession into her resistance.

During a debate between the panel of experts on *Death is Justice*, DI Hart and ex-judge Cicero argue about the confession’s value in determining guilt:

CICERO: You’re assuming she’s guilty when all she is, is *accused*.  
What happened to innocent until  
PROVEN guilty?

DI HART: She’s as guilty as they come. My men caught her.  
She’s admitted it. What more do you want?

CICERO (shouting): EVIDENCE! I want EVIDENCE!  
Proof, for God’s sake!

Joshua taps his gavel gently on the wood. The guests stop and turn. He smiles.  
(*Cell 7 209*)

The confession has proven well-adapted for the changes that criminal justice has experienced under the market pressures of neoliberalism. For *Death is Justice*, the confession facilitates expedited policing that is economical and efficient. As the guilty admit their wrongdoings, this allows the police like DI Hart to reach judgements of criminality immediately, thereby making

costly investigations unnecessary. Foucault points out that the confession has been so elevated by the law that "...the confession had priority over any other kind of evidence" (*Discipline & Punish* 38). For law enforcement, the confession is a self-testimony that produces the truth of one's guilt. Thus, the confession holds substantial discursive and legal power to generate indelible criminalised identities for those who confess their guilt like Martha has. Hart is clearly aligned with this perspective as he argues that the moment Martha verbalised her guilt to the police, she instantly criminalised herself. When Cicero counters that the police must investigate beyond taking Martha's word literally, Joshua demonstrates the host's ideological power to control dialogue and debate. Using his prop gavel, Joshua acts as court judge to silence the ex-judge and prevent Cicero from further revealing the confession's fallibilities as a juridico-discursive method to determine truth and guilt.

While the confession in Western societies originated from the pastoral practices of Christianity, it has been repurposed for its starring role on Reality TV. The confession is a popular Reality TV technique because the act of publicly disclosing one's private life and sharing one's thoughts and secrets guarantees the drama of emotionality. As the confession is important to criminal justice, the confession is naturally prominent on reality-crime. On reality-crime, individuals have the opportunity to open up about their "deep wounds" (Kozinn 112). Victims of crime and the families of victims can share with the viewers the pain of their trauma. Similarly, the guilty have a rare opportunity to share their life's hardships, to explain to the public their motivations for committing crime, and to express any regrets and remorse they feel. On reality-crime, the confession operates as a neoliberal technique because it compels the guilty to take responsibility for themselves. In the act of confessing their wrongs on-camera, the confessor takes ownership of their misdeeds. In so doing, they may experience catharsis; they sometimes receive guidance and intervention from the experts on reality-crime; there

might even be the small possibility for them to earn public forgiveness from the viewers (Kozinn 112).

Foucault states that “...one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile...” (*History of Sexuality* 61). In *Cell 7*, Martha has the dubious honour of being the first prisoner on *Death is Justice* to encounter an A.I. system called the virtual counsellor, which is in the literal sense a virtual presence and partner in the confession. With unlimited access to criminal and public databases, the virtual counsellor is an omniscient interlocuter. Hence, the system speaks to Martha as a collective ‘we’. It is also a cost-efficient neoliberal invention as it combines the expertise of the chaplain, therapist and legal counsellor in one entity. *Death is Justice* thus saves costs by doing away with hiring these professionals. The virtual counsellor requires Martha to confess to it: “...we can help you deal with your emotions and thus share your problems, feelings and secrets.” (*Cell 7* 228). As the authority requiring the confession, the virtual counsellor claims to prescribe everything from spiritual guidance to psychological therapy to help Martha unburden herself and prepare for her execution.

*Death is Justice* capitalises on the confession for its emotionality and dramaturgical potential. Martha is made to confess to the virtual counsellor in a small room equipped with CCTV cameras, reminiscent of the diary or confession rooms popular across Reality TV. In order to entertain the viewers and also enlighten them about herself, Martha is instructed by the virtual counsellor to answer a battery of questions pertaining to her life, her crime, and her feelings about her impending execution. By confessing, Martha may reveal remorse or potentially incriminate herself even further and alienate herself from the viewers if she expresses deviant perspectives such as enjoyment in killing Jackson. Here the confession operates as a neoliberal technique on two levels. For Martha, the confession compels her to take personal responsibility

for her crime. Just as significantly, the confession allows the viewers to act as self-responsible neoliberal citizens. Since viewers are empowered by *Death is Justice* to vote to release or execute its prisoners, they need to cast their votes judiciously. Hence, viewers require an in-depth understanding into Martha's mental and moral conditions. The confession forces Martha to make herself knowable so the viewers can better judge whether to save or exterminate her.

Foucault remarks that since the Middle Ages, confession has been accompanied and supported by its "shadow": torture (*History of Sexuality* 59). Foucault elaborates that "[w]hen it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat..." (*History of Sexuality* 59). Today, however, forced confessions through threats are not admissible evidence in the courts of democratic nations. Nevertheless, just as *Death is Justice* resurrects the spectacle of punishment, the programme also returns torture to the confession. Interestingly, while *Death is Justice* spectacularises executions by broadcasting prisoners' deaths on the electric chair, the programme subtly hides the tortures it inflicts upon prisoners during their weeklong incarceration. Martha experiences the convergence of torture and confession during her encounter with the virtual counsellor. Initially, Martha defies the virtual counsellor by refusing to engage with it. As a mute confession makes for dull television, *Death is Justice* intervenes by using physical violence to incentivise Martha to speak and facilitate 'dialogue'. The lights in the confession room are cut and guards enter unseen to assault Martha. Torture thus returns as the shadow of confession, taking place in darkness so that the viewers cannot see Martha being beaten on-screen.

Compelled through physical force to speak to the virtual counsellor, Martha complains about her ill-treatment on *Death is Justice*. The virtual counsellor remarks:

'We are sorry to hear that. Although we sense your problem derives from a subjective point of view-'

'Subjective point of view and bloody *torture*.'

(*Cell* 7 229)

Throughout the *Cell 7* trilogy, Drewery plays with varying depths of narration and focalisation. Generally, first-person narration in YA fiction aligns readers intimately with the sensations, perspectives and ideologies of the adolescent narrator while third-person narration may result in a sense of perspectival and ideological distancing. Martha's chapters are predominantly narrated in first-person where she takes an 'I' position central to the narrative. However, in certain chapters, such as when Martha encounters the virtual counsellor, the narrative is told in third-person. As Martha is not the dominant textual voice in this chapter, third-person narration opens her to certain textual vulnerabilities. Just as darkness prevents viewers from seeing Martha being tortured during her confession session with the virtual counsellor, the narrative shift to third-person similarly leaves readers 'in the dark'. Thanks to the shift to third-person narration, readers lack direct access to Martha's mind and can only infer that Martha is being tortured in the dark because the narrative hints at it obliquely. Insidiously, the virtual counsellor insists that the "bloody torture" which Martha says are being inflicted upon her are really her own "subjective point of view" rather than verifiable facts that the viewers and the readers can know for certain.

#### Channelling public outrage.

The primary goal for *Death is Justice* throughout *Cell 7* is to secure Martha's execution by ensuring that the viewers vote 'Guilty' for her. The programme works relentlessly to convince the viewers of the threat to public safety that Martha represents as a destructive teenaged murderer. In so doing, *Death is Justice* simultaneously exploits the fears of crime felt by an at-risk society and generates intense moral panics around Martha as a teenaged killer. To gauge public sentiment and to determine how the viewers will vote, hosts Kristina and Joshua invite the viewers to call-in or text their comments about Martha: "Well, viewers, it's *your* opinions we'd like to hear on this. What do *you* think?" (*Cell 7* 271). As Garland explains, social outrage

and anger are manifestations of social fears and anxieties, and “the open expression of these emotions” is often felt to be cathartic and therapeutic (145). Similarly, *Death is Justice* presents itself as an avenue where the viewers can publicly vent their anger and disgust against Martha as the source of their collective insecurities and fears about crime. Just hours before Martha’s scheduled execution, Kristina and Joshua read aloud the viewers’ comments about Martha that *Death is Justice* has received:

JOSHUA: Take a look at some of these – ‘She should rot in hell,’ says Tony. ‘How can a teenager be so evil?’ asks Chandra. ‘Society should be ashamed of itself for letting immorality breed,’ ... ‘What can society expect but wanton death and destruction when our morals have been in decline for so many years?...  
(Cell 7 270)

Dovey states that criminality is often represented pathologically “as a disease or virus infecting particular individuals” (95). Tyler argues that “the communication of disgust draws heavily on metaphors of sensation”, in words and phrases that convey the physicality of disgust (19). More specifically, Jewkes says that females who have transgressed are positioned as “doubly deviant and doubly damned” because they have not only violated the law but also social expectations of ‘good’ femininity (140). Consequently, the media tends to represent such transgressing females as caricatures or even monsters, thereby denying them their humanity (Jewkes 140). To *Death is Justice* and many of its viewers, Martha is triply deviant because she is an adolescent, female, and working-class killer. Thus positioned, Martha violates expectations of youthful and female innocence while reinforcing fears of the poor High Rises as violent. The viewers’ comments about Martha contain dehumanising words of emotional repulsion that cast aspersions on Martha’s physical and moral interiority. Words like “rot” fixate on the decomposition of the body while implying a similar internal decomposition of Martha’s character; meanwhile, “breed” and “wanton” connote an undisciplined and

ungovernable female sexual appetite that can turn into “death and destruction”, as Jackson supposedly experienced by her hand.

While Martha is spared from listening to the viewers’ hateful comments, Isaac is forced by *Death is Justice* to listen to the public’s opinions about him during his incarceration in *Day 7*. As Jackson Paige’s adopted son, Isaac is a celebrity with a positive public image prior to his confession and incarceration. *Death is Justice* combines the expression of public opinion with the confession when it holds a competition to give viewers more intimate access by calling-in to speak with Isaac from his cell. The competition opens the confession into a conversation for viewers to ask Isaac questions about himself and share with Isaac their thoughts about him as a celebrity on death-row. Host Joshua claims the competition will provide greater insights into Isaac’s personality to help viewers decide how to vote for Isaac: ““This is a not-to-be-missed chance to understand the inner workings of a murderer’s mind”” (*Day 7* 307). Dovey notes that “...Foucault’s confession is now dispersed...within television” (108). Similarly, *Death is Justice* disperses the confession by allowing viewers across the nation to participate as remote interlocutors who can interrogate Isaac on television, thus forcing him to confess and disclose details about himself in degrading dialogues with unseen strangers.

A viewer named Elspeth asks Isaac if he would change anything in his past. Isaac admits:

‘Nothing,’ I say.  
‘Nothing? What, *nothing*?’ she says.  
(*Day 7* 318)

Elspeth is from the Avenues and she exhibits the Avenues’ insecurity, at-risk mentality and punitivism. During their televised conversation, Elspeth shares that she initially planned to vote ‘Not Guilty’ for Isaac ““because you are, like, *famous*...”” (*Day 7* 320). However, Isaac’s refusal to admit remorse for killing Jackson and his declaration of love for Martha outrages Elspeth’s moral sensibilities. Elspeth is certain that she speaks for the entire nation when she



tells Isaac that: “...You really are a cold-hearted murderer who deserves to die” (*Day 7* 320). Individuals like Elspeth and the viewers who sent *Death is Justice* their hate-filled comments about Martha demonstrate how the programme’s condemnatory discourses and punitive ideologies have become intrinsic to their worldviews. Having determined that Isaac remains unrepentant, Elspeth decides that Isaac cannot be released into society. Hence, she expresses on national television that the right choice is to vote ‘Guilty’ to execute the patricidal adolescent. As Kristina promises the viewers, “You are judge, juror and even *executioner* now” (*Cell 7* 340). How the Avenues will vote depends heavily on their perceptions of Martha and Isaac, and *Death is Justice* has trained viewers from the Avenues to believe that it is their national and neoliberal duty to eliminate these dangerous criminal youths.

#### Chapter conclusion.

In this chapter, I examined *Death is Justice* as a reality-crime programme that provides privatised and mediated televisual justice. The overt punitivism that characterises *Death is Justice* can be contextualised by examining the U.K.’s socio-political climate during the mid-1980s when reality-crime emerged. Thatcher’s Conservative party’s neoliberal law-and-order politics were widely embraced by an at-risk neoliberal society that felt fearful about crime. Simultaneously, society began viewing adolescents more suspiciously and adolescents became the subject of moral panics. Adolescents are increasingly targeted by the law’s retributive punishments. *Death is Justice* embodies the neoliberal privatisation of legal institutions and the corporatisation of criminal justice. By broadcasting executions, *Death is Justice* transforms spectacles of punishment into profitable performances.

I also examined how *Death is Justice* employs hosts, experts and the confession as televisual conventions that support the programme’s efforts to construct criminalised identities for Martha and Isaac. In so doing, *Death is Justice* exploits and aggravates the at-risk neoliberal society’s fears of criminal youths. The programme’s power to discursively and ideologically

shape criminalised identities for Martha and Isaac is life-threatening because its viewers react fearfully and angrily to these media-constructed identities as they vote to execute both adolescents. While *Death is Justice* as reality-crime expresses neoliberalism's punitivism upon adolescents, in the next chapter, I analyse YA novels in which neoliberalism is incorporated into dangerous games for youths to play.

## Chapter 2

### Playing Neoliberal Games: Game-docs that Govern Competitive Adolescent Identities in *Surviving Antarctica*, *Nerve* and *The Last One*.

In chapter two, I consider YA novels that depict young adult protagonists playing on game documentaries (henceforth game-docs). The focus YA novels for this chapter are Andrea White's *Surviving Antarctica* (2005), Jeanne Ryan's *Nerve* (2012), and Alexandra Oliva's *The Last One* (2016). In these novels, young adults either willingly enter or are forced by circumstance to compete in game-docs. Game-docs like *Historical Survivor* in *Surviving Antarctica* and *In the Dark* in *The Last One* are closely based on the wilderness and survival format. Meanwhile, *NERVE* in *Nerve* resembles a game of truth or dare. While their various settings, tasks and challenges are different, each of these game-docs involve pitiless competitions that subject participants to immense physical danger and psychological duress for the entertainment of viewers. Another similarity between these three novels is that they depict societies which have distinctly neoliberal and ludic inclinations. The neoliberal mentalities and the impulses of play that shape daily life in these societies are incorporated into the extreme competitions of game-docs. The adolescents in these novels desperately want to change their life circumstances, so they accept the risks of competition in the hope that playing games will improve their lives.

Of the three Reality TV subgenres that I evaluate in this thesis, the game-doc subgenre is arguably the most visibly aligned with the free market. My goal for this chapter is to examine how the game-docs represented in the novels function as neoliberal apparatuses that use play and games to endorse market rationalities and train participants into competitive players and neoliberal subjects. To understand the ways that these game-docs operate, I consider how neoliberalism's relationship with the market affects citizens on a personal level. As all three

novels are set in the United States, my discussion of neoliberalism in this chapter refers specifically to neoliberalism within an American context. I consider how at the turn of the twenty-first century, the corporate state facilitated neoliberalism's aggressive promotion of privatisation, public-private partnerships and market competition in America. These neoliberal conditions have also exacerbated widespread economic precarities and social inequalities that have left many citizens struggling to survive. I discuss how neoliberalism turns the precarities that it causes into 'opportunities' for individuals to learn to govern themselves as neoliberal subjects. Individuals in neoliberal societies are compelled to practice key neoliberal mentalities that include taking personal responsibility, being self-enterprising and competitive, and showing a willingness to take risks.

I also note that the societies depicted in the novels are not only neoliberal, but also demonstrably ludic. As such, I consider how as neoliberal societies have become increasingly ludic, they have grown inclined towards harnessing the principles of play across diverse areas and activities. Game-docs are especially prominent cultural sites that reflect the convergence of the neoliberal and the ludic. The competition structures, rules, and rewards of game-docs extensively reflect and endorse the neoliberal conditions of privatisation, competition and precarity into game formats. In the selected novels, the ultra-competitive and precarious arenas of game-docs demand that adolescent participants govern themselves as self-reliant and self-enterprising players who demonstrate strategic-thinking, an openness to risk-taking, and a desire to compete and win. In addition, I am interested in the way the novels utilise narrative strategies to depict how young adult participants are interpellated with neoliberal ideologies and discourses at various stages before, during and even after the game. The novels demonstrate remarkably sophisticated and creative usage of extraliterary genres, multi-voiced narration, and varying depths of focalisation to symbolically and textually convey the extent

that adolescent protagonists ideologically accept or reject the neoliberal market logics and discourses that they receive as they compete on game-docs.

### Neoliberalism: the corporate state and precarity.

Neoliberal governmentality in the U.S. is characterised by an open preference for limited state power and a strong emphasis on privatisation (Davidson 57; Ventura 2). Wide-scale deregulation and corporatisation of the public-sector and the corresponding dominance of corporations and business interests are other hallmarks of neoliberalism in the U.S. (Ventura 38). Under neoliberalism, the state is expected to ensure that the services offered by its institutions are revenue-generating and competitive in the marketplace (Ouellette & Hay 38). Public dissatisfaction has deepened over perceptions of the state's general "ineffectiveness" and bloated administrative costs (Ouellette & Hay 19). Giroux remarks that "big government is disparaged as inefficient, monopolistic, incompetent" (590 *Beyond*). For Rose, widespread criticisms of the state locate a distinct lack of enterprise, competitiveness and profitability in the management of state institutions (*Inventing our Selves* 154). In neoliberal societies like the U.S., the state's authority and legitimacy to govern rest heavily on the state's capacity to sustain a dynamic economy (Brown 40). Amidst heated criticisms of its deficiencies, the state now prioritises profit-earning and cost-saving measures for its institutions. State institutions have therefore progressively developed stronger relationships and partnerships with the private-sector. As such, the U.S. is considered a corporate state.

Since the mid-1970s, the American political landscape has significantly restructured and privatised into the corporate state that it is today (Giroux 70). Schram points out that "[g]overnment programs are now run more like businesses" (318). Around the 1980s, "new public management" styles, business practices, and corporate discourses were imported from the private-sector and popularized as templates for state institutions to model their

administrative operations upon (Davies 274). The private-sector's performance-based indices, cost-benefit analyses and managerial ethos were increasingly utilised by the state to evaluate and manage the public-sector, with significant socio-economic ramifications (Brown 40; Giroux 150). During George W. Bush's presidency that defined the twenty-first century's first decade, the White House pursued an aggressive neoliberal governmentality that implemented "radical deregulation" and accelerated the private-sector's expansion (Giroux 4). Pressured to maximise the profitability and competitiveness of its institutions, the state justified political decisions and policies that pruned 'unprofitable' or costly expenditures. The Bush administration reduced federal expenditures by ruthlessly slashing its budget for public education, food programmes and medical care (Giroux 4). Welfare and other state support systems were thoroughly underfunded or disbanded as the state largely abandoned its pastoral duties of providing care for the population (Ventura 23).

The neoliberal imperative to prioritise the market, privatise the state, and reduce welfare resulted in serious socio-economic and personal precarities and risks for citizens. Among the continuing challenges that citizens in the U.S. struggle with are high unemployment, rampant bankruptcy, personal debt, foreclosures, and a deepening credit crisis (Graham 9; Giroux 2; Redden 402). Navarro attributes neoliberal practices and policies as "responsible for a substantial growth of social inequalities" (47). Neoliberalism is primarily blamed for triggering the 2007/2008 Great Recession, the U.S.'s worst financial crisis of the twenty-first century (Mavelli 489). When the Great Recession struck, the U.S. government offered generous bailouts to conglomerates (Mavelli 489). While the state protected businesses from the free market's volatility, many ordinary Americans were exposed to these same risks and struggled to survive (Ventura 38). Clearly the business agendas of corporations supersede citizens' basic needs and rights (Riofrio 141). Adolescents have not been spared. Grossberg laments that despite being the world's wealthiest nation, a third of American youth live in poverty (62). For

Giroux, many Americans cannot afford to live decently but must contend with “the much more deadly task of struggling to stay alive” as its citizens, including youths, are made disposable to the economy (9).

### Neoliberal mentalities.

The precarities of the twenty-first century demonstrate that despite neoliberalism’s insistence that the free market maximises the population’s choices and happiness, not all citizens enjoy the benefits of the market. It is also evident that neoliberalism does not shield citizens from the risks and hardships that market forces and economic inequalities produce. Nevertheless, neoliberalism flourishes in America. One reason neoliberalism continues to thrive is because neoliberalism is both “crisis-making” and “crisis-managing” (Peck, Brenner & Theodore 11). Mavelli even describes neoliberalism as a “crisis-driven mode of governance” (490). The same socio-economic inequalities and precarities which arise from extreme capitalism and market competition actually have value for neoliberalism (Davies 276). In neoliberal societies, disasters and crises are used to strengthen the market order and further naturalize the need for more neoliberal governance (Davidson 55). Neoliberalism transforms and presents the very risks and precarities that it causes into opportunities which citizens can make entrepreneurial use of (Giroux 151). Forced to survive the unequal and uncertain precarities of the free market, especially without the safety net of state welfare, citizens supposedly have the opportunity to learn to practice neoliberal rationalities. Among the neoliberal rationalities I discuss here are self-responsibility, self-reliance, autonomy, risk-taking, and naturally, competitiveness.

The dismantling of the welfare state exemplifies how neoliberalism turns the precarities it causes into ‘positive’ opportunities for citizens. In the U.S., freedom includes being free from state intervention and by extension, freedom from depending on state support (Ventura 4). Welfare is viewed as antithetical to the best interests of citizens, and welfare dependence is

thoroughly condemned (Ventura 36). As such, neoliberal societies adopt a “get-tough approach to social welfare” (Schram 308). The dismantling of state welfare is regarded positively as a necessary impetus to free citizens from being overdependent. Citizens must recognise that the state is not obligated to render assistance, nor should individuals feel entitled to support (Redden 402; Ventura 4). Ventura argues that the systematic diminishment of the welfare state in the U.S. clearly signals one of neoliberalism’s major goals: to transfer the state’s pastoral responsibilities to manage and mitigate socio-economic risks onto the individual’s shoulders (16). Neoliberalism achieves this partly by fostering a spirit of self-responsibility in which individuals are made acutely aware of their duty to take personal responsibility for the outcome of their lives (Ventura 16). Neoliberal citizens thus have a moral duty to themselves to be responsible for managing and resolving their own problems (Giroux 77).

Since neoliberal individuals must take responsibility for themselves and cannot rely on external support, they must be proactively self-reliant in order to improve their personal situations. McRobbie observes that “self-reliance becomes a way of being, a means of conducting the self...”, and that individuals should develop a “self-reliant outlook” in their daily conduct (99; 103). Ideal neoliberal subjects are imagined to self-reliantly plan their life trajectory and secure their future through strategic and enterprising choices (*Inventing our Selves* 153). Closely related to the neoliberal imperative for self-responsibility and self-reliance is the valorisation of the individual’s autonomy to make choices (Harris 145). Neoliberalism encourages citizens to see themselves as “individualized and active subjects” who have the right and the responsibility to exercise decisions in their lives (Larner 13). Indeed, Palmer notes that neoliberal governance strives “to give the individual a sense of autonomy” and that “freedom lies in what appears to be choices” (3). Freedom is assumed to be the individual’s capacity to strategically choose and decide as rational beings as they seek to better their lives.



Elliot elaborates that the individual's ability to determine their choices in the free market is regarded as "the solution to a host of social ills" (83).

As responsible and autonomous individuals, neoliberal citizens are putatively capable of confronting, navigating and overcoming the precarities of the market on their own. If neoliberal citizens want to be successful, they must "accept risks in the pursuit of goals" in their everyday lives (*Inventing our Selves* 154). The neoliberal subject is therefore imagined to have an enterprising relationship with risk, and willingly embraces precarities as entrepreneurial opportunities for personal and economic growth (Dean 43). Risk is made individualised and taking risks becomes a private affair (Harris 4). Similarly, Ouellette and Hay say that because risk is made "an individual problem", neoliberal citizens must take "personal responsibility" for overcoming the hardships and inequalities brought by neoliberalism, even those beyond their control (Ouellette & Hay 8). Of concern is that the dismantling of the welfare state and the neoliberal emphasis on personal responsibility, self-reliance and autonomy to weather the risks and shocks produced by the market's volatilities actually hide the structural causes of socio-economic inequalities (Harris 145). Since neoliberalism imagines citizens as autonomous, the individual's suffering is privatised and no longer the state's concern (Giroux 77). Anyone unable or unwilling to improve their life circumstances is deemed as having failed to live up to neoliberalism's ideals and values.

Arguably the core neoliberal mentality that individuals are increasingly expected to learn and display in neoliberal societies is competitiveness. As Mavelli asserts, "neoliberalism rests on the principles of competition", and he adds that neoliberal subjectivity centres primarily around competition (491). The impulse, or rather the imperative to compete is broadly manifested in activities across economic, political and social spheres (Birch 572). In the U.S., market competition has contributed to the rise of privatisation in matters of state governance, and beyond the state, interpersonal competition is a potent force driving all areas of life for citizens.

Competition is valorised as the engine that spurs individuals to improve their performance efficiency, marketability, and personal worth, thereby optimising each individual's quality of life. With neoliberalism's emphasis on market competition extending to the private sphere, neoliberalism promotes a "brand of competitive individualism" that individuals must incorporate into their subjectivities (Harris 3). Under neoliberalism, competition is enshrined as the moral standard for everyone to strive towards (Schmidt 70). As competition became the foundation for social identities, relationships, and interactions, neoliberal societies foster respect and admiration for those who openly compete (Davies 276). Worryingly, cut-throat and ruthless competitive behaviours are increasingly normalised as desirable.

Neoliberalism resonates deeply in the U.S. because American culture highly prizes characteristics like competitiveness, entrepreneurialism, self-reliance and risk-taking. These neoliberal mentalities are required and reinforced by the competition inherent in the market. Ventura notes that in today's popular parlance, one commonly hears buzzwords like "entrepreneurs" and "risk takers" (69). Furthermore, individuals are defined from economic perspectives as winners or failures in their professional and personal lives (Ventura 2). Individuals must develop and actively display these neoliberal mentalities if they wish to be seen as competitive and successful in the marketplace and workplace (Lasch 133). The market demands that citizens demonstrate their capacities for self-discipline, rational-thinking and tactical choices, as these traits are deemed essential to support the economy in terms of the citizen's ability to work and consume (Heelas 84). In their role as employees, citizens are compelled show their personal ambitions and "will to win" as they outcompete each other for career advancements (Lasch 57). Market competition has also propelled neoliberal mentalities into activities such as play, as exemplified by the ludic competition formats of the game-doc subgenre. Competition is intrinsic to the narrative structures of game-docs, and the subgenre

demands that participants visibly practice various neoliberal mentalities as they compete and play.

### The ludification of society.

To demonstrate how the game-docs in the selected novels are neoliberal apparatuses that use game formats and competitions to train adolescent participants with neoliberal rationalities, I first consider the importance and wider social implications of play and games. First of all, play is an “overarching category” that encompasses both actual games and “non-game” activities performed in playful ways (Raessens 13). In *Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games* (2007), Malaby explains that play is generally regarded as possessing the following characteristics: play is fun and enjoyable; is safe and consequence free, and is separate from the everyday world (96). Play is strongly associated with youths and is appealing because play offers the freedom of fantasy and the fantasy of freedom from the stresses of adult expectations, responsibilities, and work (Caillois 4; Malaby 96). Lasch proposes that because the demands of contemporary society’s corporate culture make work feel boring and impersonal, people seek stimulation in the physical and intellectual challenges of play (101). Despite the escapist fantasies that play putatively offer, play has undeniable elements of disciplinary power that govern players. Johan Huizinga notes in *Homo Ludens* (1949) that “[p]lay demands order absolute and supreme”, and he explains that play not only produces and utilises order, but actually embodies order itself (10).

Games refer to “the formalised parts of play” (Raessens 13). Games are structured and directed activities possessing spatial-temporal boundaries and communally accepted regulations, rewards and penalties. Western societies typically view playing games “as safe, separable, and pleasurable” activities (Malaby 98). Nevertheless, some games induce tension and distress, and sometimes entail tangible risks for players. In such games like gambling,

“play is designed to be extremely lucrative or ruinous” (Caillois 5). Losing some games can cost players their “material, social, and cultural capital”, negatively impacting players’ real lives beyond the game’s spatial-temporal boundaries (Malaby 96). The high-stakes and high-risks of some games reflect and embody the uncertainties, inequalities and precarities of everyday life (Malaby 98). Games also reinforce their authority and disciplinary power by infusing their game rules with “serious intent” (Lasch 109). The order demanded by play is manifested and enforced by the expectation that players govern themselves according to the internal rules that constitute the formal structures of any game. Any disobedience, cheating, non-compliance, or resistance are met with disciplinary action like penalties, shame, and even expulsion from the game. Thus, the discipline and order games demand from players make games useful apparatuses for governance in any society.

Huizinga believes play and games are essential to civilised life because societies are shaped by “[t]he spirit of playful competition” (173). Similarly, Caillois sees play as the basis for many activities (58). Today, games and play have attained widespread cultural presence, leading Deterding to describe the twenty-first century as a “ludic century” (23). The term ‘ludic’ refers to “playful behaviour” (Raessens 6). As contemporary society grew increasingly ludic, games and play now dominate and rationalise our economic, social and personal lives (Deterding 23). Quarters as diverse as state institution, workplaces, the market, and the media are embracing, importing and applying game elements, principles and discourses to ‘improve’ their products and services, boost worker productivity, or enhance consumer interactivity (Raessens 6; Deterding 23). For example, the daily grind and stress of office competition may be disguised as game-like endeavours, while the market may redirect and commodify the energies of play into enthusiastic consumer spending (Wark 163). Similarly, the media is embracing playful and participatory narratives as media texts and popular culture are saturated by “ludic

language” (Raessens 8; Deterding 23). The ludification of the media and the incorporation of play and games in television programmes have contributed to the development of game-docs.

### The game-doc subgenre.

Cailliois describes play as “nearly always spectacular” (4), while Wark says that contemporary spectacle-oriented economies commodify play into financially lucrative activities (163). The game-doc subgenre is therefore especially suited for the twenty-first century’s neoliberal, ludic and media-centric societies. At the turn of the millennium, Reality TV experienced significant transformations with the near-simultaneous arrival in 2000 of two game-docs: *Big Brother* (U.K.) and *Survivor* (U.S.). Kavka credits *Big Brother* and *Survivor* as a major “evolutionary leap” in Reality TV’s development (75). Both programmes are regarded as “landmark” TV shows that catapulted Reality TV into the popular and global imagination (Kilborn 58). While reality-crime dominated early Reality TV throughout the 1980s-1990s, the game-doc subgenre substantially expanded Reality TV’s range by incorporating play and competition as central features of its game formats and narratives. Although TV quiz-shows and sports programmes have long used play and competition for their entertainment and economic value, the game-doc format stages play and competition under conditions of extreme surveillance (Kavka 76). The term ‘game-doc’ articulates the intersection between gameshows and documentaries: the subgenre combines the documentary tradition’s observational practices and surveillance technologies with the thrill, emotional drama and conflicts of competition (Kavka 76).

Unlike documentaries, which aim to record and observe people naturalistically, game-docs strive to actively create contrived situations and ‘made-for-TV’ challenges for participants (Kavka 97). Game-docs typically recruit participants from among ordinary people to appear ‘as themselves’. Participants are assembled and contained within an impressive variety of settings ranging from urban locations to natural environments and even artificially constructed

TV arenas. Once participants enter the arenas of game-docs, they are bound by various arbitrary TV rules and regulations of the game that they are expected to adhere to closely. The basic structure of game-docs centres around participants undertaking challenges and assorted tasks assigned by the production team. Drama arises as participants compete heatedly as individuals or in teams to complete each challenge before their opponents. Winners are rewarded with material or monetary prizes and advancement to the next episode and round of games. Tension is further produced as participants are eliminated through populist voting or by virtue of coming in last. Game-docs culminate in climatic finales where the final victor is declared and awarded the grand prize (Bourdon 68). As landmark game-doc programmes, *Survivor* and *Big Brother* established and popularized many of these narrative templates that other game-docs continue to be modelled upon.

*Survivor* is one of the longest-running Reality TV programmes. Created by Charlie Parsons, *Survivor* premiered on CBS in 2000 and continues until today with over forty seasons. *Survivor* is well recognised for its desert-island aesthetics, tribal motifs, and exoticized castaway narratives (Kilborn 76). Participants are assigned to ‘tribes’ and compete in solo or group challenges that test their physical endurance and wilderness survival skills, such as fire-making, foraging, and eating grubs (Bignell 71). *Survivor* is famous for its ceremonial and ritualised weekly group votes and eliminations that incite tribalistic competitiveness, dramatic betrayals, tenuous alliances, and self-serving tactics. Despite the programme’s ‘pre-modern’ settings, Kavka observes a distinctly consumer culture as participants compete for branded merchandise (98). Similarly, Bignell notes the symbolic significance of costuming, with participants wearing a contradictory ensemble of jungle gear, military boots, and leisure swimwear (79). The island settings, primitive signifiers and rituals, costuming, and commercial rewards combine to create an amalgamated atmosphere of safari adventure and beach holiday, juxtaposed by images of extreme consumerism and territorial warfare that accentuate the

competition and rivalry amongst participants (Bignell 79). *Survivor* thus stages and dramatizes as play the survival-of-the fittest mentalities of ‘man vs. nature’ and ‘man vs. man’ (Kavka 97).

*Big Brother* (Channel 4 from 2000-2010, Channel 5 from 2011-2018) situates the tensions of unfamiliar group dynamics within urban settings. Participants are strangers sequestered without privacy in stylish built-for-TV houses rigged with surveillance cameras that film them engaging in banal and communal everyday life. Participants must periodically complete amusing and absurd tasks dictated by the eponymous and unseen Big Brother to earn desirable supplies and coveted rewards (Kilborn 76; Bignell 72). In a sense, *Big Brother* strikingly parallels the neoliberal conditions and inequalities of the corporate workplace. Participants can be imagined to parallel office workers as they must obey without question the “absolute external authority” of Big Brother, who resembles an unseen but powerful corporate boss dispensing tasks that participants must work promptly to complete (Couldry 9). Just as corporate employees may be subject to workplace surveillance and performance reviews that judge their competitiveness, participants are similarly subjected to close scrutiny from Big Brother and the viewers (Couldry 9). Participants’ performances are reviewed minutely as they vie to secure their ‘promotion’ to the next episode. Those whose performances and competitiveness are judged unworthy may be dismissed in elimination events that parallel the risks and anxieties of being fired (Grazian 70).

In terms of precarity, participants on game-docs are thoroughly immersed in “unpredictable environments fraught with insecurity and risks” (Redden 407). Participants must navigate artificially created hardships that induce physical and emotional distress like hunger, exhaustion, conflict, and rivalry (Brenton & Cohen 117). Outside of Reality TV, the extreme conditions inflicted upon participants would normally be considered torture (Brenton & Cohen 109). Yet game-docs are designed to stress-tests participants to elicit neoliberal mentalities from them such as self-reliance, risk-taking and competitiveness. The subgenre offers viewers

the thrill of watching participants overcome challenging scenarios without external assistance, which reflects simultaneously the hardships and inequalities of neoliberal societies and the concurrent decline in state assistance (Redden 399). Many game-doc programmes have distinct “survivalist objectives”, and by confronting participants with elevated difficulties, game-docs forcibly teach participants “how to cope with risk” to successfully survive and overcome precarities (Ouellette & Hay 158). The subgenre therefore “require[s] maximum degrees of self-sufficiency” from participants (Ouellette & Hay 185). Participants are expected to possess and display neoliberal “do-it-yourself” attitudes to secure their victory without relying on others (Bourdon 78). Meanwhile, the rewards system of game-docs incentivises and reinforces the importance of demonstrating one’s commitment to competing and winning.

Giroux observes that the social Darwinism of neoliberal competition plays out abundantly on Reality TV (*Beyond* 591). Competition is naturally the *raison d’être* of game-docs. Bauman remarks that *Big Brother* and *Survivor* endorse the following logics: “no one except a few solitary winners is truly indispensable... the ultimate stake of survival is outliving the others” (*Wasted Lives* 131). For Kavka, “[t]he emphasis on strategy (out-wit), gamesmanship (out-play) and endurance (out-last)” is crucial (96). The winner-takes-all competitive mentalities promoted by game-docs demand “displays of individualism and self-interests” as participants view others as adversaries (Grazian 69). Game-docs promote intense individualistic competitiveness since “only those who fight their way to the top are lauded as deserving” of remaining in the game (Kosciesza 1687). Participants must display their “fire” and “grit” (Kosciesza 1687), and each participant attempts to “be the last one standing” (Ouellette & Hay 158). The ultimate winner is praised as the “most self-actualized” player/survivor (Ouellette & Hay 187). Conversely, those who fail in competition are eliminated from the game as ‘losers’ (Bauman *Wasted Lives* 131). The competition structures of game-docs are designed to



explicitly separate strong from weak, inevitably resulting in a solitary winner triumphing while everyone else is eliminated (Grazian 70).

Thus, the arenas of game-docs can be considered “pocket worlds” because they are self-contained microcosms reflecting the external world (Brenton & Cohen 50). Game-docs parallel prevailing neoliberal conditions, from the interminable competition demanded by the market to the precarities that market competition produces. As such, game-docs are structurally shaped by neoliberalism, and neoliberal ideologies are abundantly codified into the subgenre’s formats, discourses and expectations. The internal environments of game-docs are designed and managed by television producers who enforce their complex but arbitrary systems of competition, regulations, rewards, and penalties upon participants. Ensnared within the competitive, precarious, and rules-based pocket worlds of game-docs, participants may find themselves rapidly developing all-consuming mentalities and subjectivities directed by the game’s internal neoliberal logics (Brenton & Cohen 109). Game-docs use play and competition to enact “games of government” and “citizenship-contests” for participants to learn and practice neoliberal mentalities, which presumably prepares them into self-governing and entrepreneurial neoliberal citizens (Ouellette & Hay 174). Among the most important neoliberal mentalities that the game-docs in my selected novels require from adolescent participants are: the capacity to endure precarity as self-responsible, self-enterprising and strategic players, a willingness to take risks, and the competitive drive to survive and win.

### *Surviving Antarctica*

Andrea White’s *Surviving Antarctica* is set in 2083 in an America blighted by vast inequalities and poverty. The nation is ruled by an uncaring corporate state that governs the population primarily via public-private media. The Secretary of the Department of Entertainment organizes a televised edu-entertainment competition for fourteen-year-olds called *Historical*

*Survivor*. The competition simulates Robert Scott's historic and doomed 1912 Antarctic expedition and is played by a team of five adolescents, who must recreate the same polar trek that killed Scott's team of seasoned explorers. Robert, Billy, Andrew, Polly and Grace enter the game despite its terrible dangers as they hope to win the \$100,000 prize money and escape from poverty. Unbeknownst to the kids, the Secretary orders audio-visual corneal implants surgically inserted into their eyeballs to record their journey, thereby eliminating the need for camera-crew. Effectively abandoned in Antarctica without adult support, the kids must contend with Antarctica's perilous environment and the production team's artificially created calamities. Throughout their journey, they are aided from afar by Steve, a sympathetic adolescent editor on the Secretary's production team. *Surviving Antarctica* demonstrates how adolescent participants are vulnerable to exploitation when the corporate state incorporates neoliberal competition, privatisation and precarities into game-docs.

While Schram remarks that government is run like businesses (318), one could add that state institutions are now run *by* businesses. Since neoliberalism prefers that "power should reside in markets and corporations rather than in governments", the state has grown deeply imbricated with corporations (*Beyond* 590). Giroux comments that "[u]nder neoliberalism everything either is for sale or is plundered for profits" (2). The state has increasingly teamed-up with the private-sector by contracting, outsourcing and even selling-off its institutional responsibilities and public assets to corporations to manage in collaboration with or on the state's behalf (Davies 276 & 279; Giroux 150; Ventura 38). Ouellette and Hay point out that the White House has grown reliant on partnerships with the culture industries like media broadcasters (38). Giroux criticises how "[p]oliticians willingly hand the public's airwaves over to broadcasters and large corporate interests without a dime going into the public trust" (151). While many U.S. television broadcasters are independent, partnerships between the state and private-sector have afforded television an expanded role as a "privatized network of social service" (Ouellette

& Hay 66). Television broadcasters play a sizable role providing privatised services that cater for citizens' needs where and when the state appears unable to do so (Ouellette & Hay 66).

Similarly, in *Surviving Antarctica*, “[t]he politicians decided that better programming was the way to make Americans happier” (*Surviving Antarctica* 84). Therefore, the Department of Entertainment (DOE) was established to govern the nation. The DOE embodies the neoliberal privatisation of the state as it is co-jointly managed by the state and corporate broadcasters. The DOE is headed by the ruthless Secretary of Entertainment, a woman nicknamed ‘Hot Sauce’. The Secretary brags of her department’s success at governing the population through television as mass distraction: “...we’ve cut the crime, murder and assault rates...” (*Surviving Antarctica* 31). The DOE’s most important division is EduTV, an edu-entertainment channel that broadcasts ‘tele-school’ which is mandatory viewing for students. As EduTV is managed by private-public collaboration, corporations have commercialised the nation’s school system and business interests are prioritised over educating students. The Secretary claims that “Ever since the government got into the entertainment biz...We’ve saved our taxpayers billions of dollars by getting rid of the public schools” (*Surviving Antarctica* 31). That the state has essentially sold public education to big businesses in *Surviving Antarctica* reflects Grossberg’s criticism that the U.S. government has lost its priorities: “we are unwilling to pay for [adolescents’] education...but we are willing to commercialize education...” (39).

Although the Secretary is proud that EduTV saves taxpayers’ money, the money has not been utilised to benefit the population, especially adolescents. *Surviving Antarctica* imagines a future America devastated by economic collapse, including the crippling Big Bust (a financial meltdown that anticipates the Great Recession), food shortages, and extensive environmental pollution. Andrew, one of the five young participants, recalls his father telling him about their nation’s long struggle with precarity and inequality: “...as life grew harder in America, as the rich grew richer and the poor poorer, the poor people rebelled” (*Surviving Antarctica* 84).

These events triggered widespread and lingering hardships like pervasive unemployment and childhood malnutrition. To exacerbate matters, EduTV ceases education for students above fourteen. Since the majority of students are from poor families, further education in private schools is unobtainable. Hence, adolescents are essentially abandoned *en masse* to repeat the cycle of poverty trapping their families. To survive, adolescents either become underaged labourers or enlist to play on EduTV to earn prize money. The most prestigious and dangerous is *Historical Survivor* for fourteen-year-olds. Steve, a seventeen-year-old production editor for *Historical Survivor*, sympathises with the desperation of the thousands of adolescents applying for the game.

Steve recognises that for the adolescents signing up for *Historical Survivor*, their own perilous everyday existence is already “a real-life Survivor – a game with no rules, no fans, no prize money, and worst of all, no hope” (*Surviving Antarctica* 32). Steve’s thoughts reflect Christopher Lasch’s observations that for many individuals, under “the normal conditions of everyday life...[t]hey hope not so much to prosper as simply to survive, although survival itself increasingly demands a large income” (53). For most adolescents in *Surviving Antarctica*, surviving life itself is the name of the game, and they hope to help their families escape from the precarities of hardcore poverty by playing on *Historical Survivor*. Steve observes that the Secretary has selected Robert, Billy, Andrew, Polly and Grace exclusively for their poor backgrounds. He worries that “These contestants were probably street kids...They were kids who didn’t have much to lose. They were kids whom hardly anybody cared about” (*Surviving Antarctica* 32). Steve realises bitterly that the participants chosen to play on *Historical Survivor* have throughout their lives been abandoned by the state to grapple with the inequalities and precarities of poverty, and he rightly surmises that similar dangers and hardships will be incorporated into *Historical Survivor*.

## Risk as playful opportunities to demonstrate neoliberal mentalities.

While hardship and deprivation are common on game-docs, and while the young participants in *Surviving Antarctica* already face precarity in their daily lives, *Historical Survivor* exposes them to maximum risk in the Antarctic harshness. Self-proclaimed team leader Robert feels most prepared for *Historical Survivor*'s dangers because his life experiences have forged a strong neoliberal inclination for personal responsibility, self-reliance and autonomy. When the participants first introduce themselves to each other, Robert shares how his hometown Houston flooded, an event that anticipates the devastation of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Interestingly, *Surviving Antarctica* was published just before Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. Ouellette and Hay argue that Hurricane Katrina was a major crisis that exposed how neoliberalism had changed the expected responsibilities of the state to help citizens manage precarities like disasters. The federal government's painfully slow response sending aid to Hurricane Katrina's victims showcased the neoliberal transference of responsibility from the state to citizens, who were forced to rely on themselves to survive the disaster (Ouellette & Hay 23). Similarly, although Robert's community received no government help, Robert's self-reliance and resourcefulness at fishing and rafting secured his family's survival. Robert believes his personal history of enduring precarity proves that he can survive *Historical Survivor*, and he confidently declares "I'm ready" (*Surviving Antarctica* 49).

When teammate Polly asks the Secretary whether the production will intervene if their team encounters trouble in Antarctica, Robert views Polly's request for assistance as weakness: "Robert glared at her. He didn't want or need anybody's help" (*Surviving Antarctica* 69). Robert's reaction is typical of the self-reliant neoliberal subject who believes that society "cannot owe an individual anything" (Redden 402). Robert reinforces his dedication to personal responsibility and self-reliance by assuring the Secretary that they can cope with any

challenges by themselves: ““We don’t want special favors”” (*Surviving Antarctica* 69). Yet when the Secretary declares that the production has no intention of helping anyway despite the participants’ youth, Robert recognises that the Secretary’s disregard for their survival is indicative of the government’s general indifference. “That’s okay, Robert told himself. Hot Sauce was unfair, just like the world he lived in. He was used to it” (*Surviving Antarctica* 70). Robert acknowledges that the precarities and lack of state support that constitute his ‘real’ world will be intrinsic components of the game. Just as Robert needed to survive his entire life without government support, he understands that to survive the game-doc, his team must be self-reliant and perform without expecting adult assistance or state intervention.

Left to cross Antarctica without adult guidance, the youths must demonstrate supreme personal responsibility, self-reliance and autonomy as they recreate Scott’s historic polar expedition. Polly tasks herself with analysing the mistakes Scott made during his expedition. Since Scott’s team perished before reaching the Pole, Polly fears that the Secretary has designed their modern-day expedition to similarly fail, thus stripping the adolescents of their autonomy over their destiny. Polly also aggravates Robert by constantly reminding them of Scott’s mistakes and by pessimistically comparing their chances of survival to Scott’s. Robert tells her: ““Polly, Scott and his men didn’t make it. We’re going to,” Robert said. He couldn’t put his anger into words. But he sensed that Polly believed getting to the Pole was impossible” (*Surviving Antarctica* 208). As a decidedly self-reliant adolescent who values his autonomy, Robert is angered by Polly’s defeatist attitude. He worries that Polly has internalised Scott’s losses and has thereby mentally given up, which Roberts feels will actualise their own team’s failure. Robert recognises that they are not just competing against a hostile environment, but are also in competition against history. Robert rejects being aligned with the failures of adults from the past, and is determined that his team succeed on their own terms.

Despite Robert's determination to be self-responsible, self-reliant and agentic, he recognises that his teammates are young and inexperienced, and that *Historical Survivor* will confront them with the very real and extreme risks of navigating a perilous polar expedition that killed experienced adult explorers. Robert is convinced that clueless and accident-prone Andrew will risk their team's already tenuous survival. When Andrew carelessly contaminates their drinking water, Robert declares: "“You're a bumbler!”" (*Surviving Antarctica* 134). Robert attempts to forcibly 'educate' Andrew about the consequences of failing to be attuned to the dangers they will encounter during *Historical Survivor*: "“There's no margin for error in Antarctic travel. None! Don't you understand?”" (*Surviving Antarctica* 134). Robert constantly reminds the others that Antarctica is not child's play but a precarious landscape that will not forgive childish mistakes. He is acutely aware that his team must rapidly learn to cope with the risks and precarities surrounding them, including quashing their juvenile playfulness in favour of an adult hyper-awareness of risk. Andrew internalises Robert's declaration that "In Antarctica the bumbler probably died first" (*Surviving Antarctica* 135), which Andrew grimly acknowledges will be his deserved fate if he does not improve himself into a competitive player and productive team-member.

#### The logics of competition in play and survival.

*Surviving Antarctica* exemplifies how the ludification of society and the neoliberal pressures of competition combine to determine people's value as winners or losers. Society in the novel is intensely ludic; game principles like play and neoliberal competition are prominent aspects of public life and discourse even outside *Historical Survivor*. Citizens are exposed daily to state-produced propaganda that trumpet the logics and desirability of competition. Street speakers constantly blare Fair Society commercials that declare: "Life's a game...Winners are winners. Losers are losers...Now everybody gets a chance" (*Surviving Antarctica* 210). Although the commercials proclaim that everyone (ostensibly) has a fair chance in life, only

the rich can play the game of life well. Citizens are indoctrinated to accept an aggressive social Darwinism that mercilessly hierarchises individuals based on their competitive fitness. Their society celebrates winners as deserving the right to live comfortably, while anyone deemed uncompetitive is made abject. Through the privatisation and the ludification of education by the Department of Entertainment, society's terrible socio-economic inequalities are turned into game-like competitions of survival. For the young participants on *Historical Survivor*, the extreme competitiveness of their society is an intrinsic component of the game, and they are evaluated based on their competitive worth even before the game commences.

Kosciesza argues that neoliberalism uses the myth of individual meritocracy to disguise the fact that determining "...who deserves to win or lose, and why—is a political act" in which individuals are subjected to a "political calculus" that weighs their competitive worth (1690). Kosciesza finds that game-docs similarly reproduce the myth of meritocracy even as they disguise it through "the rhetoric of meritocratic judgment and fair competition" (1690). The Secretary reveals a similar understanding of competition when she explains how the five participants were chosen for *Historical Survivor*. She first describes them as "...lucky, lucky kids" because "You have been chosen from a pool of 4825 applicants" (*Surviving Antarctica* 22). She first implies that the selection is luck-based, reinforcing the DOE's claims of equal opportunity games. However, she deliberately selected participants with special gifts like Polly's eidetic memory, making them inherently 'winners' from the general population. The Secretary eventually admits that "Games like...*Survivor* are the fairest way that I know to decide who gets a chance" (*Surviving Antarctica* 71). Her last comment belies the truth: as a corporate-state official, she uses the selection process of *Historical Survivor* as her own political calculus to evaluate the adolescent population's value. As she alone decides who has competitive value, the supposed meritocracy of her game is illusory.



During their voyage to Antarctica, Robert applies the same neoliberal logics the Secretary used to evaluate them. He assesses his teammates for their individual strengths in order to hierarchise their potential usefulness to his and the team's survival. For Robert, his teammates' unique abilities define their worth and competitive fitness more than their human value. As Ouellette and Hay explain, when game-docs involve teamwork, participants must demonstrate their willingness to be productive, contributing, and committed team players (185). Though the Secretary says each participant on *Historical Survivor* is gifted, Andrew cannot readily identify his gift. When everyone except Andrew works hard in their specialism to prepare for the expedition, Robert questions Andrew's contributions and competitiveness as a team player. Robert asks: "I'm getting a sense of what the other team members' strengths are. What do you bring to the team?" (*Surviving Antarctica* 93). When Robert questions how Andrew spent his time, Andrew decides he "[m]ight as well tell the lazy truth. 'Slept'" (*Surviving Antarctica* 93). Laziness is a neoliberal sin on game-docs. Andrew recognises that Robert views his laziness as a personality defect and his lack of gifts further makes him a low-value 'commodity' that contributes no competitive advantage to his team.

Giroux mentions that neoliberalism normalises merciless competitive behaviours like "[b]ackstabbing, deception, and a childish hypermasculinity" in the interest of the competitive and enterprising individual getting ahead of others (152). Although *Historical Survivor* is a team game requiring mutual solidarity, the game-doc also incentivises competitiveness by rewarding the participant voted as Most Valuable Player (MVP) with a bonus \$100,000. Billy is the most competitive among his teammates and obsesses about being voted MVP. He understands instinctively that to be recognised as MVP, he must openly demonstrate and maximise his competitive worth and versatility. He conducts himself as a self-enterprising and tactical player who plays the game with calculated tactics. "With a smart game strategy, he could win the one hundred thousand dollars" (*Surviving Antarctica* 130). Billy identifies Robert

as his biggest competitor and plans his strategy to beat Robert. "...With Robert, his strategy was simpler...When Robert was worn down and exhausted from the responsibility, Billy would quietly take over" (*Surviving Antarctica* 130). As a neoliberal player, Billy actively seeks entrepreneurial opportunities to optimise his chances of winning. He believes that usurping Robert at the end of the competition will demonstrate that Billy is the MVP because of his ability to take responsibility as leader.

Winning or losing is the difference between surviving or dying on *Historical Survivor*. Still, Polly is troubled by her teammates' mania for winning. "She didn't understand Billy's and Robert's obsession with being first" (*Surviving Antarctica* 238). Polly greatly admires Scott even though his team was beaten to the Pole by a competitor and they eventually perished. Her teammates meanwhile are convinced there is no value in emulating Scott because, in Billy's words, "'They were losers'" (*Surviving Antarctica* 237). Robert adds: "'Another explorer beat them'...They'd died on their journey back. It was obvious that they had lost" (*Surviving Antarctica* 237). According to the neoliberal logics of competition which discards losers, the boys rationalise that Scott's greatest failure was being defeated rather than dying. Dying was a by-product of his failure to win, and serves as a neoliberal cautionary tale to them of the gravity of losing a competition. Ironically, Scott's personal worldview was distinctly neoliberal. Polly recalls that when Scott realised he was beaten, he wrote: "...*This is an awful place and terrible enough for us to have laboured to it without the reward of priority*" (*Surviving Antarctica* 239). For Scott, the intolerable ignominy of being defeated in competition was his true loss, not his death, which came soon after.

While the five participants are exposed to neoliberal mentalities every day of their lives, and they actively apply neoliberal values throughout the competition, they are most directly exposed to neoliberalism by the Secretary right before they commence playing her game. Notably, *Surviving Antarctica* is the only novel that I analyse in this chapter which depicts a

game-doc that intentionally ceases communications with participants during the game. As the Secretary plans for the participants to be entirely alone in Antarctica, they are deprived of any contact with the programme while playing. Therefore, before the game commences, the Secretary meets the participants in a spurious attempt to prepare them for the competition. As she converses with them, the Secretary interpellates and instructs the participants with her version of neoliberal ideologies that she believes they will need to draw upon to successfully complete *Historical Survivor*. The Secretary reminds the participants that danger and risk are integral elements to *Historical Survivor*. Survival is literally the name of this game, and the entertainment value of watching *Historical Survivor* requires real danger for the young participants to struggle against as opportunities for them to display neoliberal values like competitiveness, self-responsibility and risk-taking.

“Then you know that *Historical Survivor* can be dangerous,” the Secretary said.  
Andrew thought...[s]urely for kids the show would be different.  
Robert guessed that of the five, he was the only one who understood danger.  
Grace willed the idea of danger to become a snowball, and she tossed it away.  
(*Surviving Antarctica* 23-25).

As the adolescents listen to the Secretary, they each reveal varying degrees of readiness to accept neoliberal mentalities like risk-taking. Of the three novels discussed in this chapter, *Surviving Antarctica* is most multi-voiced. McCallum defines multi-voiced narratives as those that “use of two or more character focalizers or narrators from whose perceptual and attitudinal viewpoints events are narrated” (23). By representing various textual voices, multi-voiced narratives allow readers to compare different perspectives and ideologies. *Surviving Antarctica*’s multi-voiced narrative provides insights into each participant’s attitudinal predispositions towards neoliberalism. Robert has been made resilient and self-reliant by the precarities of his life and is already an actualised neoliberal subject who requires little training to accept further precarity. The multi-voiced narrative confirms that Robert is correct in his assessment of the others’ readiness to embrace precarity. Andrew naively clings to the illusion

that their youth deserves consideration and protection from the Secretary and the state. Unfortunately, just as adolescents are not spared the harsh inequalities of neoliberalism, so too will their team be sacrificed to their corporate state's machinations and manipulations. Grace meanwhile is an Inupiat who intends to use *Historical Survivor* to recolonise Antarctica for her people. From her perspective, the environment is already home, and its dangers can be conquered and tossed away by force of will.

Before they embark for Antarctica, the Secretary presents the participants a wristwatch. To decide the wristwatch's recipient, she asks which of them is the most responsible:

Choose me, Billy prayed.  
A Tantasm, Model 120. Polly recognized the watch from the ads.  
I'm going to live by the sun, the moon, and the stars, Grace promised herself.  
Nice watch, Robert thought, wondering how much it would sell for.  
Andrew never got chosen in things like this, so he looked out the window.  
(*Surviving Antarctica* 65).

In her seemingly generous gift, the Secretary tests the participants before the game by making them declare themselves the most responsible (and deserving) participant, and thereby demonstrate their initiative and competitiveness. The use of multi-voiced narration to depict each adolescent's respective perspective towards the watch helps to reveal how amenable or resistant they are to neoliberal ideologies. Billy is desperate to be voted MVP and is convinced that receiving the watch will publicly validate his superiority, thus giving him a competitive advantage. The fact that Billy prays indicates how strongly he has been indoctrinated by neoliberalism, as the dogma of competition is practically religious for him. Polly has an eidetic memory and memorises advertisements for work; her instant recognition of the watch's model indicates how immersed she is in the discourses of consumerism. Conversely, Grace remains detached from the capitalist world and her Inupiat heritage appears to shield her from neoliberal influences. Robert reveals his neoliberal pre-disposition towards strategic and market-oriented thinking by automatically evaluating the watch's market value. A lifetime of team rejection

causes Andrew to instinctively devalue his self-worth, so he withdraws himself from this minor competition. The visible display of neoliberal attitudes during play is just as important in *NERVE*, which I discuss in the next section.

### *Nerve*

In Jeanne Ryan's *Nerve*, Vee is a shy sixteen-year-old who decides to challenge herself and break away from her wallflower reputation by doing something daring. She applies as a Player for *NERVE*, a popular gam-doc for adolescents. *NERVE* is managed by a powerful and mysterious corporation. The game challenges Players to complete physically demanding and emotionally demeaning dares in various urban settings like cafes, schools and clubs. *NERVE* sends Players instructions for their dares via their handphones, and Players use their handphones to record themselves performing their dares, which are broadcast live for the entertainment of the Watchers. Players who successfully complete their dares accrue fame and personalised prizes. Vee is paired with fellow Player Ian, and she is initially overjoyed by their early victories and accumulated prizes. She even credits the game positively for expanding her horizons and showing her what she is capable of. However, when *NERVE* escalates the immorality and risk of each dare, Vee becomes frightened by the game. During the Final Round, *NERVE* holds the Players hostage for a fatal game of Russian roulette with handguns. Realising that *NERVE* will sacrifice adolescents for entertainment and profit, Vee resists the game and publicly exposes the dangers of *NERVE*.

Compared to *Surviving Antarctica*, the operations of neoliberalism through the corporate state are less pronounced in *Nerve*. Nevertheless, Vee's everyday life is still shaped by the relentless privatisation of public and domestic spaces. The physical, social and virtual spaces that Vee and her schoolmates occupy and interact in are subject to intense commercialisation. Sponsored advertisements and games permeate their classrooms, bedrooms and handphones, and

adolescent conversations, aspirations, and relationships are directed by commercial interests. Vee's middle-class social world appears unconcerned and removed from the precarities and inequalities of the free market. Unlike the dramatic nationwide crises in *Surviving Antarctica*, the precarities in *Nerve* are played out on an individual level instead, and the struggles that Vee faces initially occur in her personal life. However, once Vee begins to play *NERVE*, the game-doc aggressively commodifies and spectacularises the precarities that she must endure. *NERVE* learns everything about its Players' life history, individual weaknesses and desires in order to personalise every dare to maximise each Player's rewards and suffering. The game-doc capitalises on transforming Players' personal problems into entertaining and entrepreneurial opportunities for play. As a corporate funded game, *NERVE* embodies the thrilling rewards of privatisation, the precarities of privatisation, and the dangers of privatising precarity.

#### Play as entrepreneurial opportunities to remake oneself.

Several months before the narrative begins, Vee suffers a near-death experience when she almost asphyxiates from carbon monoxide poisoning in her car. The accident resulted in a prolonged and costly hospital stay and Vee has lost her parents' trust. She also struggles to downplay the rumours of her hospitalisation that have hurt her reputation at school. Vee is frustrated that her parents and peers continue to "[see] me as a frail being who tried to do something unthinkable, no matter how many times I've tried to tell them otherwise" (*Nerve* 74). When the opportunity to play on *NERVE* arises, Vee sees the game as an opportunity to take charge of her life and resolve her personal problems through play. She reflects that "All anyone cares about is the latest drama. Tonight I have the opportunity to replace my old drama with something new" (*Nerve* 74). Vee believes that by playing *NERVE*, she can rehabilitate and remake her image. She aims to dramatically change the narrative of her life into one where she is seen as an empowered winner rather than a victim. In her mind, playing *NERVE* is a self-

enterprising choice that will vastly improve her self-esteem, relationships, reputation, and future.

Vee's determination to change her life by playing *NERVE* demonstrates that for her, the game offers the possibility of a life makeover. Although *NERVE* is a competition game-doc, it carries traces of the makeover in its rewards system. I will not detail the makeover's ideological and narrative functions at length here as I discuss the makeover in family-docs in chapter three. Briefly, makeover-oriented programmes claim to help participants transform their lives through significant lifestyle improvements. Makeovers proffer 'life-changing' solutions in the form of consumer goods or physical 'upgrades' that transform one's appearance, body and behaviour. Central to the makeover is that participants learn to govern themselves by taking personal responsibility for bettering themselves. Makeovers reward participants with consumer goods when they visibly align their goals, their personal life, and their bodies with neoliberal values like the desire for improvement. As Rose notes, neoliberal subjects must align their "personal objectives and ambitions" with "socially prized goals or activities" (*Governing* 10). Similarly, *NERVE* promises successful Players irresistible rewards that are tailored to their individual tastes and personal aspirations. Players are therefore incentivised to work hard to win rewards that they believe will dramatically remake their lifestyles, if not their actual lives.

Before each dare, *NERVE* sends Vee a link advertising her next tantalizing reward: "Sure enough, *NERVE* has dangled the first prize. Whoa, it's a full-day makeover at Salon Dev, including a massage, waxing, makeup consult, the works" (*Nerve* 73). Her first reward is an actual makeover promising total bodily transformation. Here, Ryan employs free indirect discourse to liberally permeate Vee's narratorial voice with the excitement of consumer culture. Vee's stunned "Whoa" as she reads the advertised reward is inseparable from the long list of goodies presented to her. As she reads the reward's description, Vee's narratorial voice resembles the breathless cadence of an advertisement. Sounding as though she herself is

promoting the makeover at Salon Dev, Vee's narratorial voice demonstrates how her thinking has been thoroughly colonised by consumerism. Furthermore, whenever she completes each dare, the sense of liberating and transformative empowerment is reinforced. After Vee finishes a dare, she is thrilled both at her success and at proving her self-directed capacity to succeed. She exults: "I did it! I did it! As we jog to our cars laughing, I almost lose a slipper, which is perfectly in character, since I feel just like Cinderella..." (*Nerve* 55).

Vee's comparison of herself to Cinderella underlines the transformative power of *NERVE* to radically make over and upgrade a participant through play. Playing *NERVE* gives Vee an intense sense of agency and freedom to enact her own fairy tale of *self*-transformation. Unlike Cinderella, Vee requires no external help from a fairy godmother to succeed. To Vee, her victories are sweeter because they are self-made, reinforced by her triumphant declaration and reiteration of "I did it!". The virtues of taking personal responsibility and being self-reliant are essential traits for neoliberal subjects. The individual is not to rely on others for support or handouts, but must prove their worth by working independently to secure their own future. The competitive market rationalism of neoliberalism means that individuals have to be self-reliant and self-enterprising in making the right choices for themselves to direct their destinies (Harris 3-4). Unfortunately, the pressures to make the best life without traditional support systems "have generated considerable anxiety about the future of youth..." (Harris 5). Left with only themselves to help themselves, adolescents must navigate risks alone (Harris 4). For Vee, the economic and social fallout of her recent accident must be borne and resolved personally as her responsibility.

Vee feels guilty that her accident and costly hospitalisation has strained her family financially. She also worries that she has jeopardised her dreams of attending fashion school, which her parents can no longer finance. Since failure and success are both privatised and attributed to the individual's personal efforts, the neoliberal participant must be a self-responsible agent



(Redden 399, 405). Hence, Vee takes personal responsibility to improve her gloomy future prospects by joining *NERVE*. When *NERVE* offers her a full scholarship as a prize, "...the thought of attending fashion school flashes shiny in my brain, like a beacon. Especially since so much of my college fund was raided to pay for hospital bills" (*Nerve* 152). As Vee believes she must not rely on anyone except herself to repair her family and future, she commits to winning the rewards *NERVE* offers. For many hard-pressed participants like Vee, the prizes offered by Reality TV can alleviate some of their immediate personal problems. Hence, Reality TV as a privatised resource for help or charity can often seem an attractive alternative to welfare (Ouellette & Hay 39). Better still, participants like Vee feel that they can exercise self-responsibility and agency by 'working' through play to earn life-enhancing rewards.

To reinforce the neoliberal mentalities of self-responsibility and self-reliance, *NERVE* appears to grant Players room to exercise their autonomy. Whenever *NERVE* dispenses a dare, Players can choose to accept or withdraw from the game. Once Vee and her partner Ian are selected for the Final Round, they must formally accept *NERVE*'s invitation to continue participating. After hours of increasingly debilitating dares, Vee is conflicted about playing further. She tries getting advice from her friends by calling them on her handphone. Vee realises that the *NERVE* app which Players are required to download on their handphones is blocking her calls. She then receives a text message from *NERVE*: "YOU NEED TO MAKE THIS DECISION ON YOUR OWN" (*Nerve* 154). *NERVE*'s ability to block Vee's cellular communications demonstrates the game's monologic control as a neoliberal apparatus of governance. By policing her communications, *NERVE* displays its neoliberal power to discipline Vee into a self-governing and agentic Player. Since Reality TV participants are typically expected to perform "as self-responsible enterprising authors of their own lives" (Redden 399), the game requires Vee to prove her autonomy, independence, and maturity by making decisions for herself, by herself, which will determine her success in game.

## Risk-taking, winning and losing.

*NERVE* disguises the precarities of its dares behind its ludic format, and the game tests its Players' determination to risk everything to compete and win. When a Player named Samuel cautions that they should exercise prudence to not risk their winnings, another Player named Micki reminds him that "...the game is called *NERVE*, not *CANDY ASS*" (*Nerve* 178-179). Risk-taking is an important neoliberal quality. Danger is built into the game, and *NERVE*'s very name invokes the need for Players to assess risk and openly display their willingness to take risks. Even before Vee enters the game, she exhibits the neoliberal risk-assessment skills that Players need. Aware that *NERVE* involves illegal dares, Vee browses the game's website and admires how lavishly the game rewards risk-takers. "They show us photos of the smiling winners. Not bad for one night of terror, I guess" (*Nerve* 33). She quickly realises that "...This much loot will come with hefty expectations" (*Nerve* 73). Like any self-enterprising neoliberal subject should, Vee rationally evaluates the potential rewards against the risks of playing *NERVE*. She understands that terror and danger are intrinsic components of *NERVE*, and its rewards are directly proportional to the risks she must take.

Her friend Tommy castigates Vee's willingness to risk her life for a game: "'You saw how they terrorized the players in the last game. Ever hear of PTSD? My cousin has had it since he got back from Afghanistan'" (*Nerve* 71). Speaking of the ludification of society, Raessens says that play elements have steadily entered areas like warfare (6). Tommy's description of *NERVE* clearly articulates that the risks inherent in warfare have likewise been incorporated into play, making the game extremely risky for adolescents to play. Tommy is proven right - throughout the competition, Vee is exposed to increasingly dangerous scenarios. Nevertheless, this risk exposure actually raises Vee's resilience to precarity and spurs her willingness to pursue greater risks. Vee is surprised by her new daring when she spontaneously caresses fellow Player Ian. She thinks: "Maybe the game is altering my risk-taking DNA somehow" (*Nerve* 125). For Vee,

the game has improved her on a fundamental level; she learns that the benefits of risk-taking are directly proportional to improving her life. When *NERVE* offers to reward her with a scholarship for the Final Round, she resolves to risk everything: “I could seriously change my life...I’ll be someone who risked it all to win big” (*Nerve* 155).

Game-docs are neoliberal apparatuses that teach participants about “individual and group governance” via competition (Ouellette and Hay 174; 4). Although participants may occasionally play in teams, they must always work for themselves. Therefore, participants must balance the tensions between their commitment to the group as productive, valuable, and contributing team members, against their personal responsibility to themselves to remain competitive (Ouellette & Hay 185). In the Final Round of *NERVE*, all Players are combined into a single team and informed that: “You’re playing as a team now, so if one of you quits, no one wins any prizes” (*Nerve* 172). Since *NERVE* ties everyone’s prizes together, the threat of one player failing or being deadweight jeopardises everyone. As Vee is the least enthusiastic and most openly resistant Player, she is immediately identified as their weakest link and the biggest threat to their team’s competitiveness. “[Micki] makes a fist and glares around the table, stopping at me. “If anyone wusses out, I’m coming for you”” (*Nerve* 173). Vee’s value to the other Players is related directly to her willingness to contribute as an individual within the group, and her teammates threaten punitive disciplinary action to forcibly govern Vee into a cooperative and competitive Player.

During group competitions, game-docs can heighten distinctions between winners and losers by making participants vet and vote on who remains and who leaves the game (Ouellette & Hay 187). Participants are therefore pressured to constantly display their desire and commitment to win as proof that they “deserve” to stay in the game (Kosciesza 1691). During the Final Round, *NERVE* instructs the Players to vote for a victim. On the understanding that the victim will be eliminated, the Players engage in Darwinian social competition by separating

the most underserving participant from the fittest. As the most unwilling Player, Vee disqualifies her as a contender in the other Players' eyes. When they naturally select her as their victim, she observes their changed attitude towards her: "I make my way around...noticing how the rest of the players avert their eyes, as if I'm no longer an entity. Oh God, isn't that the first step that people at war go through? Depersonalizing their victim?" (*Nerve* 213). The competitive neoliberal logics of *NERVE* pitches Players into ludic warfare as they judge each person's worthiness to survive. As the designated 'loser', Vee loses her human value as a non-entity to be eliminated from the game. Unlike Vee, who faces the serious repercussions of elimination, Mae, the main protagonist of *The Last One*, plays a game that has no eliminations but which suddenly ends without her knowledge.

### *The Last One*

In Alexandra Oliva's *The Last One*, a devastating pandemic of unknown origin strikes during the production of *In the Dark*, a wilderness survival competition. Caught during Solo Challenge in the middle of the woods, most of the dispersed participants and camera-crew are either evacuated or succumb to the disease. However, Mae is abandoned and she continues playing the aborted game as the last remaining participant. Mae initially remains ignorant of the pandemic and is unaware that the competition has ceased, so she continues playing the game. When Mae accidentally breaks her glasses, she begins suffering from double-vision and actively indulges in cycles of self-deception to protect her sanity from the mounting evidence of apocalypse surrounding her. Walking with compromised vision through pandemic-ravaged towns, Mae imagines and interprets the destruction around her as the sick designs of the game's production team intended to test her limits. Alone and facing immense hardships and privations, Mae actively draws upon the survival rules and neoliberal mentalities that she learned from *In the Dark*. Driven by her refusal to quit both the game and life, she hardens

herself into a strategically self-reliant player and survivor to push herself to reach her imagined finish line: going back home.

### Playing without a game.

The very structure of *In the Dark* seems designed to force participants to develop and constantly display a range of neoliberal mentalities, from heightened self-reliance and autonomy, to competitiveness and self-enterprise. Unlike most conventional game-docs, which are played in fixed arenas that Brenton and Cohen describe as “self-contained pocket worlds” (50), the contract for *In the Dark* stipulates that the game may be played across sprawling distances with no marked boundaries. Most importantly for the participants, this game-doc has no eliminations, no definitive finishing line, and no fixed end date: “No one knows how long the show will last, not the creators, not the contestants” (*The Last One* 25). In this regard, *In the Dark* subverts the traditional definitions and expectations of games and play, as outlined by Roger Caillois in *Man, Play and Games* (2001). Caillois argues that play has specific spatial-temporal boundaries “with precise limits of time and place” (6). However, *In the Dark* does satisfy one of Caillois’s stipulations: that players have the freedom to articulate their intention to stop playing and withdraw from the competition (6). The only way to exit *In the Dark* is to utter the safety phrase “*Ad tenebras dedi*”, meaning “into the night, I surrender” (*The Last One* 25).

As this game-doc appears designed to afford participants an unusually high degree of autonomy, participants who quit must bear the shame of committing the neoliberal sin of choosing to surrender on their own volition. Ouellette and Hay argue that Reality TV places participants in difficult circumstances to test their ability to act as “agents of their uncertain destinies” (4). Similarly, Elliot believes that “[w]hen life is reduced to minimal elements and self-preservation is at stake, the operations and consequences of agency become magnified”

(89). As the pandemic in *The Last One* pre-dates COVID-19, the novel presciently anticipates the inadequacies of the corporate state's response to support citizens during difficult times. The pandemic in the novel generates precarities that push Mae to draw upon the neoliberal mentalities which she learned from *In the Dark*. The real-world dangers she encounters magnify an intense drive to continue persevering as a display of her self-reliance and agency. She survives her predicament precisely because she believes "I cannot give up. I cannot fail. As exhausted and frustrated as I am, I must keep going. I've given myself no other choice" (*The Last One* 265). Mae feels pride at her autonomy to choose to keep going rather than quit: "The choices were mine to make" (*The Last One* 77).

The pandemic that paralyses the state and collapses society strikes while Mae and the other participants are undertaking Solo Challenge. Mae is essentially abandoned by the production and the state when evacuation attempts of participants and citizens fail. As the precarities of the pandemic spill into the game, self-reliance becomes absolutely essential for survival. After days of being alone, Mae believes her total solitude is a natural part of Solo Challenge. "*It was bound to happen eventually*. The contract said we'd be on our own for long stretches, monitored remotely. I was prepared for this, looking forward to it, even..." (*The Last One* 10). Through the neoliberal logics of the game, Mae believes she is contractually obligated as a participant to survive 'solo'. Furthermore, Mae's understanding that she is still "monitored remotely" is reminiscent of Ouellette and Hay's argument that Reality TV is a neoliberal apparatus that facilitates "governing at a distance" (2). As self-reliant subjects, participants take charge of their own governance, requiring only minimal 'remote' or 'distant' governance from others. Though forced to fend for herself amidst a rapidly deteriorating global health crisis, Mae actually welcomes the freedom to exercise her self-reliance in charting her own path.

Obeying the rules of (the) competition.

Both neoliberalism and game-docs valorise merciless winner-takes-all competitiveness. For neoliberal citizens and game-doc participants to survive and succeed in the marketplace or in the game, they must outcompete and outlast others. Although Mae suffers terribly and longs to utter the safety phrase to quit, she keeps competing rather than accept the release of elimination (and possibly death). Wondering why she feels so driven to continue competing and surviving, Mae reflects: “When I was introduced to the ideas of Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel in school...I experienced the closest thing I’ve ever known to a spiritual revelation. I recognized truth” (*The Last One* 77). Just as citizens in *Surviving Antarctica* are indoctrinated daily to the neoliberal logics of competition, so too has Mae’s thinking been shaped to embrace competition as ‘truth’. Even before Mae participated on *In the Dark*, she was already thoroughly trained to accept the inevitability and desirability of Darwinian competition. Mae’s admiration for Darwin and Mendel naturalizes for her the logics of competition even in play. Competition is integral to *In the Dark* as it informs how participants engage in teamwork, and competition justifies the game’s slanted rewards system. The impulse to compete is so strong that Mae continues competing even without a competition or other competitors.

Mae eventually encounters a survivor named Brennan, whom she mistakes for a ‘new’ companion/competitor sent by the producers. Brennan’s presence heightens Mae’s competitiveness and sharpens her self-enterprising and strategic survivalist thinking. Trekking through plague-emptied towns, they obtain supplies at abandoned stores. Though they needn’t pay, Mae continues being self-enterprising in the literal marketplace. Neoliberalism demands that self-enterprising subjects apply economic logics to their decisions in the marketplace (Schram 308; Brown 39). Mae’s consumer choices are directed by market rationalities and she carefully calculates the costs-benefits of her choices. Whenever she strategically selects items that advance her survival, like portable just-add-water meals, she feels a “sense of accomplishment” (*The Last One* 84). Especially during times of suffering, the individual’s

ability to make choices in the market feels empowering (Elliot 83). Brennan meanwhile chooses candy, and Mae critically assesses his consumer choices as irresponsible. Mae resents when Brennan asks to share her just-add-water meals: “I chose my supplies with care. I cannot give him any” (*The Last One* 116). By the economic logics of neoliberalism, non-enterprising subjects like Brennan do not deserve handouts and must take responsibility for his poor choices. Mae meanwhile feels vindicated as a consummate self-enterprising individual who makes competitive and strategic consumer and survival choices.

Game-docs involving teamwork elevate competitiveness as teammates exercise group governance by vetting “who’s in and who’s out” (Ouellette & Hay 185; 187). Anyone unwilling to contribute as productive teammates is valued less and usually expelled before they can drain the group. Prior to Solo Challenge and the pandemic, participants of *In the Dark* occasionally cooperated for group activities. Yet competition still manifests when the participant called Exorcist sleeps while the others prepare camp together. When he returns expecting food, the others refuse to share their group-made dinner, and conflict ensues. Amongst all the participants, “[a]n ancient instinct is kicking in...an unwillingness to carry an able but lazy individual” (*The Last One* 202). Discussing the ethics of denying someone food, the participants rationalise that ““He just took a nap while the rest of us set up camp... why should we carry his weight?”” (*The Last One* 204). They declare that ““He’s not worth it”” (*The Last One* 203). Exorcist’s unwillingness to contribute determines his human value to the group as worthless. He is firmly informed that ““If you want to eat as a team, you gotta be part of the team”” (*The Last One* 202). Exorcist is effectively ostracized as punishment, and he reflects that ““Every society needs its pariahs”” (*The Last One* 204).

*In the Dark* practices a rewards system explicitly designed to reinforce competitiveness. The production team validates the desirability of competition and winning by distinguishing and separating victors from losers. After winning a challenge, Banker’s team of four is rewarded



with an exclusive feast. Realising that “[t]he feast could feed all twelve contestants, easily” (*The Last One* 89), Banker suggests sharing their spoils with the others who lost.

‘We could share,’ he says.

Rancher shakes his head. ‘Nah, we won, fair and square.’

‘It’s not like they’re starving,’ says Biology. ‘It’s just a game.’

Her last comment will be struck. The on-site producer will approach her later, remind her not to call their situation a game.

(*The Last One* 89)

Peck, Brenner & Theodore argue that neoliberalism promotes “competitive individualism with deep antipathies to social redistribution and solidarity” (6). Neoliberalism dictates that receiving rewards is an inalienable moral right for the victorious who deserve their rewards as part of the fundamental economic returns for striving, surviving, and succeeding. Banker’s teammates subscribe to the neoliberal logics of the game, which disinclines fellow-feeling and sharing with competitors; they feel justified that the other participants should rightfully receive nothing and accept this condition as part of the neoliberal logics of competition. When Biology refers to the competition as a game, she exposes that *In the Dark* is composed of established rules and systems like rewards and penalties. Biology inadvertently reveals that the game and its market rationalities are not inherently natural but are cultural constructs, thus exposing the invisible hands of the market and the production team. The game’s interior rules must remain invisible to viewers, and participants must dutifully observe the unspoken rule of not revealing the game. When Biology breaks this rule, the producer silences her in a display of disciplinary power to preserve the integrity of the illusion that sustains the competitive logics of game-docs.

Mae was so thoroughly trained into a dedicated neoliberal player by the rules of *In the Dark* that despite the game’s abrupt cessation, Mae still perceives herself as a participant who must continue adhering to the game’s rules. Her inability to distinguish and focalise reality from the game is understandable considering the effects that playing games have on players’ minds. Caillois says that play “absorb[s] the player intensely and utterly” (4). Lasch elaborates that

games “obliterate awareness of everyday reality...by raising it to a new intensity of concentration” (100). Brenton and Cohen believe that the precarious and competitive pocket worlds of game-docs actually “engender a mentality in their participants far more consuming” and in which participants “cease to be as they know themselves to be” (109). Mae’s misperception(s) are reinforced after she accidentally breaks her glasses during a wild animal attack. Finding herself with impaired sight, Mae’s compromised vision inadvertently sustains the rules and expectations of *In the Dark* long after the game ends. Unable to fully perceive or accept the reality of her situation, including the real precarities she faces in a pandemic world, Mae continues conducting herself according to the neoliberal ideologies she learnt from the game.

Throughout *The Last One*, Oliva sophisticatedly manipulates depth of focalisation to convey how Mae overlaps her perceptions of her environment with game logics. Bal describes focalisation as “the relationship between the ‘vision,’ the agent that sees, and that which is seen” (146). For Rimmon-Kenan, focalization encompasses and conveys a character’s “cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation” (73). As a focalising character and neoliberal subject, Mae’s compromised vision merges with the game’s neoliberal mentalities to overwhelm her ability to interpret what she focalises. Notably, although Mae breaks her glasses, one lens manages to remain intact, and she clutches it for inspiration. “As I walk, I hold the surviving lens from my glasses...The lens has become my worry stone...my I-can-do-this-stone” (*The Last One* 75). For Mae, the surviving lens focalises the neoliberal mentalities she developed from the game and which she now draws upon to inform her choices and conduct. The lens helps motivate her forwards by focusing and focalising her neoliberal “I-can-do-this” attitude of self-reliance. Mae compulsively holds the lens to cling tightly onto her neoliberal perceptions of herself as a participant and survivor, as she recognises that just like “the surviving lens”, she is capable of prevailing despite the precarities she endures.

Whenever Mae uses her single surviving lens to focalise, it simultaneously produces for her double-vision and half-vision, and she perceives both more and less than what there is. She perpetually mis-perceives her surroundings, including all signs of the pandemic, as part of the game, and responds accordingly. Mae encounters numerous forms of written communication from the ‘real’ world warning about the pandemic, which Oliva represents textually as extraliterary genres. When Mae sees a signboard warning against close contact, she attempts to read it despite her short-sightedness. “I feel as though I’ve just scored a point. I read a word; I’m winning this Challenge” (*The Last One* 212). Her time on *In the Dark* has trained Mae into a neoliberal subject who eagerly turns her difficulties with seeing into a rewarding challenge. She transforms the act of reading into a playful capitalist game where she can accumulate points and feel the satisfaction of competing and winning, even if it is just with herself. The sign she reads says:

NO TRESSPASSING.  
VIOLATORS WILL BE GUTTED.

*Gutted*, I think. The sign is so extreme, so ridiculous...

With the thought, a sense of extreme unimportance overwhelms me. This show isn’t about me. It’s not about the other contestants...We’re bit players, our purpose one of entertainment, not enlightenment...

This is the game I agreed to play.  
(*The Last One* 212-213)

When Mae uses her lens to read the sign, her confused doubled and halved vision combines with her neoliberal game-doc mentalities to transform the sign into a prop with a message from the production team ‘directed’ at her. The fact that the violently worded sign is “so extreme, so ridiculous” is for her perfectly in keeping with the wilderness survival narrative of *In the Dark*. The sign becomes discursive proof that reaffirms the game’s continuance. Thus, Mae feels herself obligated to continue being a participant and performs as such. She perceives the sign as a reminder that the game-doc reduces the human value of its participants into “bit players”

used for entertainment. Significantly, so long as she believes her purpose is for entertainment rather than enlightenment, Mae will continue misperceiving the purpose of everything around her for its putative entertainment value. This effectively prevents her from reaching enlightenment to see that she is freed from the game. Her recognition that she has agreed to play by the game's rules, no matter how extreme or ridiculous they sound to her, thus makes her complicit and responsible for prolonging her terrible situation.

Mae continues adhering closely to the game's archaic rules for fear that breaking them will result in elimination. Participants were contractually obligated to obey numerous rules forbidding civilised comforts like sleeping indoors, in order to sustain the wilderness and survival themes of *In the Dark*. Despite an abundance of evacuated houses to sleep inside comfortably, Mae continues 'roughing it' by camping outdoors. Her companion Brennan cannot understand her determination to avoid civilisation, so he incessantly questions her logic, which threatens Mae's sense of stability: "Why is he challenging me like this? Why doesn't he have any regard for the rules of the game?" (*The Last One* 210). Mae has been so mentally conditioned by the rules-bound world of *In the Dark* that Brennan's suggestions represent a dangerous rupture; breaking one rule would prove that there are no repercussions to disobedience because the production is no longer controlling her. Mae would be forced to recognise her freedom from the game, but she also unconsciously fears losing the illusory safety of the game. Deflecting Brennan's questions, Mae draws on her compromised vision to reassert the game's comforting reality: "I grasp my glasses lens, tight. If I allow myself to doubt, I'll be lost" (*The Last One* 210). For all the protagonists in the three novels analysed in this chapter, obedience to the neoliberal rules of their respective game-docs is essential because losing entails certain death, despite the apparently ludic qualities of the game-docs.

## Chapter conclusion.

In this chapter, I analysed the representations of game-docs as neoliberal apparatuses designed to train adolescent participants into competitive neoliberal subjects. While the game-docs in the focus novels are staged in diverse settings, they are played in neoliberal and ludic societies. I discussed how the corporate state and the erosion of welfare created socio-economic inequalities and personal precarities that citizens must contend with by themselves. Simultaneously, the ludification of society naturalised and accelerated the integration of neoliberalism into seemingly innocuous activities like games-docs. Consequently, neoliberal mentalities along with the precarities that neoliberalism generates have been incorporated into the competition formats, discourses and rules of game-docs. *Surviving Antarctica* most prominently exemplifies the corporate state's aggressive extension of privatisation and market competition, while *The Last One* demonstrates the abandonment of citizens to precarities.

The game-docs in all three novels translate the outside world's dangers into their competitions, and the young participants must embrace and practice neoliberal mentalities to survive their respective game-docs. Participants must take responsibility for themselves to overcome the precarities they face while competing; they must constantly demonstrate their competitive fitness and commitment to win by self-enterprisingly seizing every opportunity to outlast others. Anyone who fails to compete risks not just elimination, but death. While game-docs use play in fantastic environments to train adolescents in neoliberal mentalities, in the next chapter, I consider how family-docs brings neoliberal mentalities closer to home for adolescents.

## Chapter 3

### Family Matters: Family-docs that Pathologize and Rehabilitate Adolescents in *Reality Boy* and *Something Real*.

In this chapter, I examine two YA novels that represent the trauma young people experience to their identities when they are forced to star alongside their families on family documentaries (henceforth family-docs). A.S. King's *Reality Boy* (2013) depicts a nanny-themed family-doc called *Network Nanny*, while Heather Demetrios's *Something Real* (2014) depicts *Baker's Dozen*, a composite of lifestyle television, consumer makeover and docusoap. The Fausts in *Reality Boy* and the Bakers in *Something Real* are seemingly all-American families struggling with ungovernable offspring whose messy bodies and misbehaviours disrupt their families' lives. Both families appeal to corporate broadcasters for help and services; the Fausts for childrearing intervention and the Bakers for financial sponsorship. The families willingly open their homes to camera-crews to film their daily lives and familial breakdowns, while childcare and lifestyle experts evaluate, diagnose and rehabilitate their children's behavioural issues. The cameras interspersed throughout their homes document the families' attempts at governing, disciplining and even shaming their children into civilised individuals. As neither Gerald Faust nor Chloe Baker consent to appear on television, they feel violated that their private lives are exposed on national television, and they resist the family-doc's intrusion and interference upon their identities, bodies and behaviours.

I begin the chapter by contextualising the American family institution in the contemporary neoliberal era. I confine my examination of neoliberalism's impact on American families to George Bush's administration during the first decade of the twenty-first century, because both Gerald in *Reality Boy* and Chloe in *Something Real* first experience the family-doc in the mid-2000s. I discuss how the family's position as a key institution for neoliberal governmentality was cemented as neoliberalism realigned the corporate state's policies away from supporting

families and placed enormous responsibilities upon families to raise their children as self-governing consumer citizens. Still, there are unmistakeable anxieties that the American family institution is ‘in decline’. This decline is allegedly caused by ungovernable youths whose unruly behaviours destabilise their families’ domestic harmony and economic prosperity. As popular programming, family-docs contribute to the narrative that families are in crisis due to out-of-control children. The subgenre glories in spectacles of parents struggling to govern their children’s difficult and deviant behaviours. I examine how family-docs offer privatised resources and expert interventions intended to help families govern, discipline and rehabilitate their badly behaved offspring on television. Of the three Reality TV subgenres that I discuss in this thesis, the family-doc brings neoliberal governmentality closest to home and directly into adolescents’ private lives.

I approach the family-docs in *Reality Boy* and *Something Real* as neoliberal apparatuses that rehabilitate and govern young people towards neoliberal values and consumer subjectivities. For *Reality Boy*, I situate the TV nanny among those experts who have opened the private family to external examination and control. I examine how *Network Nanny* diagnoses Gerald’s body and behaviours as pathologically ‘dirty’. The TV nanny then attempts to rehabilitate Gerald through household disciplinary regimes and managerial techniques. For *Something Real*, I consider how *Baker’s Dozen* operates in the consumer society to help ‘rebrand’ the adolescent’s identity. *Baker’s Dozen* deploys lifestyle gurus to coach Chloe to make entrepreneurial shopping choices and optimally remake her public image and body into desirable commodities with market value. I should note that I use the word “children” throughout this chapter to refer to the family’s *offspring* regardless of their biological age, rather than specifically to pre-teen individuals. My reason for this is because *Reality Boy* and *Something Real* are notably the only YA novels I analyse in this thesis where the adolescent

protagonists originally participated on Reality TV during childhood. Gerald and Chloe continue to be governed in various ways by the family-doc well into their adolescence.

### The neoliberal American family.

The family is at the heart of American society and the family institution is of fundamental importance to the nation, the economy, and to the governance and ideological formation of the individual self. Foucault argues that the family is more than a system of kinship relations; rather, the family is a “physical environment which envelops, maintains and develops the child’s body” (*Power/Knowledge* 172-173). Richard Gill conceptualises the family as “a virtually universal institution by which human beings historically...have organized the succession of generations” (14). Gill’s choice of word ‘organized’ aptly reflects the family’s managerial role in governing offspring, which makes the family institution essential to neoliberal governmentality. The family’s managerial role and its connections to governance and the economy are cemented by Skeggs, who notes that while the word economy has evolved to its contemporary meaning of “the management of national resources”, including citizens, the word economy formerly referred more to “the management of a household” (29-30). As these various definitions illustrate, the family institution is intimately involved in governance; through the family’s domestic responsibilities for organising the household and its duties for managing its offspring, the family is understood to raise children into compliant citizens and future economic subjects.

I now contextualise the American family’s place in the contemporary neoliberal era. As discussed in the previous chapter, neoliberalism in the U.S. supports the free market, brought the rise of the corporate state, and promotes values like self-responsibility, entrepreneurialism and competitiveness. As neoliberalism has had far-reaching political, economic and social effects, it is unsurprising that American families have found their personal lives and domestic



existences profoundly 'remodelled' by neoliberal ideologies and policies. Neoliberalism's rationalisation for minimal state intervention in both public- and private-sectors also extends to the family. As Rose notes, "the family represents the private sphere *par excellence*" (*Governing* 126). As such, the family's position in the private sphere means that the family is widely perceived to exist "outside the proper authority of the state" to directly govern and control (*Governing* 126). From a neoliberal perspective, just as the market and state should be separate, so too is the family imagined to be free from the state's interference. Consequently, neoliberalism advocates for the family's freedom and responsibility to manage its private affairs, including developing its own economic potential and raising its children independently. Neoliberalism positions the family as free not only from government overreach but also from overdependence on the state.

Furthermore, the establishment of the corporate state expedited the rapid diminishment of the welfare state and the concurrent growth in antiwelfare sentiments. The opening decade of the twenty-first century witnessed an aggressive neoliberal sea-change in the state's attitudes towards its obligations to the family. Throughout the course of George W. Bush's presidency from 2001 to 2009, the federal government progressively realigned its responsibilities and policies for families. The state's budget and spending on welfare to support families, especially low-income families and families with dependent children, were heatedly questioned and steadily reduced. State funding was slashed for educational initiatives like the Head Start programme for schoolchildren from underprivileged households, as was funding for food stamps that helped low-income families feed their children (Becker 179). The state also pursued tightening its expenditure on housing payment schemes and cash support for families with dependents (Becker 179). The Bush administration's attempts to ruthlessly cut-back its spending on social welfare were motivated by more than fiscal prudence. Neoliberalism invested the corporate state's growing antiwelfare stance with ideological and moral legitimacy. From a neoliberal

and antiwelfare perspective, the state's attempts to help the family were, ironically, partly responsible for allowing the decline of the modern family.

According to the logics of neoliberalism, if state regulations make the economy sluggish by hindering market competitiveness, then interventions from the state would presumably also hold back the family from progressing. State interventions like welfare were increasingly perceived as government overreach into the family. Coontz observes that as early as the 1970s, commentators were already vocally criticising the welfare state as “overly generous”, even as economic conditions in the U.S. grew more challenging for families (80). Neoliberalism stigmatises welfare dependence by promoting the “myth that only “abnormal” or “failed” families require public assistance...” (Coontz 85). As one of the demographics that needs welfare the most, low-income families are widely regarded as particularly at risk of being crippled by becoming inordinately reliant on state support and welfare (Ouellette & Hay 95). As such, Bush's administration pushed hard for welfare reforms based on the understanding and general disapproval that welfare weakens American families by diminishing the family's independence, natural competitiveness and entrepreneurial spirit (Ouellette & Hay 95). The corporate state justifies its fervent dismantling of welfare as a positive and necessary prerequisite to activate the family's entrepreneurial and competitive drives by forcing the family to stand independently (Becker 179).

As neoliberalism gained dominance in the U.S., it gave rise to “a romanticized notion of the autonomous family” (Becker 176). Furthermore, the market pressures of neoliberalism compel families to behave competitively “to capitalise on the uneven spread of resources in order to maximise the futures of its own children” (Garrett, Jensen & Voela ix-x). As discussed in the previous chapter, neoliberal values such as self-responsibility, self-reliance, competitiveness, and entrepreneurialism are also central to the American sense of self and way of life. For Rose, the model neoliberal citizen is one who can “...conduct his or her life, and that of his or her

family, as a kind of enterprise” (*Powers of Freedom* 164). From a neoliberal perspective, the ideal family strategically manages itself and its offspring like a business enterprise. Through the medium of the family, children are raised to learn how best to maximise their life chances “through calculated acts and investments” (*Powers of Freedom* 164). As such, the family contributes to the economy and reinforces neoliberal governmentality by nurturing and governing its children into optimal citizens and consumers. Such citizen-consumers must both possess and display their capacity to work and consume competitively in the consumer society.

It is precisely because neoliberalism frames the family as private and separate from the state that the family’s social and economic roles and its institutional involvement in governing are concealed (*Governing* 126). The family is not operationally a ‘private’ institution but rather a vital site for governmentality (Garrett, Jensen & Voela x). Foucault describes the family as “the privileged instrument for the government of the population” (*Governmentality lecture* 100). Rose notes that government, which involves shaping the conduct of others, can occur anywhere “where conduct is subject to government”, and he specifies the home and family as places where conduct is governed (*Powers of Freedom* 5). Similarly, Ventura refers to the family as “a locus of control” and she asserts that “[g]overnment begins at home” (13). As the family is the primary medium through which children’s early physical, ideological and social development occurs, the family is usually where most people first encounter and experience being governed. The family has important ideological dimensions and is inextricably linked to governance because it acts as a “voluntary” institution in which parents and guardians are tasked with the responsibility of raising, moralising, and governing children into future citizens that are “a docile labour force” (*Governing* 132; 126).

Although neoliberal governmentality presents as “deeply liberating” the idea that “all individuals [are] responsible only for themselves and their families” (Ventura 12), neoliberalism has also impacted American families less positively. With the loss of welfare

and the stigmatization of depending on state support, many American families feel overburdened with having to survive the precarities and inequalities of market competition. Anxieties about the state of the American family are widely felt. Melinda Cooper describes the American family as in “perpetual crisis” (7) and Stephanie Coontz comments that “[p]eople worry about families” (21). The neoliberal challenges and changes to the American family institution have also been broadly compounded by other social-economic and socio-cultural factors. For instance, the gender revolution is routinely blamed for inspiring mothers to ‘abandon’ their families and children to selfishly pursue and prioritise their careers (Cooper 8). Family dynamics have also altered significantly with a sharp rise in divorces and the corresponding fallout of ‘fatherlessness’ facing many families (Cooper 7; Coontz 16). With youths seemingly left to themselves thanks to the widespread loss of family life, concerns and debates have turned towards youths themselves. Troublingly, young people are also blamed for their supposed role in the family institution’s decline.

As I argued in chapter one, adolescents in the U.K. have been discursively and ideologically situated at the centre of widespread moral panics. Similarly, the cultural position that young people in the U.S. occupy has changed substantially as opinions about youth have dramatically deteriorated. For comparison, the prevailing sentiments during the 1960s and 1970s were that parents could trust their children and have faith in their children’s ability to act responsibly (Grossberg 16). Conversely, today many “American adults seem to believe that youth are in a “moral meltdown”” (Grossberg 22). Gill remarks that adolescents in America are perceived simultaneously as being in trouble and as sources of trouble, and these perceptions are fuelled by fears that “[v]iolence among teenagers is exploding” (35). In public discussions and on the media, adolescents are spoken of and represented as “uncivilized”, and figured as “animals” and “demons” (Grossberg 21). From a neoliberal perspective, such adolescents are bad subjects because their out-of-control behaviours disrupt their family’s stability and economic earning

potential. Since families are the first foundations of governance to build strong societies, badly behaved adolescents that hurt their families by extension also threaten the nation's stability, economic progress and social order (Grossberg 21).

Grossberg argues that “kids are growing up in an environment in which the slightest sign of deviance is met by diagnosis, control, and punishment” (52). Adolescents are increasingly inserted into tighter “network[s] of surveillance” that make their bodies, movements and behaviours knowable to others (Taylor & Rooney 1). Rose notes that as “the 'private' family has been opened up”, the conduct and behaviour of young people has been made ever more visible (*Governing* 124). Whenever there arise possibilities for youths to be disruptive, deviant or dirty, “devices of surveillance were installed; traps were laid for compelling admissions; inexhaustible and corrective discourses were imposed” (*History of Sexuality* 42). Anxieties about the young have produced “a panoply of programmes that have tried to conserve and shape children by moulding the petty details of the domestic...” (*Governing* 123). Among this panoply of programmes is the family-doc subgenre. As neoliberal apparatuses, family-doc programmes manage the family in the domestic sphere; surveillance devices are installed around the home to catch and expose bad behaviour; TV experts diagnose and pathologize the family; confessions of dysfunction are extracted on-camera; and corrective disciplinary techniques are dispensed to shape every aspect of young people's life and conduct within the family.

#### The family-doc subgenre.

The family and family life are enduring themes in media culture, and family-docs capitalise on the entertainment value of watching the lifestyles of real families. Family-doc programmes cast actual families who appear ‘as themselves’ on-screen. These families may come from various socio-economic backgrounds and represent all manner of family models, from

conventional nuclear families to blended, celebrity, polygamous, and even supersized families. A portmanteau of ‘family’ and ‘documentary’, the term family-doc reflects the subgenre’s interest in documenting family life. Around the 1960s, camera equipment grew smaller and more portable; the improvements in recording technologies facilitated the documentary tradition’s fly-on-the-wall observational techniques and made it possible for documentary filmmakers to record their subjects less obtrusively and for extended lengths of time (Bignell 14; Kavka 27). Hence, it became easier for documentary filmmakers interested in capturing family life to record families continuously within the ‘natural’ environment of their homes. Home is central to family-doc narratives and the actual household of the mediated family often serves as the primary setting for most family-docs. By bringing cameras into private homes, family-docs offer viewers glimpses into the (putatively) unscripted interactions, conversations, relationships, and dynamics between family members going about their daily routines.

The appeal of family-docs is that they allow viewers to become intimately familiar with the represented family. Notably, the subgenre also demonstrates elements of the docusoap in its overt melding of the generic conventions of the documentary and the soap opera. Family-docs resemble docusoaps by following each family member’s personal life across multiple storylines, and thematically in the subgenre’s penchant for turning the family’s triumphs and tribulations into emotional melodramas (Biressi & Nunn 64). Hence, family-docs do not merely record the family; rather, they dramatize family relationships by focusing on tensions and conflicts to transform the intimacies and friction of everyday family life into a “circus” (Edwards 125). Although family-docs strive to represent the family as ‘ordinary’ and relatable like our next-door neighbours, family-docs must maintain viewer interest by strategically casting families with unconventional attributes or families that are prone to “battles and outbreaks” (Ferguson 88). While the subgenre encompasses a vast family of Reality TV programmes, I focus specifically on *An American Family* and *Supernanny* (US version)

because both are influential programmes within the subgenre, and the family-docs represented in *Something Real* and *Reality Boy* appear modelled on these programmes respectively.

*An American Family* (1973) is widely credited with influencing how real American families are recorded and represented on television (Kavka 28). Kavka calls *An American Family* “the original family doc” (28), while Kozinn considers this landmark programme the first Reality TV show (11). *An American Family* was produced by Craig Gilbert. Gilbert’s production crew ‘lived-in’ with an average family for several months (Kavka 29). The programme featured the Louds, a white all-American nuclear family that consisted of parents Pat and Bill and their five children. The Louds initially appeared to live the American Dream in their upper-middle-class Californian home. Nevertheless, the programme’s premier in 1973 coincided with what Rupert and Puckett describe as “a disturbing transitional period” for Americans (83). Against the backdrop of the Vietnam War and gender revolution, the Louds struggled with various familial irruptions that destabilised their family, from Pat and Bill’s strained marriage to intergenerational tensions like teenage rebellion and their son Lance publicly coming out as homosexual. The collapse of their family climaxed with Pat and Bill’s nationally televised divorce, which seemed to legitimise anxieties that the American family and its values were in trouble (Kavka 28).

Another family-doc that spectacularises real families in turmoil is *Supernanny*. The U.S. version debuted on ABC in 2005 and was hosted by British nanny Jo Frost (Becker 176). *Supernanny* showcases families that have contacted the programme seeking Frost’s professional help. In most episodes, families struggle with their children’s behavioural issues and the parents’ inability to manage and discipline their offspring. Hence, *Supernanny* typically attributes the modern family’s rupture to ungovernable youths. Frost meets families in their homes to assess their domestic problems; she routinely judges the parents’ faulty childrearing skills and at least one child is invariably identified as “a chronic misbehaver” (Ouellette & Hay

96). Frost then helps the parents reassert control of their children and household by teaching them her brand of simplistic step-by-step disciplinary techniques and behavioural management strategies (Vered & McConchie 71). Frost's methods involve regimented house rules like the imposition of strict routines and timetables, the naughty step technique (a 'time-out' for children to reflect on their poor behaviour), and progress charts to record positive improvements in the children's conduct (Vered & McConchie 75; Skeggs & Wood 105). Episodes usually conclude with rehabilitated families made happier and healthier thanks to the TV nanny's guidance in governance.

Family-doc formats are usually structured around key narrative moments like destabilisation, diagnosis, intervention, and rehabilitation. Many family-doc programmes typically begin with scenes of families struggling with various domestic problems: children having uncontrolled tantrums, family members arguing, or messy households. As such, family-docs make publicly visible the private problems and conflicts of ordinary families. The subgenre's love for spectacularising family drama can be attributed to family-doc's close generic ties to infotainment programmes. Palmer notes that infotainment capitalises on publicly showing "[v]arious disorders and acts of incivility" (*Exposing* 7). The everyday lives, relationships and conflicts of these families are dramatized as "maladaptive" or "sick" (Lowney 80). Since family-doc programmes have a tendency to locate the source of the family's troubles in dysfunction familial dynamics, the family is often held as solely to blame for their problems (Bender 535). As family is the foundation of the American sense of self, family-docs articulate and reinforce anxieties that the American family institution is deteriorating (Edwards 133). Hence, family-doc programmes both shape and promote a distinctly "family crisis discourse" (Bender 541). However, as Biressi and Nunn caution, family-docs regularly overgeneralise the bad conduct of mediated families as the universal truth for all families (67).



After spectacularising the family's dysfunctions, family-docs then provide the services of experts who diagnose, guide and intervene to help the family rehabilitate itself. Family-docs enlist diverse experts from childcare specialists, fitness trainers, nutritionists, psychologists to lifestyle gurus. The television-appointed expert starts by observing and diagnosing the problems the family faces. Part of this diagnosis entails assessing how the family departs from the expert's opinions of good behaviour (Biressi & Nunn 15). The expert then passes judgement on the family, and will often medicalise or pathologize 'abnormal' aspects of the family's lifestyle, behaviour, and interpersonal relationships. Next, the expert devises a personalised curriculum of household guidelines, strategies, and regulations designed to rehabilitate the family. As such, family-docs have a particularly pedagogical nature because families must learn from experts how best to govern their children and manage their households more effectively. Palmer points out that when one family member is unable to progress or openly refuses to improve their lifestyle and conduct, they are shamed as failures (*Exposing* 8). In such cases, the expert will prescribe lifestyle interventions to discipline and 'save' the particular family member who has been marked as "self-destructive and/or out-of-control" (Ouellette & Hay 67).

Family-docs are aligned with and endorse neoliberal rationalities like personal responsibility and self-discipline. As the corporate state has diminished welfare support and public services like childcare have grown increasingly inaccessible to many families, the broad range of privatised services and expertise offered by family-docs appear socially acceptable from a neoliberal perspective (Vered & McConchie 69). For example, as Jo Frost of *Supernanny* is employed by a corporate broadcaster, she operates like a private consultant whose interventions and rehabilitation are aligned with the neoliberal preference for families to seek privatised services rather than state support. On their part, the families on family-docs are expected to practice neoliberal values. The mere fact that a family appears on family-docs to publicly admit

their deficiencies and limitations and to seek help is represented as an important (and neoliberal) step towards taking personal responsibility to improve itself. By following expert sanctioned regiments, families can supposedly govern themselves properly to reach their potential (Ouellette & Hay 92). However, by emphasising that the family can be saved through a combination of private-sector assistance and the family's personal efforts, family-docs deflect attention away from how underfunded public services have become for families in neoliberal societies (Edwards 134). In *Reality Boy*, the Faust family experiences the consequences of requesting the corporate services of a TV nanny.

### *Reality Boy*

In A.S. King's *Reality Boy* (2013), sixteen-year-old Gerald Faust is emotionally scarred by his humiliating experiences from the time his family starred on *Network Nanny*. When Gerald was five, he began openly defecating throughout his house, specifically soiling his eldest sister Tasha's belongings and bedroom. Gerald's parents, Doug and Jill, were unaware that Tasha was secretly brutalising Gerald, and they did not realise that Gerald used his unseemly defecation both as retaliation against Tasha and as a cry for help. Instead, his parents became distressed and disgusted by their youngest child's seemingly senseless bodily incontinence and they turned desperately to *Network Nanny* for professional help. The Fausts were sent a pseudo-childrearing 'specialist' whom the children referred to as Nanny. To reform Gerald, Nanny imposed tough love disciplinary regiments upon the Fausts. Unfortunately, by publicly shaming Gerald on television, Nanny also caused him to gain the permanent public persona of the Crapper. Instead of rehabilitating Gerald, Nanny exacerbated his dysfunctional behaviour. A decade later, teenaged Gerald continues to display destructive and self-destructive tendencies. He blames Nanny's incompetence and his parents' complicity for irreparably

damaging him, and he worries that his ability to pursue healthy relationships with others is forever stunted.

*Network Nanny* pathologizes the ‘dirty’ child.

*Network Nanny* fixates on Gerald’s tendency to openly defecate as the root cause of his family’s problems. When social anxieties blame the decline of the family on youths and their supposedly ‘bad’ behaviours and ‘dirty’ bodies, children like Gerald are vulnerable to social condemnation. As Amy West points out, dirt refers both to filth as physical matter and as metaphor (63). Dirtiness therefore has close ideological associations not only with pollution, waste and physical disease, but also with notions of class status and moral degradation (Wray 96). In *Purity and Danger* (2002), Mary Douglas argues that dirt is symbolically regarded as offensive and has been made taboo because of its associations with disorder (2). The seemingly natural tendency to react with disgust towards dirt and dirty individuals therefore stems from social unease towards anomaly (Douglas 5). Hence, individuals who glory in filth and who display their “desire to pollute oneself and take pleasure in impurity” are regarded as dangerous because their perversity destabilises the social order’s boundaries of morality (Wray 113). Society guards against the dangers of dirt and moral contagion by closely monitoring, exposing and sanctioning those whose actions and transgressions contaminate the physical and social body (Douglas 3-4).

Family-docs have a special affinity with dirt. The subgenre revels in the “exposure of actual, material instances of problematic matter”, offering viewers close-up displays of all manner of physical dirtiness, from bodily emissions to household messes like clutter, rubbish or mud, to social messes like arguing parents and screaming children (West 64). Notably, families on family-docs are expected to deliver what Grindstaff calls the ‘money shot’. Although the money shot refers to ejaculation in pornography, the term is more broadly about “mak[ing]

visible the precise moment of letting go” of one’s civilised self and bodily control (Grindstaff 20). Similarly, West argues that scenes of physical and behavioural dirtiness on family-docs are made “confusingly ‘sexual’” because they make ‘leaky’ bodies and private transgressions visible for public entertainment (71). Grindstaff also compares families who fight, quarrel and openly discuss their personal problems on television to defecating in public (23). Family-docs paradoxically horrify viewers because they offend Western sensibilities about dirt and pollution, yet titillate viewers with “delighted disgust” at glimpsing the ‘messed-up’ lives and relationships of other families (West 71). After spectacularising and pathologizing families with dirty homes, behaviours, and lifestyles, family-docs then offer to discipline and rehabilitate these families.

In *Reality Boy*, even though Nanny pathologizes Gerald’s open defecation, her programme profits from the entertainment value of spectacularising his dirty body and behaviour. Gerald’s ability to defecate on command in front of the cameras means he provides visible proof of his pathological tendencies while delivering the money shot for *Network Nanny*. The programme even eroticises Gerald’s penchant for openly relieving his bowels. Recounting how he was represented by the programme, Gerald asks “Remember how the camera cleverly hid his most private parts with the glittery fake daisy...?” (*Reality Boy* 1). Beyond his excessive defecation, Gerald exhibited various destructive behaviours. Adolescent Gerald describes his younger self as: “Gerald the spoiled little brat. Gerald the kid who threw violent tantrums that left holes in the drywall and who screamed so loud it made the neighbors call the police. Gerald the messed-up little freak...” (*Reality Boy* 2). Gerald’s description of himself as “messed-up” reinforces his bodily and behavioural dirtiness. For Gerald’s parents, their son was not only dirtying his body and their house with faeces, blood and broken plaster, he was also sickening their family’s domestic stability with his uncontrollable physical and verbal outbursts. To save their family, his parents turned to *Network Nanny*.

To gain *Network Nanny*'s sympathy and services, Doug and Jill Faust wrote Nanny a letter explicitly describing Gerald's proclivity for messily defecating around their house. Hence, even before they participated on *Network Nanny*, Gerald's parents already practiced the confession by revealing their child's problems to others. From a neoliberal perspective, confessing the family's struggles is an important step towards taking personal responsibility for seeking help. Once Nanny arrives, she draws upon her authority as expert to pressure the Fausts to continue confessing their child's dysfunctions: "'Well, come on, Faust family. Speak up!'" Nanny said" (*Reality Boy* 220). Gerald's mother admits her shame about her son when she confesses to Nanny: "'You can see why I think there's something wrong with him, right?'" (*Reality Boy* 219). Jill further justifies herself by rationalising: "'It's normal for families to try again for a boy...And look what we got. Look at *that* boy'" (*Reality Boy* 225). Jill's insistence that something is self-evidently "wrong" with Gerald delineates him from other healthy children, while her comment about what is normal for families reinforces that "*that* boy" is abnormal and pathological. Nanny uses the confession as a technique of power to get Gerald's parents to participate in her mission to pathologize Gerald on-camera.

#### The TV nanny governs the family.

That the Faust sought an expert's help to control Gerald is unsurprising when considering the significant involvement of experts in managing problematic children within the family. Nikolas Rose explains that as "a new visibility has been accorded to the child in its life within the household and outside it", the internal life of the family has similarly been opened to observation, judgement, and direction from external social powers (*Governing* 124). The private home has become increasingly accessible to entire markets of specialist experts who offer tailored consultations, guidance and disciplinary techniques to the family as private clients (*Power/Knowledge* 166). Such experts draw upon discourses as diverse as medicine, psychiatry, social hygiene, and childrearing to support "their claims to a scientific knowledge

of childhood” (*Governing* 134). In attending to the family, these experts will typically observe, assess and diagnose the family’s living conditions, intra-familial relationships, lifestyles and parenting styles. Having identified the family’s deficiencies and dysfunctions, experts then strive to help the family by providing guidance and training which are designed to help the family learn how best to discipline and govern its members. In so doing, the family learns to take personal responsibility as it restores itself to functional normality.

As Foucault remarks, the family is “the privileged locus of emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal and abnormal” (*Discipline & Punish* 216). Under the authority of experts, the family serves as a key site to determine the parameters and criteria of what is healthy and normal for children’s bodily, social and moral development. Rose points out that the expert’s declaration of what is normal or abnormal constitutes not only an observation but a pronouncement of value judgement that establishes standards to be achieved (*Governing* 133). As such, experts do not merely evaluate the family, they also moralize and even mortify families whose members, especially its children, do not conform to the norms that experts set. Furthermore, even though these experts couch their diagnoses and techniques with scientific and therapeutic discourses, their presence and the privatised consultations they offer to the family belies the “secretly economic” and transactional nature of their work (*Power/Knowledge* 166). Experts invariably profit from the family’s desperation by offering their services to resolve the family’s needs and difficulties. Significantly, the supposed benevolence of experts disguises their power to introduce greater governance and systems of surveillance and control over the home, the family and its children (*Governing* 125).

In *Reality Boy*, Nanny embodies the modern-day expert’s role on the family-doc as an authority for governing the family. Family-docs typically send experts from various backgrounds to struggling families to rehabilitate and restore them to normality. Upon their arrival in the family’s home, these TV-appointed experts monitor and assess the family. They

usually expose instances of the family's physical and behavioural dirtiness, which are diagnosed and pathologized as manifestations of socially offensive disorder (West 64). Many experts on family-docs like Nanny are positioned as "experts in hygiene and sanitation", and their primary objective is to "instill habits of cleanliness" to rehabilitate the family's pathologies (Ouellette & Hay 93). These experts provide the family with disciplinary techniques in household management, from cleaning practices to childcare (West 64). Experts on family-docs ostensibly help the family learn to master the skills needed to 'clean up' their lives through better domestic governance (Biressi & Nunn 15). As Douglas argues, any attempt to eliminate dirt or dirtiness entails reorganizing and governing one's self or environment (2). In her role as expert, Nanny strives to reorganize the Faust family by rehabilitating Gerald's dirty pathologies so that he can become a healthy, normal and self-governing child.

Many experts on family-docs rely on surveillance cameras placed throughout the home to gain visual evidence of the family's day-to-day dysfunctions. Gerald remembers that "Nanny only came around for a day and then she left her crew of cameras and cameramen there to film us being violent little bitches to one another. Then, two weeks later, she came back and decided, based on that footage, who was right, who was wrong, who needed *prop-ah punishment*, and who needed to learn more about *responsibility*" (*Reality Boy* 16). Though the surveillance footage offers visual proof of their family's disastrous intra-familial relationships and general incivility, Nanny specifically targets Gerald as the family's chronic misbehaviorer whose disruptiveness necessitates her presence in their home. "Then she looked exclusively at me... "Your parents have called me in because your family needs my help" (*Reality Boy* 15). Nanny also informs Gerald: "Your mother says you fight all the time and that's not acceptable behavior" (*Reality Boy* 15). Nanny's capacity to declare to the Fausts what constitutes acceptable behaviour and who deserves punishment reflects Biressi and Nunn's comment that

the expert “makes patently clear what is out of bounds in terms of attitudes, behaviour and lifestyle for the aspirant well-socialized family” (*Exposing* 15).

Nanny tells the Fausts: ““Sounds to me like you need the three steps to success in this house. And we’ll start with some old-fashioned discipline”” (*Reality Boy* 15). The disciplinary techniques on nanny-themed family-docs tend to be calibrated towards ““old-fashioned” household dynamics” which reflect the U.S. corporate state’s efforts to regularise government at home according to conservative and neoliberal family values (Ouellette & Hay 95). Family-docs bring neoliberal governance into the home through the experts’ domestic disciplinary techniques which strongly inculcate the importance of values like self-responsibility and self-discipline. Family-docs forward the neoliberal narrative that the family must be willing to learn from the TV experts’ specialised knowledge and technical guidance to manage their lives and take personal responsibility for their own problems (Ouellette & Hay 65; Kavka 135). Children on family-docs are often the primary target for the expert’s neoliberal disciplinary techniques. Ultimately, experts on family-docs reinforce neoliberal values by training parents in the art of raising their children to be well-disciplined and responsible citizens (Ouellette & Hay 98). Nanny’s efforts to rehabilitate Gerald are predicated on the expectation that the Fausts will discipline and train Gerald to take personal responsibility for regulating his own body and behaviours.

To help the Fausts regain control over their household by governing their children more strictly, Nanny teaches Doug and Jill to impose a regiment of household disciplines and managerial techniques. Gerald relates how: “She taught Mom and Dad about the naughty chair and how to take away screen time. They made homework charts with rows, columns, and stickers” (*Reality Boy* 16). Nanny’s techniques are strikingly similar to those popularised by Jo Frost of *Supernanny*, arguably the most famous family-doc nanny. Among Frost’s more well-known techniques are the naughty step and making schedules that divide the family’s time and



tasks into routines. Foucault calls the timetable “an old inheritance” (*Discipline & Punish* 149). The timetable as a disciplinary approach has spread into many areas of life, from schools and workplaces to the home. The timetable serves to “establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition...” (*Discipline & Punish* 149). By dividing the day, the timetable allows for the governing of bodies in time. Timetables and household charts are popular on family-docs because their simplicity and rigidity as disciplinary approaches allow the family to establish routines that help parents to engender obedience, orderliness and discipline in their children’s everyday conduct (Becker 184).

Gerald recalls that Nanny did not actually involve herself in helping their family make the charts. Nanny explains her reason to his parents: ““Anyway, it’s not my job to parent these children,” she said to Mom and Dad. “It’s yours”” (*Reality Boy* 16). From Nanny’s neoliberal perspective, it is Doug and Jill’s job as parents to ensure that they themselves actively practice taking personal responsibility for governing and disciplining their children. By mastering and enacting Nanny’s techniques, which are based upon the neoliberal rationalities of self-responsibility and discipline, Doug and Jill will presumably raise their children to embrace and practice these neoliberal rationalities. The Fausts’ commitment to enforcing Nanny’s disciplinary techniques is tested when Gerald wilfully defaces Tasha’s entire room with faeces. Jill’s immediate response is to call for professional cleaners, but Nanny intervenes: “Nanny put her hand up. “This is Gerald’s mess. He needs to clean it up. It’s part of his learning responsibility”” (*Reality Boy* 282). The TV nanny promotes the belief that when children are instructed to clean-up and look after themselves, they will become more disciplined and self-responsible in other areas of their daily lives, and thus grow into well-governed and responsible neoliberal adults (Ouellette & Hay 97).

### Gerald's self-governance post-*Network Nanny*.

I consider how *Reality Boy* utilises a multitemporal narrative structure to contextualise how *Network Nanny* continues to influence Gerald's present. When novels intertwine narrative strands of different timelines, these contrasting multitemporal narratives help to open up "a dialogue between textual past and present" that can provide readers with additional context and insights into characters and their development over time (McCallum 133). Wyile suggests considering how much time has passed between the character's focalisation of events and the narrator's telling of events in YA fiction (189). Although narration and focalisation are not interchangeable terms, in YA novels with first-person narration, the adolescent narrator-protagonist is often both the focalising individual who experiences, and the narrator who narrates events. Due to the relative youth of their protagonists, most first-person YA novels feature adolescent narrator-protagonists who narrate events from their immediate past (Wyile 187). The immediacy of first-person narration in YA fiction serves to align readers more intimately with the young narrator-protagonist's perspectives (Wyile 189). Nevertheless, this immediacy also means there is little temporal distance from the time adolescents protagonists focalise events to the time they narrate their experiences, thereby precluding much time or reflection to significantly influence their development and thinking.

Unlike the protagonists in the other YA novels that I examine in this thesis, Gerald is the only one to participate on Reality TV exclusively during childhood and not in his adolescence. Though Gerald was five when he starred on *Network Nanny*, the narrative proper begins when he is sixteen and is still struggling with the fallout of mediation. *Reality Boy* therefore has the longest timespan between the protagonist's participation on Reality TV and the present-day. The novel is structured into two narrative strands. The past narrative is focalised by five-year-old Gerald and narrated by adolescent Gerald, who recount the traumatic months on *Network Nanny* during his childhood. *Reality Boy*'s past narrative combines five-year-old Gerald's

innocent ignorance with adolescent Gerald's narratorial voice and ideological perspectives, including his adolescent cynicism and painful awareness of how Reality TV operates. Meanwhile, the present-day narrative is focalised and narrated in first-person narration by sixteen-year-old Gerald. The ten-year temporal gap between past and present-day narratives gives Gerald a decade of self-reflection to examine his life. The past narrative provides context to the present as Gerald reflects on how his current dysfunctions were aggravated by the shameful on-camera disciplinary techniques and rehabilitation that Nanny imposed upon him.

Although the Fausts parted with *Network Nanny* over a decade ago, Nanny's neoliberal ideologies and disciplinary training have enduring effects which continue to govern Gerald's sense of self and his conduct throughout his adolescence. Even though Gerald resents Nanny and attributes his current dysfunctions like his proclivity for physical violence to the trauma of being on *Network Nanny*, Gerald ironically maintains and practices many of the disciplinary techniques and neoliberal rationalities that Nanny instilled in him. For example, Gerald continues to practice the confession by keeping up ongoing and internal confession with an imagined viewer. He sees another expert, an anger management coach, for help with his emotional issues and violent tendencies. Gerald also actively tries to practice personal responsibility as he takes efforts to improve himself and master his bad behaviours. I will first examine how Gerald continues to engage in the confession impulse that he learned from *Network Nanny*. First-person narration conveys an immediate and engaging narratorial voice that helps produce an intimate tone reminiscent of the Reality TV confession mode as Gerald recounts and self-reflects on his childhood. *Reality Boy* opens with adolescent Gerald confessing to the narratee, whom he has fashioned into an imagined viewer:

**I'M THE KID** you saw on TV.

Remember the little freak who took a crap on his parent's oak-stained table when they confiscated his Game Boy?...

That was me. Gerald. Youngest of three. Only boy. Out of control.

(*Reality Boy* 1)

Gerald continues to apply the lessons that Nanny taught him about taking responsibility for the messes he created. He understands that to be a normal, healthy and well-governed individual, he must literally and figuratively start cleaning his shit by speaking of it. Identifying himself as “I’m the kid you saw on TV”, Gerald addresses an imagined viewer in an attempt to confront his past and confess his childhood misdemeanours. Gerald knows he must take personal responsibility and ownership for his out-of-control childhood defecation, which he now has the self-awareness as an adolescent to admit were wrong: “And no. It wasn’t excusable. I wasn’t a baby. I wasn’t even a toddler. I was five” (*Reality Boy* 1). Furthermore, Gerald is able to recognise and confess that his current behavioural issues with anger and physical violence are extensions of his original childhood dysfunctions. “I *am* proud of it... I *was* proud every time I crapped on the kitchen table. I am addicted to anger. This makes me smile” (*Reality Boy* 190). Ironically, despite his capacity to acknowledge that his past and present behaviours are inexcusable, Gerald also confesses his pride in his continued bad behaviour; this dissonance leads him to continue seeking expert help.

To manage his uncontrollable anger, Gerald sees an anger management coach named Roger, who teaches him to implement a regiment of self-help techniques that are remarkably similar to Nanny’s techniques. These include breathing exercises, counting-to-ten, and writing confessional letters to confront the people Gerald harbours anger towards, including Nanny. Roger also reinforces the neoliberal rationalities that Nanny taught Gerald by training Gerald with self-help mantras that reshape his thinking and conduct. “Not only did I have to give up the words of anger – *should, deserve*, etc. – but I also had to start owning my shit” (*Reality Boy* 202). From Roger, Gerald learns to believe that “*Should is a dirty word. No one should do anything for you. You deserve nothing more than what you earn*” (*Reality Boy* 152). The mantras Roger spouts reflect the neoliberal perspective that “society as a collective construct

cannot owe an individual anything” (Redden 402). As someone whose disruptive and angry behaviours have created many messes in his personal life, Gerald must unlearn ‘dirty’ habits including blaming others for his problems. Furthermore, to achieve what “Roger calls...cleaning the slate” (*Reality Boy* 202), Gerald must take full ownership for his mistakes and assume responsibility for cleaning up the messes in his life by himself.

Perhaps the most influential expert in Gerald’s life is the one he has created inside his mind. Gerald constantly daydreams of conversations with an imaginary companion he calls Snow White, a caricature of Nanny who follows Gerald around dispensing guidance and guidelines for better living and behaviour. In her role as expert, Nanny resembled a fairy-talelike character who promised that she could instantaneously transform the Fausts from a dysfunctional mess into a happy and healthy household. Nanny assured Gerald that: ““...we’re about to start a whole new life,” she said. “And this will be a whole new family, easy as one, two, three”” (*Reality Boy* 16). Palmer notes that “[s]implicity is a key theme” behind the efficiency of training that TV experts provide (*Exposing* 8). This simplicity underlines the fairy-talelike stories of personal self-improvement and transformations on Reality TV (Hearn 495). While Ferguson describes these instantaneous TV transformations and makeovers as “Cinderella-style” (97), it is fitting that Gerald projects Nanny as Snow White rather than as Cinderella’s fairy godmother. While the transformation and happiness that Cinderella’s fairy godmother provides is instant yet fleeting, Nanny as Snow White entered a messy household and trained its inhabitants to transform *themselves* through self-governance and enduring neoliberal rationalities.

Gerald’s imaginary Snow White vocalises and reinforces Nanny’s neoliberal values. This is most evident when Gerald daydreams of a meeting with Snow White as his school guidance counsellor (another ‘expert’ profession). Gerald confesses to her his ambition to leave the ‘slow-learners’ class at school and attend college, which his mother believes he is too

dysfunctional for. However, Snow White confronts Gerald with harsh reality, even in his daydreams: ““Your grades aren’t great. And you know your discipline record, so I don’t have to tell you that”” (*Reality Boy* 212). Her emphasis on Gerald’s dismal discipline record highlights the neoliberal necessity of keeping disciplined and self-responsible to succeed. Those like Gerald who have a record of struggling with self-discipline face the neoliberal consequences of a future with limited opportunities. Snow White instructs him to ““...keep this positive attitude and stay out of trouble and it’s totally possible”” to attend college. Gerald responds: “I nod because my inner director told me to nod. This is the scene I want on TV. Boy makes good of himself. Boy takes a shit sandwich and turns it into a scrumptious meal. Boy calls himself on his walkie-talkie and says, *Dude - you’re better than this...*”” (*Reality Boy* 213).

Gerald’s response to Snow White’s advice is a complex set of neoliberal reactions. To start, his nod of agreement is a learned response from *Network Nanny*. Grossberg mentions that contemporary adolescents are under so much daily surveillance that they have learned to watch and control their conduct so that they are effectively guided by “an inner-directed self-control that produces... compliant individuals” (32). On *Network Nanny*, young Gerald was constantly instructed by the programme’s director to nod in agreement to everything Nanny said. Even without a TV director around him anymore, Gerald has learned to internally direct himself to take instructions for better behaviour. After a lifetime of receiving expert advice, Gerald is able to direct and govern himself automatically. Using his imaginary walkie-talkie, Gerald addresses himself internally with personal instructions to live and act better according to neoliberal values. His resolution to “make good of himself” and to take the “shit sandwich” messes he has created in his life and turn them into “a scrumptious meal” are the determined vows of a neoliberal subject deciding to take full responsibility for his mistakes and transform

his life (*Reality Boy* 213). Gerald's resolution is an important self-initiated step towards becoming a responsible, self-governing and rehabilitated neoliberal self.

### *Something Real*

In Heather Demetrios's *Something Real* (2014), Chloe Baker's family were the stars of *Baker's Dozen*, a popular but cancelled family-doc produced by media company MetaReel. Chloe herself was born on television with the birthname Bonnie™. Since MetaReel financially sponsored her parents' dream of adopting thirteen children, their names and identities are MetaReel's trademarked property, a fact that Chloe strongly detests. For thirteen seasons/years, the Bakers enjoyed fame and wealth as a Reality TV family, with MetaReel broadcasting their upper-middle class lifestyle and antics on national television. Their family was shaken when thirteen-year-old Bonnie™ impulsively overdosed herself with painkillers on-camera. To Bonnie™'s dismay, her near-death experience was represented on television as an out-of-control teen suicide attempt. Her parents subsequently divorced and *Baker's Dozen* was cancelled, thereby terminating their family's mediated and lucrative lifestyle. The novel opens four years later; now seventeen, Bonnie™ has changed her name to Chloe. With her new identity, she seeks to distance herself from MetaReel to recover from her emotional wounds. Chloe's hard-won normal life is jeopardised when her mother Beth, fearing bankruptcy from sustaining thirteen children, invites MetaReel to resume filming. When Chloe attempts to resist participating on the programme, MetaReel's head producer Chuck threatens to bankrupt her family for her non-compliance.

The main selling-point of *Baker's Dozen* is the size and composition of the Baker family. The Bakers are a supersized family with thirteen biological, surrogate and adopted children. Describing her unusual family, Chloe says: "We're like the poster children for alternative families" (*Something Real* 44). After Beth and Andrew Baker divorce, Beth remarries Kirk

Miller and reconstitutes her family whole again. Despite their family's expansive size, the Bakers appear a fairly conventional and affluent family. In practice, however, the Baker household parallels a workhouse in their approach to each family member's obligation to work. Chloe's parents treat their thirteen children as TV labourers who must contribute to the family's income by appearing and performing on *Baker's Dozen*. Chloe is informed that "...your presence on the show has made hundreds of thousands of dollars for your family" (*Something Real* 311). The stress of enforced mediation has always weighed heavily on Bonnie™/Chloe. At thirteen, Bonnie™ overdosed herself; at seventeen, MetaReel's return prompts Chloe to engage in various acts of bodily and performative resistance. MetaReel publicly represents Chloe's resistance as disruptive adolescent rebellion that destabilises her family. Hence, MetaReel legitimises its corporate interventions as attempts to 'save' Chloe by remaking and replacing her identity with a more desirable consumer persona.

#### Family-doc representations of adolescents as unstable.

*Something Real* is the only novel I examine in this thesis where the adolescent narrator-protagonist returns to Reality TV after a prolonged hiatus. Throughout the first thirteen years of her life, Bonnie™ and her family entertained America on *Baker's Dozen* until Bonnie™'s painkiller overdose. When MetaReel resumes production four years later, they market the show as *Baker's Dozen: Fresh Batch*. For specificity, I refer to the programme in general as *Baker's Dozen*, and as *Fresh Batch* only for the present-day production. Much in the style of *An American Family*, *Baker's Dozen* both documents and dramatizes the Baker family's day-to-day lifestyles. While *Network Nanny* deliberately diagnoses Gerald's body as pathologically dirty before trying to rehabilitate him, MetaReel does not actively pathologize the Bakers. Nevertheless, with thirteen children, the Baker family is naturally prone to instability, from irruptions of dirty messes, bad behaviour, physical and verbal fighting, and family members having meltdowns. The presence of the camera-crew spread throughout the Baker household



ensures 24/7 surveillance to capture any occurrences of general disorder to entertain the viewers. Bonnie™'s attempted suicide in Episode 2 of Season 13 is the programme's most graphic and famous scene. The incident is represented textually by Demetrios as a transcript from that episode. Below are two extracts from the transcript:

**INT-BAKER HOME-NIGHT:** [BETH screams into a phone while ANDREW administers CPR to someone lying on the floor...]

(*Something Real* 116).

[The sound of sirens grows louder...CUT to PARAMEDICS rushing into the house. CUT to ANDREW sobbing over BONNIE™.]

(*Something Real* 116).

The transcript format presents a scene of the family in chaos, with screams, sobs and sirens around the adolescent's broken body. Bonnie™'s overdose from stuffing copious amounts of pills into her mouth provides *Baker's Dozen* easy material to spectacularise her adolescent body as unstable, out-of-control and messy. The programme also represents young Bonnie™'s act of self-harm as the major contributing factor that brought the collapse of the Baker family. Shortly afterwards, Andrew Baker left their family and *Baker's Dozen* was cancelled, severing the Bakers' primary income. MetaReel and the wider media persistently turn Chloe's body and behaviour into a lightning rod to amplify anxieties that adolescents are so unstable they endanger themselves and their family's stability. That Demetrios represents the most traumatic moment of Chloe's life in transcript format raises significant questions about the loss of the adolescent's autonomy over her voice and identity. Tellingly, events in this transcript are narrated in third-person; this breaks Chloe's first-person textual voice that predominates throughout the narrative. Furthermore, she is textually designated in the transcript as Bonnie™, her detested trademarked name. The dehumanising reference to her as "someone lying on the floor..." further enhances Chloe's loss of control over her identity and narratorial voice.

After *Baker's Dozen* ends, Chloe and her brother Benton™ deal with their parents' divorce by indulging in underage drinking and, for Benton™, smoking. Chloe fears that when MetaReel begins filming them for *Fresh Batch*, the media will uncover, sensationalise and condemn what she and her brother do in their personal lives. Her fears that the media will be judgemental are proven when she sees a celebrity magazine: "It's *Stargazer*, a trashy tabloid...I'm on the cover" (*Something Real* 267). Inside, she reads an article about her: "The bold yellow headline says TEEN IN CRISIS: AN INSIDE PEEK INTO THE LIFE OF METAREEL'S MOST VOLATILE STAR" (*Something Real* 267). The article has an accompanying photograph and Chloe acknowledges that "The girl in the picture seems, I have to admit, a little volatile" (*Something Real* 268). Although *Stargazer* is not affiliated with MetaReel, the tabloid supports and exacerbates the media narrative of Chloe as an adolescent-in-crisis. While most of her friends embrace drinking and smoking as normal, the media constructs an identity for Chloe as an unhinged adolescent whose overdose proves her capacity for volatile overconsumption that hurts herself and her family. Then Chloe then sees a more devastating headline that criticises her adolescent behaviour and body:

***Bump Alert! Is Bonnie™ pregnant? If so,  
how will Beth and the kids react?***

(*Something Real* 269)

The article outrages Chloe because it raises public scrutiny of her body and public speculation about her behaviour as a teenaged girl. She angrily declares "I'm a fucking virgin! What is wrong with these people?" (*Something Real* 270). The fallout from this entirely erroneous article is significantly damaging to her already stained public identity. The rumour fuels speculation that as Chloe has entered adolescence, she has become more unseemly, unstable and badly behaved. On top of an attempted suicide, a teen pregnancy would seemingly reinforce that Chloe is ungovernably impulsive. The headline's insinuating question about how

Chloe's mother and younger siblings will react to her alleged pregnancy snidely hints that the shame of her scandalous behaviour will trigger another rupture to wound her family. The article casts doubt on her parents' ability to raise their children as healthy, balanced and self-governing individuals. While her mother quickly establishes that Chloe is not pregnant, the family worries that MetaReel will capture and sensationalise Chloe and her brother Benton™'s underaged drinking and smoking. Chloe is more concerned about how MetaReel will intervene in her life: "Do you think they'll have an episode with an intervention? You know, 'the Dangers of Teen Substance Abuse'..." (*Something Real* 21).

#### Privatised interventions in the consumer society.

Although Chloe worries that MetaReel will hold an intervention episode to 'fix' her adolescent behaviour, MetaReel has always intervened in the Bakers' personal affairs, ostensibly to help them. The corporate help offered by private broadcasters like MetaReel was made particularly appealing by American neoliberalism. The ascendancy of the market and the subsequent dismantling of the welfare state significantly diminished public services like childcare. Consequently, parents seeking assistance for their families are increasingly turning to the private-sector, including commercial broadcasters (Vered & McConchie 69; Ouellette & Hay 33). McMurria says "[t]he very foundation of U.S. commercial broadcasting was built on a faith in corporate benevolence" (308). Ouellette and Hay similarly describe commercial television's involvement in "the helping culture" of providing charity and helpful services to individuals in need (33). From a neoliberal perspective, since most American family-docs are produced by private-owned broadcasters, the corporate philanthropy, financial and material resources family-docs provide families with appear 'privatised' and therefore without the stigma of welfare. Furthermore, family-docs market their interventions as helping families take responsibility for their own lives. In this sense, the Bakers exemplify a family that fulfils the

neoliberal preference for privatisation because they turned to the private-sector rather than the state for support.

In effect, that Beth and Andrew Baker chose to resolve their private fertility troubles by seeking MetaReel's financial and legal sponsorship to acquire children and build their massive family actually positions them as enterprising neoliberal parents, while valorising MetaReel's corporate philanthropy. An article on their family describes the Bakers' longstanding relationship with MetaReel: "What began as a private wish soon caught the attention of MetaReel head producer Chuck Daniels, who took it upon himself to make the Baker's wish come true" (*Something Real* 47-48). Beth constantly articulates her belief in what Leigh Edwards calls "the largess" (134) of corporate broadcasters to provide privatised services for improving their family's personal lives. When *Good Life* does an interview with the Bakers, Beth earnestly shares that "...I wouldn't have any of our children without MetaReel's help, and that's the truth. This show gave me my family. I'll be forever grateful" (*Something Real* 129). Hearing her mother's comments, Chloe is saddened to realise how indebted their family is to MetaReel's 'charity' and interventions. "...it's crappy to know we wouldn't exist as a family without a major corporate sponsor" (*Something Real* 129). Chloe grows in awareness of MetaReel's enormous corporate power to commodify her family and her identity.

To understand how *Baker's Dozen* shapes Chloe's adolescent identity around the imperative to consume, I now discuss the consumer society, its influence on adolescent subjectivity, and how family-docs support the consumer society's values. In the consumer society, every aspect of an individual's life, from one's freedom, citizenship and identity, revolves around consumption. The appeal of the consumer society is that it promises happiness; however, this happiness can only be sustained through continuous and conspicuous acts of consumption (Bauman 44). With the citizen being steadily replaced by the consumer, consumption is positioned as a fundamental right and paramount responsibility for everyone (Giroux 38).

Citizen-consumers are constantly interpellated by the media and advertisers to actively embrace and visibly display their enthusiasm for consumerist lifestyles (Bauman 53). Simultaneously, commercial products increasingly confer their symbolic value and status upon the individual's identity, leading to the cultivation of commercialised consumer identities. Consequently, the individual's subjectivity is predicated heavily on their ability and willingness to buy consumer goods, and one's consumer identity is publicly expressed through one's purchasing patterns and shopping habits (Bauman 15). Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the neoliberal consumer-citizen practices strategic and self-enterprising consumer decisions as a lifestyle (Bauman 15).

Besides tying one's lifestyle to consumer goods and choices, the individual can also turn him/herself into a marketable product. In the consumer society, individuals are tasked with a personal responsibility to themselves to actively make and market their own identities (Bauman 57). The consumer society celebrates a "do-it-yourself" or DIY spirit that encourages individuals to enjoy their freedom to determine and shape their own identities (Bauman 57; Hartley 161). This DIY spirit compels individuals to engage in what Hearn calls "self-branding", which involves turning one's body and identity into commodity signs (497). The individual must master the skills needed to market "its own promotional skin" to gain attention and compete in the marketplace (Hearn 497). Essentially, by branding oneself, the individual turns into a commercial product with market value (Cook 19). In many ways, the consumer society reflects and valorises neoliberal rationalities like self-responsibility, self-enterprise and competitiveness. For to thrive and succeed in the consumer society, the individual is expected to be self-enterprising and constantly work on their self; individuals are to strategically identify and maximise their market value in their lifelong mission to brand themselves like commodities that can out-compete other people in the marketplace (Bauman 62).

Contemporary adolescents have been thoroughly immersed in the consumer society and its values. For today's youths, the consumer society has commodified and linked personal identities and aspirations to the self-enterprising pursuit of consumer goods and brands (Giroux 32). The marketplace has become one of the main places where adolescents feel they can experience citizenship, enfranchisement and empowerment through their participation in the economy as citizen-consumers (Cook 12). Furthermore, young people are taught that they have both the freedom and the obligation to engage in "projects of the self" by branding themselves to make their identities stand out as unique (Harris 5). The consumer society trains adolescents to engage in an endless cycle of marketing their bodies, identities and relationships to actualise their full market potential (McRobbie 104). Adolescent girls especially are positioned within the consumer society as "the ideal subjects for the new socioeconomic order" (Harris 93). As citizenship and female empowerment are increasingly intertwined with consumption, the consumer society directs girls to strive for success and self-invention through strategic shopping choices (Harris 86). Making independent consumer choices in the marketplace is presented to girls as opportunities to exercise their personal autonomy and power (Harris 86).

The consumer society is supported by the media, which constantly promotes the importance of consumerism and the individual's obligation to brand themselves (Hartley 179). Since private broadcasters operate within the cultural economy of the consumer society, the family-docs they produce likewise emphasise the importance of material accumulation, private ownership and self-branding (Ouellette & Hay 66). When family-docs like *Baker's Dozen* combine lifestyle interventions and makeovers, they do more than document the family's life. Rather, they seek to intervene and change the family's *lifestyle* through consumerism, in the belief "that consumption improves people's fortunes in a market society" (Redden 405). Family-docs are pedagogical in that their lifestyle interventions and makeovers offer practical 'how-to' guidance for consumption. Families on family-docs are taught to monitor their current

lifestyles and to identify their personal deficiencies; they are taught to apply “personal managerialism” in their lives so that they can ‘upgrade’ themselves through better consumer choices; and they learn the skills to develop and market their consumer identities as a unique brand (Ouellette & Hay 103-104). Fam-docs encourage families to visibly conduct themselves as self-enterprising consumer-citizens who consciously engage in strategic shopping and self-branding as they strive to achieve their best lives and consumer lifestyles on-screen.

Concerned that four years of sustaining thirteen children without MetaReel has diminished the Bakers’ lavish lifestyle, head producer Chuck gives the Baker family and home a complete consumer makeover before *Fresh Batch* starts filming. Chloe observes: “Chuck grins as we come into the warm light, his hands spread out with benevolent Jesus-like welcome” and “[a]s usual, Chuck’s playing Santa Claus” (*Something Real* 33). Chuck appears shrouded in Christian and capitalist iconography, figured as Saint/Santa bringing the family corporate benevolence through generous offers of consumer rewards. Chuck presents a cornucopia of MetaReel-sponsored gifts that serve multiple material and ideological functions. Chloe is shocked at the dramatic transformation her house undergoes: “I peek into the kitchen, which is suddenly super shiny, with new appliances and bowls overflowing with fruit. There are even happy-happy photos of all of us on the fridge” (*Something Real* 31). Significantly, it is the kitchen, a centre for family consumption, that is most transformed through consumer items. MetaReel makes over their household with consumer products to erase any visible evidence of the Bakers’ loss of upper-middle-class prestige, while the “happy-happy” photos of the Bakers present a causal link between a household overflowing with material abundance and the family’s wellbeing.

Due to her reputation as an unstable adolescent and her resistance to appearing on *Fresh Batch*, Chloe becomes MetaReel’s primary target for a makeover involving consumer goods and lifestyle interventions. When Chloe is caught unaware by MetaReel’s surprise return, her

fight-or-flight reaction triggers ‘messy’ bodily responses: “I look right into the camera. My face is practically pressed up against it. America will be able to see my smudged eyeliner and the zit on my chin. They’ll probably show a Cover Girl commercial after this segment – I’ll be a cautionary tale for teen skin care” (*Something Real* 11). She also begins sweating, itching and hyperventilating on camera. Chloe’s experience remarkably parallels Hearn’s description of how the “nearly always female participants” are treated on makeovers: “...she is rendered literally and figuratively abject...reduced only to her appearance and to the scathing judgement of her fellow humans” (Hearn 500). Reality TV focuses on making visible the participant’s deficiencies and insecurities to justify their makeovers and interventions. Chloe fears that MetaReel may use the visible evidence of her messy body as a marketing opportunity to sell the message that consumer products have therapeutic powers: here, skin care is an enterprising investment in self-care to clean-up emotional and physical breakdowns like Chloe’s.

On Reality TV, lifestyle interventions and makeovers are generally supported by experts from diverse fields (Biressi & Nunn, *Exposing* 20). Through their ministration and guidance, these experts seek to bring about the “re-education” of participants towards middle- and upper-middle class “prestige” (Palmer, *Exposing* 4). Many of these experts present “[s]hopping as [a] disciplined pedagogy” (Hearn 499). Participants are given the opportunity to learn from experts the skills needed to enhance their lifestyles and personal image through enterprising consumer performances and purchases. Palmer notes that because these experts are presented as private consultants whose expertise in consumerism appear to have the implicit approval of the market, participants tend to be more open to invest in the consumer items and lifestyles that experts recommend (*Exposing* 6). MetaReel’s team of experts is headed by a woman named Sandra, who helps guide the Bakers towards making better consumer and life(style) choices. Unlike the parenting and childcare specialist Nanny from *Network Nanny*, Sandra’s diffused role of expert extends from dietician to fashion and style guru, to entrepreneurial coach and marketing



consultant. Sandra's main priority is to help Chloe recover from her damaged public image by rebranding a cool and fashionable consumer identity for Chloe.

Sandra provides her expertise in entrepreneurial self-branding to help each Baker develop their personal identity into a desirable and commercialised public persona. As a public figure living in the consumer society, Chloe is pressured to endorse sponsored merchandise on television. The Bakers must live their televised lives as consumer selves who not only promote consumer goods and lifestyles but who also promote *themselves* as commodities with market value. The Bakers fulfil Bauman's description of the commodification of people: "[t]hey are, simultaneously, *promoters of commodities* and the *commodities they promote*" (6, emphasis in original). Under Sandra's expert guidance, the fashion label Bonnie™ Lass Designs is curated and launched for Chloe. All the designer clothes are embossed with a personalised *B* and Sandra insists that Chloe wears her own fashion brand exclusively, even off-camera. Chloe fears that by wearing the clothes, she will "...go back to being trademarked, to only being known by a name that is a brand" (*Something Real* 39). Her predicament exemplifies how in the consumer society, commodification has extended from material goods to personal identities (Giroux 38; Bauman 12). The conflation between Chloe and the Bonnie™ Lass Designs brand embodies the aggressive commercialisation of persons that self-branding entails.

After her suicide attempt in Season 13, Chloe is largely perceived by the public as an adolescent prone to behavioural issues and bodily volatility. By curating the Bonnie™ Lass Designs clothes and forcing Chloe to wear them on *Fresh Batch*, Sandra attempts to completely make-over Chloe's damaged public image into a rebranded and chic adolescent consumer self. Giving her a bagful of designer clothes, Sandra tells Chloe: "'We need you to change, hon'" (*Something Real* 39). As Redden observes, being made to change is a compulsory component in makeovers, and resistance to change is deemed a "failure of the will" (406). After all, the consumer society presents self-branding as an enterprising form of empowerment and personal

self-improvement (Bauman 6). Chloe wonders “How many times have I heard those words? *We need you to change*. Be thinner, be prettier, smile more...you’re too emotional...” (*Something Real* 39). Chloe knows she must surrender her body and identity to the strict supervision and regimented control of MetaReel’s experts: “Here comes the no butter, no sugar, no deliciousness diet I remember from my youth” (*Something Real* 39). By following Sandra’s prescribed lifestyle and consumer guidance, Chloe can presumably remake herself as the ideal adolescent consumer self: slim, stable and ultimately controllable and consumable.

Although she resents Sandra for remaking her life through consumer goods, Chloe proves that she does subscribe to Sandra’s brand of consumer-oriented makeovers, even without MetaReel’s interventions. After *Baker’s Dozen* was cancelled, Chloe pursued an intensive self-makeover to recover from the trauma of her televised suicide attempt. Chloe declares: “It took me four years, seven shrinks, three different hair colors, one Zen meditation retreat, and over six hundred mochas to get to this moment” (*Something Real* 3). “This moment” refers to the personal milestone of finally feeling confident in herself as Chloe. Although Chloe depicts her recovery and journey towards a stable identity as an involved process, the treatments and makeovers she sought are expensive pursuits that betray a privileged consumerist lifestyle. Besides the more prosaic makeover of dying her hair, activities like attending Zen meditation retreats are mainly for the affluent. For Chloe the self-professed Starbucks fan, the six hundred mochas are the most prominent sign of luxury spending. As her version of self-medication, the mochas were a literal consumption towards emotional recovery. Chloe proves that she was so thoroughly trained in consumerism by the family-doc that her own makeovers entailed further consumerism and her new identity as Chloe was built upon consumer pursuits.

## Neoliberal parenting.

Chuck reminds Beth that her family is inspiring because “...This is an *American* story...” (*Something Real* 67). Chuck promises her that “...People are gonna watch the show because you’ve taken everything the world has thrown at you and you’ve still come out on top. Stronger than ever” (*Something Real* 66). As the principal media authority managing *Fresh Batch* and the Bakers themselves, Chuck has enormous power to ideologically define the family and establish the neoliberal parameters within which they conduct themselves. Chuck paints the Bakers, especially Beth, as a neoliberal and American success story: through the matriarch’s self-responsibility and determined will to succeed, their family has managed to survive being torn apart by a teen suicide attempt and divorce. Furthermore, Chuck’s insistence that the Bakers have “come out on top” after all their hardships articulates the neoliberal imperative for the American family to strive and succeed despite, or even because of precarity. As TV parents, Beth and her second husband Kirk take every opportunity to make a public show of governing themselves, their household, and their children according to neoliberal rationalities. Beth and Kirk accept the importance of leading by example as self-responsible and self-enterprising role models for their children and the public.

Chloe’s stepfather Kirk has a distinctly neoliberal mindset that aligns well with the family-doc’s neoliberal ideologies. Chloe cynically describes Kirk’s enthusiasm for self-help books which he regularly quotes: “He’s into motivational stuff with words like *power*, *future*, and *success* in the titles” (*Something Real* 36). When Chloe expresses her anger and dismay about MetaReel’s return, Kirk explains that his and Beth’s motivation for allowing MetaReel to resume filming is strategically economic. Without the income from *Fresh Batch*, they cannot sustain the luxurious lifestyle that their children are accustomed to. Significantly, as Kirk leans on his bookshelf of self-help books when he speaks, he is symbolically supported by the neoliberal values contained in these books. For Chloe, Kirk’s explanation is the first time she

realises their financial worries: “This gives me pause. I hadn’t really thought about the financial logistics...But being a TV family, money is something we always just seem to have” (*Something Real* 37). Although Beth and Kirk believe they are being responsible and enterprising parents by providing for their family’s economic wellbeing through MetaReel, the fact that they have so cocooned their children in a consumerist lifestyle means they have not raised Chloe with an awareness of the financial realities of life.

Chloe makes her distress at being forced to star on *Fresh Batch* by ‘acting out’ on-camera and off-camera. Her resistant and uncooperative behaviour towards MetaReel problematises Beth and Kirk’s efforts to publicly present their family as happy and well-governed. Her parents grow concerned that Chloe will make another spectacle of herself on-camera like in Season 13, as this would reinforce her public image as an unstable teenager and damage their reputation as TV parents. To prove to the viewers their commitment as responsible parents, Beth and Kirk discipline their rebellious daughter on-camera and in private. After Chloe stages her most spectacular rebellion during a press conference, Beth lectures Chloe and parrots the media narrative that her daughter is out-of-control: “...Bonnie™, you’re acting like a child, throwing tantrums, getting violent...this is simply unacceptable” (*Something Real* 341). Like Nanny in *Reality Boy*, Beth delineates the boundaries of good and bad behaviour for children as she identifies exactly which aspects of Chloe’s behaviour are “simply unacceptable” and which need immediate disciplining. Kirk also attempts to discipline Chloe: “Remember, only you have the power to control your response to challenges” (*Something Real* 38). Her parents strive to train Chloe in neoliberal values so that she will govern herself responsibly.

Arguably the most explicit neoliberal ‘lesson’ that Beth gives Chloe is when Beth insists that her daughter recognise and admit the following:

“*You* made the choice to take those pills,” Mom continues. “*You* made the choice to blame me for it, and for a while, I was okay with that. I blamed myself. But I don’t any longer...I refuse to carry around your guilt any longer”

(*Something Real* 120).

For Beth, being a responsible parent means absolving herself from any parental blame and making her daughter take personal responsibility and ownership for her own actions so that Chloe can recover from the trauma of her attempted suicide. Chloe is overcome with fury at her mother’s words: “Now I’m shaking. Like somebody replaced my blood with carbonated AGHH!!!!” (*Something Real* 121). The intimacy of first-person narration in *Something Real* usually aligns readers with Chloe’s perceptions. Here, however, Chloe’s explosive physical and emotional reactions towards her mother confronts readers with proof of her infamous volatility. Furthermore, Chloe thinks bitterly: “This is so Mom. You try to confront her about something, and it’s like you threw her a boomerang. It always *always* comes back to you” (*Something Real* 120). Her complaint about her mother’s tendency to make everything about Chloe belies an ironic degree of adolescent solipsism that is potentially alienating for readers. Chloe’s outright rejection of her mother’s insistence that she must take responsibility for herself is ideologically complicated: by vehemently resisting Beth’s advice, Chloe resists the neoliberal rationalities espoused by the family-doc. Yet this same resistance prevents Chloe from taking responsibility for her actions, thereby potentially impeding her from genuinely recovering and maturing.

Failed rehabilitation: fragmented selves.

Among the supposed functions of the family-docs in *Reality Boy* and *Something Real* is helping the family to rehabilitate its ‘problem’ children. Nanny teaches the Fausts techniques and neoliberal values to govern and manage Gerald’s dysfunctional behaviours. Meanwhile, MetaReel’s fashion expert Sandra tries helping Chloe remake her damaged reputation through

the consumer lifestyle. However, it is clear that for Gerald and Chloe, *Network Nanny* and *Fresh Batch* have respectively failed to help them overcome their behavioural and emotional issues. Instead, these family-docs found it more profitable to spectacularise their dirty bodies and unstable behaviours, with disastrous consequences for both protagonists. For Gerald, the childhood shame of having his body exposed and disciplined on camera continues to impede his ability to pursue healthy relationships. For Chloe, MetaReel's ownership of her as their trademarked property, and the persistent pressure to commodify herself on *Fresh Batch*, proves detrimental to her identity. Both adolescents attribute the family-doc as the primary source for their present-day dysfunctions and emotional instability. Instead of rehabilitating them, *Network Nanny* and *Fresh Batch* produce adolescents who struggle with their sense of self, who possess fragmented identities, who feel their bodies are constantly breaking apart, and who sometimes want to break themselves physically.

Although adolescent Gerald no longer defecates openly, he retains his childhood aggression and violent impulses, proving that Nanny failed to rehabilitate him fully. In fact, it was Nanny herself who cemented Gerald's aggressive tendencies. While filming the final episode of *Network Nanny*, Gerald releases all the frustration and resentment he had been feeling by forcefully punching Nanny's nose on-camera. Seeing her son's violence resurface, Jill protests that Nanny cannot abandon them: "'But he's not fixed!' Mom said" (*Reality Boy* 283). Before parting permanently with the Fausts, Nanny spitefully tells Gerald: "'I look *forwah-d* to your *lett-ahs* from prison'" (*Reality Boy* 283). Nanny's comment parallels Lawrence Grossberg's statement that the media "seemed to assume that the default position for kids was violence/prison" (4). Nanny's words haunt Gerald into his adolescence and he believes them to be prophetic. Gerald thinks: "I wish I could just split in two and have the other me beat me to death and then that half of me could go to prison. *Homicidal Half Boy* (*Reality Boy* 158). Gerald's wish to tear himself apart speaks poignantly of his internal fragmentation, and his

violent desire to simultaneously destroy himself and be punished for it demonstrates that he views his default position as violence/prison/death.

As a child, Gerald was only violent towards inanimate objects but never to himself. As an adolescent, although Gerald sincerely tries taking responsibility to improve and clean-up his life, his shame over his public persona as the disgusting Crapper from *Network Nanny* perpetually manifests as violent self-hatred. While contemplating his reflection, Gerald's shame channels into intense self-hatred and self-destructiveness: "The longer I stare at myself in the mirror, the more I want to punch myself. Right in the face. I want to break my nose. Split my lip. Bite a hole in my cheek. I want to beat some sense into me" (*Reality Boy* 152). Once again, Gerald demonstrates the turbulent fragmentation of his identity in his desire to externally shatter his body through physical violence. Sadly, his urge to messily annihilate the Crapper comes from his desire to punish that part of himself that is publicly considered 'messed-up'. Notably, Gerald's desire to "beat some sense into me" can be attributed to Nanny, who preached that the "hard knocks" (*Reality Boy* 129) in life are valuable lessons for learning self-responsibility. In a perverse sense, Gerald's desire to beat sense into himself reflects a similar logic about learning from "hard knocks" to improve himself.

In *Something Real*, Chloe is prone to having panic attacks and emotional breakdowns. She has her most spectacular and public breakdown during the live-taping of the Bakers' Thanksgiving dinner, as seen below:

The sounds of my family falling apart press against my chest, and my breath leaves my body in short, agitated spurts. I look down and try to concentrate on not choking, but I can't I can't I can't—

(*Something Real* 192).

Chloe's breakdown is triggered by several factors. The stress of mediation that she perpetually feels is heightened because the Thanksgiving Dinner is televised live. Even worse, Chuck

engineers for maximum family drama by inviting Chloe's biological father Andrew to the dinner. As the children have not seen Andrew since the divorce, his arrival is a shocking intrusion into their happy domestic scene. Listening to the sounds of her family falling apart sparks Chloe's panic attack. The internal breakdown she feels is linguistically conveyed by the breakdown in punctuation as she thinks: "Icant'Ican'tIcan't—". Chloe's body also reflects her internal breakdown by breaking out in sweat and choked breathing. Her panic attack is exacerbated by the Bonnie™ Lass Designs dress that Sandra forced her to wear for dinner since: "It's one of the signature items from your new collection!" ( *Something Real* 182). While Sandra attempts to rehabilitate Chloe's identity with a fashionable consumer persona, the dress actually worsens Chloe's breakdown: "My skin is covered in sweat, and the nylons Sandra made me wear are cutting into my stomach..." ( *Something Real* 182). By cutting into her body, the dress and its associations with her consumer self amplifies Chloe's sense of fragmentation. MetaReel's cameras capture and broadcast Chloe's bodily and emotional collapse during Thanksgiving dinner, thereby cementing her public image as an unstable adolescent.

Chapter conclusion.



In this chapter, I explored the representations of family-docs as neoliberal apparatuses that diagnose, pathologize and rehabilitate young people in *Reality Boy* and *Something Real*. In exchange for assistance or sponsorship, the Fausts and Bakers open their homes to family-docs to broadcast their private lives and family drama. Both Gerald Faust and Chloe Baker are subjected to external scrutiny and judgement from TV experts who assess their bodies and behaviours. Gerald is positioned as pathologically dirty while Chloe is represented as an unstable teenager whose self-destructive tendencies hurt herself and her family. These TV experts dispense various disciplinary techniques, lifestyle makeovers and interventions that strongly reflect neoliberal values like being self-responsible and self-enterprising in optimising one's life and lifestyle.

Starring on *Network Nanny* and *Fresh Batch* respectively, the Fausts and Bakers are expected to publicly train and govern their 'problem' children into neoliberal subjects, according to the neoliberal specifications of TV experts. Ironically, while *Network Nanny* attempts to rehabilitate Gerald into a 'normal' boy, and *Fresh Batch* tries remaking Chloe with a consumer persona, both programmes inflict shame and trauma that contribute to painfully fragmented identities for Gerald and Chloe. Consequently, both adolescents resolve to recover their identities on their own terms, and their demands to free themselves become the impetus for resisting their respective family-docs. In the following chapter, I explore how the adolescent protagonists in all the focus novels empower themselves and resist Reality TV's power to govern their identities.

## Chapter 4

### Exploring Adolescent Empowerment and Resistance Against Reality TV in YA Novels.

In the three previous chapters, I focused on investigating how YA novels represent Reality TV programmes as neoliberal apparatuses which have power to govern adolescents and their identities according to neoliberal ideologies and discourses. All the YA novels analysed in this thesis appear in agreement that Reality TV programmes construct and forcibly impose neoliberal identities upon adolescent participants. These identities vary according to the Reality TV subgenre in operation within the novels and range from criminalised, competitive, pathologized, to commercialised identities. These YA novels raise, interrogate and criticise the dangers posed by the unchecked neoliberal power of media institutions and Reality TV in particular to govern adolescents. The anti-media/anti-Reality TV stance these novels espouse find broad support in existing public discussions. Reality TV participants have regularly and vocally complained about the difficulties of separating and recovering their identities from the embarrassing and even damaging media identities that were constructed for them by Reality TV (Biressi & Nunn 97). Palmer offers the gloomy assessment that “[w]hat distinguishes much of reality TV is a lack of human agency”, and he notes the genre’s tendency to exploit and dehumanise participants into caricatures that “...illustrate their stupidity or naivety” to entertain viewers (24).

It is therefore easy to despair for the adolescent protagonists in the focus novels as it might seem that their identities and lives are dominated by Reality TV. However, the YA genre routinely opens opportunities for adolescents to experience their own power and express their resistance against the dominant ideologies and institutions that surround them. Hence, in this chapter, I return to the YA novels analysed in previous chapters with a new objective. Here, I

examine how adolescent protagonists empower themselves and resist Reality TV's neoliberal power to govern them. I begin by considering how YA scholarship positions adolescent identity as formed in dialogue with the power, discourses and ideologies of institutions. The dialogic relations between adolescents and institutions provide opportunities for adolescents to 'talk back' and resist the discursive and ideological power of media institutions. As the adolescents in these novels learn to identify how media institutions use power, they also discover their own power to resist. I investigate how these adolescents use Reality TV's discourses, technologies, techniques and expectations to spectacularly expose and publicly resist Reality TV's power. By so doing, they empower themselves to reject the neoliberal identities constructed for them by Reality TV, and in so doing, reclaim their identities.

YA fiction is primarily interested in representing the development of adolescent identity. Notably, because YA fiction interrogates the social and institutional forces that have the power to construct adolescent identities, the genre depicts identity as inextricably intertwined with power (Trites x). Foucault says that "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (*History of Sexuality* 93). Foucault's description of power holds true in YA novels. Adolescent protagonists tend to discover that power, both external and internally experienced, is all around them (Trites x). Many adolescents may experience the realisation that they are surrounded and governed by institutional power as painful or troubling. Nevertheless, adolescents mature in YA narratives as they gain a greater awareness of power, its many sources, and its effects (Trites 19). Adolescents grow by learning to see, understand, and negotiate the ways that social institutions use power to govern their everyday existences. Although "adolescents must learn their place in the power structure", the genre imagines exciting possibilities for adolescents to engage with power (Trites x). YA narratives regularly showcase adolescent protagonists realising that they possess power which can be utilised in liberating and resistive acts to change themselves and their societies.

As discussed in the Introduction chapter's theoretical section, YA narratives represent the adolescent protagonist's identity as formed in dialogue with the institutions, social discourses and ideologies that constitute the world they inhabit (McCallum 6). Family, school and the media are among the most important institutions that surround adolescents and govern their daily lives. These institutions contribute to governmentality because they regulate adolescents and train them into acceptable citizens (Trites 22). Institutional power is determined largely by discourses, and institutions deploy their power over adolescents through their dialogues and interactions with young people. Institutions like the media reproduce and extend dominant social discourses and ideologies like neoliberalism when they use these discourses and ideologies to address and interpellate adolescents. Consequently, institutions possess power to influence the development of adolescent identity. Furthermore, YA novels depict institutions as possessing greater power and authority than adolescents. Tension and conflicts often arise between adolescents and institutions because institutions exert their power to govern adolescents (Trites 52). In YA narratives, adolescents come to discover that institutional power is discursively and ideologically situated, and that institutions reinforce dominant social discourses and ideologies to construct and impose social identities upon adolescents that adolescents are often uncomfortable with or reject.

While YA fiction may represent "the power dynamic between adolescents and adults [as] always already one of contested authority" (Trites 69), any analysis of YA fiction must avoid positioning adolescents as inevitably and ultimately disempowered in their relationships with those in power (McCallum 6). Power is not purely repressive. Precisely because power is everywhere, adolescents can access and experience power as enabling (Trites x). The social and institutional powers that construct adolescent identity also "bestows upon them a power from which they generate their own sense of subjectivity" (Trites 7). McCallum proposes that since identity is formed in dialogue with others, the individual must be conceived "as both a

subject and an agent” who can act (256). For adolescent protagonists to actualise their power, they must first recognise that they are situated dialogically in relation to institutions with the power to discursively and ideologically construct identities for them. Importantly, adolescents do not passively receive dominant social discourses and ideologies through their relationships with institutions. Instead, identity “is formed through the selective appropriation and assimilation of the discourses of others” (McCallum 11). As agents, adolescents are “capable of conscious action and resistance to the social and the ideological” (McCallum 6).

Hence, adolescent protagonists in YA narratives learn they have degrees of power to respond to or resist the discourses, ideologies and identities imposed upon them by institutions. It is precisely because identity is formed in dialogue with institutions that opportunities exist for adolescents to ‘talk back’ to and against institutions. Furthermore, as adolescents mature as subjects who take action, “they assume responsibility for their position in society...” (Trites 7). The genre richly depicts youths discovering their personal power, motivation, and responsibility to question, challenge, and change the dominant socio-political systems and ideologies that govern their lives and identities (Love & Fox 298). Significantly, although adolescents may grow skilled at navigating and frustrating institutional power, their empowerment and resistances are usually not achieved alone. Since maturity in YA narratives demands that adolescents leave the insular solipsism of childhood, the genre emphasises the importance of “interconnection, multiple perspectives, and mutuality” (Coats 319). The adolescent protagonists in the YA novels I analyse all learn the importance of engaging others in dialogue to assist them in their resistance against media institutions and the neoliberal ideologies of Reality TV. These adolescents use dialogue to galvanise the support of their friends and communities to activate important transformations on personal and social levels.

As Foucault says, “[w]here there is power, there is resistance”, and therefore resistance always exists in relation to power (*History of Sexuality* 95). Precisely because power is expressed in

diverse forms, the expressions of resistance against power are equally numerous and diverse (Fiske 319). Foucault captures the multitude of ways that resistance can be manifested: there are “resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial...” (*History of Sexuality* 96). In the focus novels, the resistances that adolescents wage against Reality TV range from sacrificial to spontaneous, but are never solitary as they enlist the support of others. Fiske argues that in its political and revolutionary sense, the concept of “resistance” encompasses overthrowing social power and systems, while in its social and semiotic sense, resistance entails “the refusal to accept the social identity proposed by the dominant ideology and the social control that goes with it” (243). In the novels, adolescents passionately reject the neoliberal identities that Reality TV constructs for them. Notably, their resistances against Reality TV occur *on* and *through* Reality TV itself as adolescents utilise the genre’s televisual conventions to spectacularly expose, undermine and reject Reality TV’s power over them.

In highly mediated societies, popular culture “involves a continuous and unequal struggle between forces of domination, points of resistance, and everything in between” (Grindstaff 33). Contemporary media are crucial sites where the tensions between resistance and power are made visible and vocalised (Glynn 188). Popular culture therefore “always contain the potential for resistance or subversion”, and television offers a plurality of opportunities, pleasures and meanings that “can evade, resist, or scandalize ideology and social control” (Fiske 242-243). Fiske emphasises that television “cannot be a one-way medium” because many televisual formats tend to stage dialogues that introduce diverse viewpoints and disruptive voices (90). For instance, individuals from various backgrounds regularly appear on light-entertainment TV. Some of those who appear on television may feel that they occupy marginalised or disempowered positions in society with little means to be heard. Those on the margins may

take to television to articulate themselves using their own discourses, engage in dialogues with others, and represent competing perspectives and different modes of identities beyond those established by the status quo (Glynn 188). The marginalised deploy their resistance by refusing the homogenisation of social identities, and they exercise their power to be different on and through television (Fiske 320).

As Foucault argues, because “power is exercised from innumerable points”, therefore “points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network” (*History of Sexuality* 94-95). In the focus novels, Reality TV creates diverse channels for neoliberal power to flow through in order to reach and govern adolescents directly and intimately. In every aspect of their lives, from prison to play to home, these adolescents are endlessly addressed and interpellated by Reality TV with neoliberal ideologies. However, precisely because Reality TV programmes open so many points of dialogue to interact with and control adolescents, this can provide adolescents themselves with countless points for resistance. Rose observes that the apparatuses and activities involved in governing “are less stable and durable than often suggested: they are tenuous, reversible, heterogeneous...” (*Powers of Freedom* 18). As neoliberal apparatuses that operate within popular culture, Reality TV’s power to govern is not monolithic but is heterogenous, and thus tenuous and prone to a multiplicity of resistances from its participants. The adolescent protagonists in these YA novels learn that they can resist Reality TV’s ideological and discursive power to govern them by using televisual conventions like the confession to force dialogues that expose and destabilise Reality TV’s power over them.

#### Turning confession into resistance.

In the YA novels I analyse, the confession is heavily utilised by Reality TV as a popular and important convention. It is thus unsurprising that many of the adolescent protagonists integrate the confession into their strategies to articulate their resistance against Reality TV. In order to

contextualise how these adolescent protagonists have found potentially positive and empowering uses for the confession as a means for resistance, I review the confession and then recap how it is embedded into and utilised by Reality TV as a technique for power. Foucault provides a comprehensive analysis of the confession in general. He declares “Western man has become a confessing animal” and that “[w]e have since become a singularly confessing society” (*History of Sexuality* 59). Western societies have elevated the confession as a key technique to produce knowledge and ascertain truth of the self (*History of Sexuality* 58). Foucault elaborates that “[t]he truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization by power” (*History of Sexuality* 59). The confession serves power by compelling the individual to speak and share inner truths about him/herself. Hence, the confession is presumed to facilitate the production of identity by making the individual articulate his/her private interiority for others to know.

As Foucault observes, “[t]he confession has spread its effects far and wide” (*History of Sexuality* 59). The impulse, or perhaps more accurately the imperative to confess has dispersed so thoroughly that today the confession is involved in diverse arenas including popular entertainment. Kilborn comments that confessional discourses are “a characteristic feature of contemporary media output” (189). The confession and Reality TV clearly interanimate one another and Reality TV is a prime cultural site where confessions are incorporated as an integral convention across Reality TV subgenres. Whether it is suspected criminals confessing their supposed wrongdoings to hosts or TV judges on reality-crime, or participants on game-docs sharing their gameplay strategies with viewers, or family members disclosing shocking secrets to the camera on family-docs, the confession compulsion is active throughout Reality TV. Participants are subjected to the expectation of confessing in dialogues to the hosts, experts, studio-audiences, and viewers. By “making it a public virtue and obligation to publicly expose the private”, Reality TV has a tendency to penalize those participants who refuses to confess



(Bauman 3). No participant is exempt from the pressured to publicly share their personal lives and every thought if they wish to avoid elimination and continue being mediated.

In the focus novels, Reality TV employs the confession to exert its power and perpetuate neoliberalism over adolescent participants. These Reality TV programmes present the obligation to confess as opportunities for adolescents to articulate and actualise their neoliberal selves. To confess on Reality TV is ostensibly to take responsibility for oneself by publicly admitting one's personal failures, and acknowledging one's need for the discipline, expert guidance, and therapeutic regimes that Reality TV can putatively offer to participants. Foucault remarks that the confession "...is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effects of a power that constrains us" (*History of Sexuality* 60). While Foucault's statement shows that the confession's power has become so naturalised into everyday life that it is almost imperceptible, the YA novels under consideration depict adolescent protagonists who develop a keen understanding of how the confession operates to make neoliberal subjects out of them. As Bauman notes, contemporary media has trained adolescents like apprentices to live in confession-oriented societies (3). Their time as participants on Reality TV has given these adolescent protagonists the insights to navigate and negotiate the currents of power, and they show skill at actively transforming the confession into positive modes of resistance.

As a Reality TV convention, the confession creates a wide variety of speaking and subject positions for participants. For example, participants may take the role of witnesses who testify in "mode[s] of self-speaking that derives from new understandings of abuse" (Dovey 111). Such confessors may admit to wrongdoings, or name abuses personally suffered, or shame their abusers. Confessions in this context are medicalised and recodified with therapeutic qualities that facilitate cathartic healing through admissions of suffering endured or inflicted. Participants on Reality TV can also engage in "biographical self-exposure", the telling of one's personal life (Dovey 111). Such self-disclosure and 'coming out' on Reality TV putatively

contribute to the production of truth and the reclaiming of identity by allowing participants to talk about themselves and speak their truths. Interestingly, Dovey finds these kinds of television confessions to be “anything but guilty”, describing them instead as “assertive, empowering, declamatory” (111). I analyse how the adolescent protagonists in the focus novels utilise the confession to articulate their resistance. These adolescents use the confession to publicly expose their suffering on Reality TV, boldly name the authorities with the power to inflict abuse upon them, and engage others in dialogues to gain support.

### [Spectacularising resistance via incarceration and execution in \*Cell 7\* and \*Day 7\*.](#)

David Lyon cautions that when powerful institutions use their authority and technologies to monitor citizens, then “[q]uestions of justice and fairness must be raised” (19). Marek Oziewicz insists that adolescents feel injustice keenly and they have a greater grasp of fairness than they are usually given credit for (11). Hence, adolescent protagonists in numerous YA novels wish to pursue “the dream of justice” (Oziewicz 1). By presenting narratives where adolescents grapple with issues of fairness, injustice and the law, YA fiction turns these fairly abstract concepts into engaging and relatable themes for young readers to think about. Learning to understand, question and challenge the status quo’s established authorities, ideologies, and practices are important for adolescent protagonists across YA fiction (Musgrave xii). From the beginning of Kerry Drewery’s *Cell 7* trilogy, sixteen-year-old Martha Honeydew demonstrates a sharp awareness of the unfairness, injustice and corruption plaguing her society and government. Coming from the impoverished High Rises, Martha is painfully aware of the socio-economic divide between her community and the wealthy Avenues, whose apathy and anxiety towards the High Rises allow crooked politicians to sustain their power by disproportionately punishing High Rises residents like Martha on *Death is Justice*, ostensibly for entertainment and national ‘security’.

Although Martha is angry at her government and frustrated by the apathic Avenues, she is initially convinced that nothing will change and that as a poor orphan girl, there is nothing she can personally do to dismantle her country's corrupt justice system. Her attitude shifts when she meets Isaac Paige and they form a deep bond. Adolescent identity is formed in relation not only to institutions but to meaningful others like friends and lovers. The relationship Martha and Isaac develop is mutually enriching and each helps the other to emerge from their respective solipsistic worldviews. Isaac received an opulent upbringing in the Avenues as Jackson Paige's adopted son. Through his relationship with Martha, Isaac's conscience is moved by the suffering of the High Rises, and he is troubled by the Avenues' general indifference. Isaac tells Martha "...But meeting you? You've opened my eyes and made me see there is so much more..." (*Cell 7* 132). Isaac becomes passionate about exposing and changing their justice system, and his enthusiasm influences Martha to seriously consider her own power: "Justice and truth...what he was talking about seemed way out of my league, but...maybe if we each played our part, then together we could change things" (*Cell 7* 132-133).

For Martha to fully embrace her power to fight a corrupt government, she must consider several key questions. In *Cell 7*, she asks Isaac if he truly believes he can change anything:

He shook his head. 'Not by myself,' he said.  
'Together?' I asked.  
He nodded.  
(*Cell 7* 132)

In *Day 7*, after her release from *Death is Justice*, Martha asks herself a series of questions and comes to some important realisations:

We're being demonized.  
They're teaching them to hate us  
Who's the 'they'?  
Who's doing this?

And why?

*Because you could be powerful*, says that voice in my head. *Because they're scared.*  
(Day 7 156-157)

When Martha asks Isaac about changing their society, Isaac's insistence that they are stronger together proves Karen Coat's argument that YA fiction emphasises interconnections and mutuality over the "atomistic" self (319). From Isaac, Martha learns the importance of adolescents working together rather than as isolated individuals to achieve a common goal. Later, although Martha is confronted by the distressing knowledge that she is surrounded by power, she learns to question and identify who has power, how they use power, and their motivations. She initially attributes power to a seemingly amorphous and anonymous 'they' that directs criminogenic discourses and punitive logics that teach the public to hate and demonise her community, allies, and herself. As Martha's understanding of power grows more nuanced, she recognises that this 'they' is a combination of institutions and authorities from the state, police, and most importantly, corporate media. 'They' collaborate in neoliberal partnerships with *Death is Justice* to use the programme as a disciplinary apparatus to channel moral panics towards marginalised groups like the High Rises. Martha also comes to the thrilling realisation that those in authority are scared of her voice and her adolescent power to question and challenge them.

Martha understands that as *Death is Justice* is their society's justice system, the programme is the government's most important apparatus for controlling the nation. *Death is Justice* offers the constant spectacle of scapegoating and executing High Rises residents to keep the Avenues appeased, entertained and distracted from social issues, thereby sustaining the Prime Minister's power and allowing his corrupt administration to continue unquestioned. Once Martha accepts her power and responsibility to change society, she focuses on fighting the justice system's corruption and countering the public's apathy. Both goals are interrelated, and Martha attempts to achieve them through *Death is Justice* itself. Her course of action is to make the public aware

of *Death is Justice*'s power by exposing how the programme's televisual techniques and conventions are used to generate moral panics about crime and as social controls for maintaining national security through spectacularising punishment. Martha is convinced that she needs to get on *Death is Justice* in order to dismantle the justice system from within. Hence, she, and then later Isaac, commit the supreme act of self-sacrifice by allowing themselves to be incarcerated on the programme despite the near-certain risk that they will be executed on national television.

Hebdige observes that when adolescents break the rules and challenge the law, they experience power to make others uncomfortable and in so doing, "they get talked about, taken seriously, their grievances are acted upon. They get arrested, harassed, admonished, disciplined, incarcerated, applauded, vilified, emulated, listened to" (18). Martha and Isaac achieve all these effects when they confess to the authorities and get themselves arrested. Their mediated incarceration on *Death is Justice* provides them an immense public platform to spectacularly stage their resistance against the justice system and expose their unscrupulous government. While their arrest practically guarantees their deaths, it is precisely through such drastic and dramatic acts of rebellion that these adolescents can command the public's attention, prick their society's conscience, and force dialogues and uncomfortable conversations amongst citizens. Martha hopes her sacrifice will start public conversations that will reform the justice system: "I'll die in seven days because I have to, but after that, their bubbles will burst and everyone will know the truth" (*Cell 7 2*). Similarly, Isaac prepares for his execution by wishing that his death will matter: "I only hope that my death makes at least one person question, or one person act" (*Day 7 315*).

*Death is Justice* is considered the world's most democratic justice system because it putatively allows every citizen a voice and a vote. The programme presents the illusion of fulfilling television's potential as a dialogic medium that invites and encourages a multiplicity of diverse

voices and opinions (Fiske 90; Glynn 188). Unfortunately, as Oziewicz states, justice as conceived in Western societies tends to be overwhelmingly retributive and monologic (5). As a reality-crime programme, *Death is Justice* is similarly retributive and monologic. The programme employs various televisual conventions that engender fears of crime. Kristina Albright, the programme's lead host, zealously fuels moral panics against Martha by using condemnatory discourses to vilify and criminalise Martha as an irredeemable adolescent killer and neoliberal failure. *Death is Justice* actively discourages the public from questioning, thinking and feeling too deeply and sympathetically about why individuals like Martha and Isaac may commit crime. Martha's weeklong mediated incarceration on *Death is Justice* exposes her to the ways the programme uses televisual conventions to shape public opinion, undermine genuine dialogue, and silence dissenting voices like Martha's. She develops a sophisticated understanding of *Death is Justice*'s inner workings and uses this understanding to publicly expose and undermine the programme's power.

At the end of *Cell 7*, Martha is released from *Death is Justice* when Isaac confesses at her scheduled execution that it was really him who killed Jackson. Throughout the following novel, *Day 7*, the authorities continue to persecute Martha as a wanted criminal and they seek to detain her to prevent Martha from further undermining the justice system. Martha remains undeterred and she continues using *Death is Justice* as a platform to reach the public and to campaign for change. When host Joshua Decker takes call-in comments from viewers to hear their opinions on the ongoing Martha/Isaac case, Martha seizes the opportunity to make herself heard again. Although she puts herself at risk by returning to the programme, this time as a viewer calling-in, Martha is now armed with her hard-won knowledge about the programme's power and she can better navigate its televisual conventions. She displays her astute understanding by strategically calling-in when only Joshua is hosting, knowing he is more sympathetic and open to conversation compared to his punitive co-host Kristina. An understanding host is necessary

to Martha's plans of forging dialogues with the public about the necessity for demanding justice that is truly dialogic and empathic rather than purely condemnatory. Calling-in to *Death is Justice*, Martha says to Joshua:

CALLER 3: If I tell you my real name you might cut me off, or that voice in your ear might. I think you're all right really, but that voice in your ear doesn't like stuff being said that actually makes folk think and question.  
(Day 7 268)

When Martha calls-in to *Death is Justice*, the narrative allows Joshua and the viewers to know her only as 'Caller 3'. Anonymity is key to delay the authorities from censoring Martha's televised conversation with Joshua. As discussed in chapter one, Drewery makes extensive use of the playscript format to represent those chapters depicting *Death is Justice*'s talk show segments. Here, the playscript format helps facilitate Martha's need for concealment as she is textually represented as 'Caller 3'; her identity is effectively hidden even from the readers, who cannot be sure initially that Martha is speaking. Thus concealed, and bringing her considerable insights into how *Death is Justice* operates, Martha works to undercut the power of those controlling the programme. She reveals outright that the voice in the host's earpiece is commanding Joshua and managing the entire programme. This voice is presumably that of the programme's producers, who constitute part of the "they" that Martha earlier realised are teaching the nation to hate her because "they" fear her adolescent power and voice. She publicly exposes the power of this voice to exert control and censor debates on the programme that might prompt viewers to think critically about justice and compassionately about prisoners.

However, once the producers identify who Caller 3 is, they quickly cut Martha off. In the final moments while she still has the public's attention, she says:

MARTHA: Our system sees only black and white... We need to stand up for this and stand up for each other. The only way we can do it is to buck the system... I plead with you to see the bigger picture, see the grey... Prove that together we have power and toge—

For the third time the line goes dead...  
(Day 7 271)

Knowing that she and Isaac cannot fight to change the justice system alone, Martha addresses the nation through *Death is Justice* and urges the viewers to support her call for a more democratic justice system. Martha recognises that the justice system will never change unless the people actively demand for reforms; unfortunately, many are too apathetic to recognise or care about their justice system's serious corruption. Hence, Martha points out how *Death is Justice* as a system divides society through its stark "black and white" worldview. The incarcerated are classed as Guilty or Not guilty, and the programme separates the world outside into the wealthy Avenues who live in perpetual media-induced fear of the 'criminal' High Rises underclass. She calls upon her society to wake up and think independently and critically for themselves rather than swallow the media's condemnatory discourses and punitive crime-control practices. She pleads with the viewers "to see the bigger picture" and understand that a truly democratic society embraces the morally grey and accepts other voices and viewpoints that may be different, counter or uncomfortable to one's own. Martha urges the viewers to realise that by uniting in solidarity, they have the power to "buck the system".

Meanwhile, Isaac also uses his mediated incarceration on *Death is Justice* to display his resistance against the programme's power over his identity. In Day 7, the winners of a competition held by *Death is Justice* get to ask Isaac personal questions to learn more about him. In what becomes a forced interrogation, Isaac is subjected to probing questions from strangers whom he must answer on national television. Growing tired of the publicized humiliation, Isaac decides to proactively disrupt the punitive tortures and endless mediation the programme forces him to undergo. He vows: "*I won't be your creature in a zoo any longer, I think. This is now on my terms*" (Day 7 321). All seven cells built for *Death is Justice* are



equipped on every side with cameras that provide viewers 24/7 footage of prisoners. Using the cameras in his cell to document and weaponize his protest, Isaac systematically punches each camera with his bare fists. When only one remains, Isaac looks directly into the camera's lens to command the attention of the viewers witnessing his resistance. He begins to recite Rudyard Kipling's poem 'If'. Once he finishes the poem's final line "–you'll be a Man, my son!" (Day 7 322), Isaac concludes:

I have only one thing left to say now. I've been their clown and their stooge, but now I'm resigning.  
'Martha, I love you.'  
Those will be my last words.  
(Day 7 322)

Isaac then punches the final camera, which temporarily ends his mediation and gives him a brief respite. He shows an astute ability to channel his power by integrating the very technologies of mediation to broadcast his resistance on his own terms. As an adolescent, Isaac takes his power literally into his own hands. Punching the cameras is a violent and spectacular protest that poignantly interrupts the violence and spectacularisation inflicted upon him by *Death is Justice*. As discussed in chapter one, the media, especially prison documentaries, tend to portray prisoners as animals behind bars to amplify their supposed deviant and sub-human nature (Jewkes 86; Page & Ouellette 130). Isaac strenuously rejects the dehumanising identities *Death is Justice* has constructed and placed upon him throughout his incarceration: a captive zoo creature, a clown and a stooge for public entertainment. Instead, Isaac draws on Kipling's poem to verbalise on national television his project of reclaiming his identity and autonomy as a young man. Isaac also empowers himself by choosing the last words that viewers will hear him utter – his love for Martha, which humanises him. His resistance has immediate reverberations. Watching Isaac's performance from the *Death is Justice* studio, Joshua and the in-studio audience are stunned:

JOSHUA: I can no longer sit by and watch the injustice mount up...I beg you to go out and question, seek the truth about your country and your leaders...You think you have freedom of speech? Question that.  
(Day 7 324)

Joshua tells the in-studio audience that Martha and Isaac's bravery, sacrifice and activism inspire him to be honest with himself and the public. Joshua admits that listening to Isaac recite Kipling's poem makes him feel like a lesser man because it forces him to confront his complicity in ideologically sustaining the justice system through his role as host. He says: "I feel like a cheat and a liar instead, and I think it's time for me to stand up..." (Day 7 323). Joshua, a relatively young adult himself, begins taking a stand against *Death is Justice*, his employer. He takes great personal risks by explicitly corroborating all the discredited evidence Martha and Isaac have exposed on the programme about their government's corruption. His position as host confers ideological authority that supports their adolescent voices and their truths. It is also crucial that he tells the public to question their assumptions, interrogate their leaders, and think about how free they really are as citizens. When the public questions, they may realise how their leaders use media institutions like *Death is Justice* as apparatuses of control. To question those in power is also to demand a dialogue with authority that holds them accountable.

Of Martha and Isaac's many acts of resistance, the *piece de resistance* occurs on the electric chair in *Cell 7*. Before executing prisoners, *Death is Justice* allows them to say their last words speech. Martha always intended for her last words at her execution to be her final, most meaningful and most spectacular act of resistance. Having been silent most of her life, and forcibly silenced many times during her mediated incarceration, Martha strategically plans to use the drama of her execution as a stage to command the entire nation's attention while she speaks her truths and publicly exposes the government's corruption. Significantly, executions on *Death is Justice* are not only broadcasted on television but also witnessed in-person by an

in-studio audience. The execution room is built with a theatre that seats an audience composed of the press, dignitaries, ticket-paying civilians, and Martha's allies like Isaac, ex-judge Cicero, and Eve, her legal counsellor. The physical immediacy of the in-studio audience to Martha makes them essential to her plan. While *Death is Justice* can use its usual televisual conventions to censor the broadcast of Martha's speech, they cannot block the in-studio audience, whose direct access to Martha limits the producers' televisual power over her.

Significantly, once Martha starts her last words speech, the narrative shifts to third-person narration. Narrative structure and depth of narration function to express a novel's ideologies (Trites 70). Throughout the trilogy, Martha is the primary focalising character and most of her chapters are narrated by her in first-person. Notably, Martha is the sole character throughout the trilogy to narrate in first-person. She therefore enjoys narratorial authority from her privileged position as the trilogy's dominant textual voice, which allows her personal ideologies about justice and resistance to predominate. While other characters also focalise in *Cell 7*, their chapters are always narrated in third-person. The distancing effects that third-person narration can produce means that as textual voices, the perspectives of Martha's friends like Isaac, Cicero and Eve are subtly minimised. While Martha's friends admire her resolve to change their world, they disagree with Martha that a teenage girl must sacrifice herself on television to accomplish this, and they urge her to find alternative solutions. Martha's stubborn refusal to listen (even as she pleads that others listen and engage in dialogue with her) leads her to the electric chair. The transition to third-person narration during Martha's last words is textually and ideologically significant in the following ways.

Foucault says that "[i]n the ceremonies of the public execution, the main character was the people, whose real and immediate presence was required for the performance" (*Discipline & Punish* 57). During Martha's last words, "...her eyes hover the audience, catching the gaze of each and every one" (*Cell 7* 343). By looking directly at the audience, Martha acknowledges

them as other ‘main characters’ who are essential as witness of her final performance of resistance. Her act of acknowledging the audience as individuals resonates with the spirit of Kipling’s poem that Isaac later recites in *Day 7*: “*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue/ Or walk with Kings – nor lose the common touch...*” (*Day 7* 321). Despite her constant refrain that she is just a poor High Rises girl, Martha’s usual position as the dominant textual voice means she talks as ‘king’ in the narrative. The move to third-person during her speech allows Martha to ‘come down’ from her usual elevated position of narratorial superiority as the trilogy’s main character. To get her message across, she must engage the crowd in genuine dialogue by talking to them as equals, as one main character to another, and all without losing the “virtue” of her adolescent identity.

Martha’s entire mission to change her country’s justice system pivots on starting dialogues with the public to encourage important conversations about judicial reforms. However, if Martha is to commit to her demands for social change through democratic dialogue, she must accept that true dialogue can be painful because it encapsulates a polyphony of potentially antagonistic others who may have conflicting viewpoints. While the in-studio audience’s presence means *Death is Justice* cannot interrupt Martha’s last words, the fact that Martha opens a dialogue with the audience means that *they* can interrupt her. Some members in the audience believe the condemnatory discourses that *Death is Justice* spouts about Martha. To them, Martha is a murdering teenager who must be executed, regardless of the truths she now speaks. The in-studio audience constantly interrupts Martha’s speech by calling her a ‘killer’, a ‘whore’, a ‘bitch’. Martha tells them ““I’d just like you to listen. With an open mind”” (*Cell 7* 344). It falls on Martha as an adolescent to be the adult and the bigger (moral) person in the room as she strives for mature dialogue. Her admirable performance of self-control defies the identity that *Death is Justice* has created for her in which she is an out-of-control adolescent killer.

While it may seem terribly risky for Martha to wait until her execution to stage her most important act of resistance, executions can provide unique opportunities for the soon-to-be-disposed-of criminal, who can experience a form of power before the gathered crowd. For at executions, rules and hierarchies may be turned upside down; those in power mocked while the criminal may be elevated in stature (*Discipline & Punish* 60). Foucault says that “[u]nder the protection of imminent death, the criminal could say everything...” without fear of further retribution (*Discipline & Punish* 60). Furthermore, Foucault argues that the crowd attending an execution is not always hostile to the criminal. Indeed, they may gather in solidarity “...to hear an individual who had nothing more to lose curse the judges, the laws, the government...” (*Discipline & Punish* 60). The criminal may find him/herself glorified by the crowd into a relatable hero whom they can rally around: “Against the law, against the rich, the powerful, the magistrates, the constabulary or the watch...he appeared to have waged a struggle with which one all too easily identified” (*Discipline & Punish* 67). The “indomitability” of the criminal’s spirit to fight and resist power can be inspirational to those watching (*Discipline & Punish* 67).

Martha skilfully leverages the media attention at her execution to achieve many of these effects of power that Foucault discusses. At her execution, she turns the disciplinary power of the confession to her advantage as the entire nation listens to her speak. As she has nothing left to lose, the authorities have no power over her anymore. Martha can speak freely to reveal her damning evidence of government corruption. Yet the biggest secret she confesses is her innocence. This bombshell revelation forces the public to re-evaluate its punitive attitudes and question the integrity and power of *Death is Justice* as an apparatus of justice. Martha’s revelation nullifies the programme’s disciplinary authority because *Death is Justice* cannot now justifiably execute Martha knowing that she is innocent, not without publicly violating their ‘eye-for-an-eye’ ideology. Martha’s allies then storm the execution room to forcibly free her from the electric chair. Their liberation of Martha fulfils Foucault’s observation that the

punitive power of executions is vulnerable to revolt by the people; the nation witnesses Martha's allies successfully "[p]reventing an execution that was regarded as unjust, snatching a condemned [wo]man from the hands of the executioner, obtaining [her] pardon by force..." (*Discipline & Punish* 59). Martha's successful escape from *Death is Justice* is the first step to dismantling the corrupt justice system.

#### A game called intervention in *Surviving Antarctica*.

In Andrea White's *Surviving Antarctica*, the Department of Entertainment (DoE) is the most powerful institution in America, managing the nation's media broadcasting, education and even courts. The DoE's power is so absolute that its neoliberal game rules determine not only the lives of the contestants on *Historical Survivor*, but also the everyday lives of citizens and the conduct of DoE employees. The DoE's most pivotal game rule is its policy of non-intervention. At the start of each episode of *Historical Survivor*, the Secretary addresses the nation; she ritualistically swears on a stack of Bibles and promises viewers: "We abide by the rules in this program," she said. "There is no outside intervention. You will see real people here make decisions that will cause them to live or die..." (*Surviving Antarctica* 143). The Secretary promises that her production teams will never intervene to help even if contestants face mortal peril while playing her games. Her ironclad non-intervention rule is in keeping with the neoliberal corporate state's stance to minimise government support because intervention is perceived as interference. Instead, the adolescent contestants on *Historical Survivor* are given the 'freedom' and autonomy to take personal responsibility for their decisions to survive in Antarctica without external interference.

The non-intervention rule serves a darker purpose: it prevents any natural impulse in the DoE's production teams to feel responsible for the young contestants or take initiative to help them survive the game. Huizinga states that "[t]he rules of a game are absolutely binding and

allow no doubt” (11). By swearing on Bibles and speaking on behalf of her employees, the Secretary solemnly binds her production teams to her game’s cruel rules. Although the production teams do not play on *Historical Survivor*, they are expected to respect and abide by the rules that govern the game. DoE employees are closely monitored at work and anyone who resists, criticises or even questions the Secretary and her rules is imprisoned without trial. The non-intervention rule is therefore religiously followed, and its power to govern conduct is exemplified in the DoE’s newest recruit, seventeen-year-old Steve. Steve is a deeply compassionate adolescent with an independent mind, and he disagrees strongly (but privately) with the Secretary’s unethical treatment of the contestants. However, Steve knows that at work, “He had to be very, very careful...Everything he said was recorded. He didn’t want to lose the best job he’d ever had...” (*Surviving Antarctica* 31).

Like most citizens in *Surviving Antarctica*, Steve is desperately poor but survives thanks to his job on the production team for *Historical Survivor*. He quickly learns to govern his conduct in accordance with his workplace’s neoliberal rules. Steve is vigilantly strategic and self-enterprising with his words while at work to safeguards his employment. Like other DoE employees, Steve’s silence is economically motivated – to keep their jobs at the DoE, they must keep quiet and become accessories complicit in the Secretary’s inhumane treatment of the contestants. Steve’s job editing footage from *Historical Survivor* allows him to grow familiar with Robert, Billy, Andrew, Polly, and Grace, and he comes to care for them. However, although Steve feels protective towards the adolescents as they struggle to cross Antarctica, he resolves to suppress his natural instinct to speak up for them or speak out against the Secretary’s rules. The non-intervention policy of the game and of his workplace have induced a neoliberal desire in Steve to prioritise his own economic survival above others, including the contestants’ welfare on *Historical Survivor*. As an adolescent himself, Steve’s solipsistic worldview is challenged when he is transferred to the production team’s mysterious night shift.

Sensing that Steve genuinely wants to help the contestants, the night shift's manager, Chad, reveals the night shift's secret:

"Well, sometimes we play a game called intervention."

"You actually talk to the contestants?" Steve said, hardly able to believe his ears.

(*Surviving Antarctica* 137)

The night shift plays their own covert games of intervention to sabotage the Secretary's games and they resist her non-intervention rule by remotely supporting the contestants. They manipulate the Secretary's very technologies of control to undermine her power over the contestants. The contestants are unaware that the Secretary had corneal implants surgically inserted into their eyes. These implants are audio-visual transmitter/receivers that turn the contestants into walking camera-crews who unwittingly record themselves and transmit footage to the production team. The Secretary is unaware that her corneal implants operate on a two-way basis which the night shift exploits to establish dialogues with the contestants. Chad reveals that for every series of *Historical Survivor*, a member of the night shift volunteers to be the Voice. While the night shift watches over the contestants and cares for their wellbeing, the Voice is the only one to speak directly to the contestants. The Voice gives contestants moral and emotional support and offers life-saving information and guidance at critical moments to save the contestants. As the Voice breaks the golden non-intervention rule by speaking to and helping the contestants, s/he must be prepared to accept serious personal risks for this responsibility to others.

Chad asks Steve several questions to determine his compatibility with and commitment to the night shift's mission:

"You thought the time was past, didn't you?" Chad said.

"What time?" Steve asked...

"The time when one person can make a difference."

Steve didn't answer. He had spent his life hoping that it wasn't.

(*Surviving Antarctica* 137)



Next, Chad asks if Steve is willing to take the risks and responsibility as the new Voice.

“Did you understand my question?” Chad said.  
“Not really,” Steve replied. His voice trembled.  
“I asked you to be the Voice.”  
“But that sounds dangerous,” Steve protested.  
(*Surviving Antarctica* 140)

Steve’s voice in response to Chad’s questions is an important indicator of his emotional readiness to accept his power as an adolescent. Although Chad’s first question resonates with Steve because he hopes people can still make a positive difference, he refrains from answering. Chad’s second and more direct request for Steve to become the Voice makes Steve’s actual voice tremble. In both instances, Steve’s verbal reticence is a defence mechanism born from the pressures of surviving a ruthlessly competitive society where helping others can jeopardise one’s life. “The topic made him uncomfortable. He wanted to help these kids, but not enough to risk his own future” (*Surviving Antarctica* 141). The night shift eventually convinces Steve that anyone can make a difference, and this happens by embracing your voice and reaching out to others in supportive dialogues. They tell Steve: “...Just to have someone who cares, even a Voice, means so much to the contestants.” “I can understand that,” Steve said. On many lonely occasions...he would have loved to have had a Voice to talk to” (*Surviving Antarctica* 143-44). Steve is encouraged to emerge from his solipsistic self-interest and embrace his power, responsibility and empathy as the Voice.

Steve rises to the occasion as the Voice when contestant Andrew falls down an ice canyon. To rescue Andrew, Steve breaks the non-intervention rule and establishes dialogues with the contestants:

“Andrew, you’re not alone,” Steve said.  
“Who are you?” Andrew asked again.  
Steve didn’t know what made him say the name. It just came to him. “I’m your ancestor Birdie Bowers.”

“Oh,” Andrew said. You died in this stuff, too.”  
“You’re not going to die,” Steve said. “You’re going to make it.”  
(*Surviving Antarctica* 340)

Steve next communicates with Andrew’s teammate Polly to guide her to Andrew:

Steve dropped Andrew’s mike and found the one to Polly’s receiver. He spoke quickly into it. “Polly, this is Birdie Bowers, Andrew’s distant uncle. I’m going to lead you to Andrew.”  
“What?” Polly heard a voice in her head...  
(*Surviving Antarctica* 364)

As the Voice, Steve fittingly adopts the persona of Birdie Bowers, a team member of Scott’s expedition which the contestants are recreating. Andrew and Polly each have an emotional connection to Bowers; Bowers is Andrew’s distant ancestor, while Polly considers the explorer an inspirational role model after reading Scott’s diaries. By communicating with them as Bowers, Steve opens a dialogue with the past as well. When he assumes the role and voice of Bowers, Steve takes on the socio-historic context and personal ideologies of the long-dead explorer, including Bowers’s famed heroism and endurance. Speaking to Andrew as Bowers engenders a sense of familial familiarity that comforts Andrew and gives him strength to survive his ordeal. Steve’s decision to speak to Polly as Bowers is also meaningful, for Polly openly speaks of her admiration for Scott’s team: ““Scott wrote in his diary that Birdie Bowers was *the hardest traveller that ever undertook a Polar journey...*”” (*Surviving Antarctica* 372). By resisting the game’s non-intervention rules, Steve unlocks his adolescent power and facilitates vital dialogues with the contestants that helps save Andrew’s life. Thus, Steve demonstrates the importance for adolescents to speak up and speak to one another to make a difference.

I quit: the spoilsport’s refusal to play in *Nerve*.

In Jeanne Ryan's *Nerve*, the game-doc *NERVE* constructs an elaborate game-world of rules, rewards and expectations for its adolescent Players. According to *NERVE*'s rules, Players must complete and obey without question every dare they receive. Furthermore, *NERVE* uses the illusion of play to disguise the reality and gravity of the physical danger its dares present to Players. Players willingly partake in risky dares while the Watchers watch them contentedly because they all believe *NERVE* is always in control of the game-world and its dares are purely entertainment. This wholehearted trust in the game, its rules, and illusions allows *NERVE* to exert enormous power over Players to make them commit terrible acts upon themselves and each other. Rules are vital to any game because they "hold" together the game world's illusion; therefore, game rules are binding and cannot permit questioning or challenges (Huizinga 11). Yet ironically, as Fiske explains, while "[r]ules are the means by which social power is exercised", play is pleasurable precisely because play affords players opportunities "to explore the relationships between rules and freedom" (Fiske 236). Similarly, Whitson says "play inherently encourages players to push against, reshape, and find movement between rules, sometimes breaking these rules altogether" (399).

Therefore, like any game or game-doc, *NERVE* is vulnerable to resistance when Players like Vee grow increasingly unwilling to play by its rules and begin to actively seek ways to physically or verbally disrupt the internal cohesion and illusion of its game world. As a YA novel, *Nerve* certainly contains ample depictions of dramatic fights and spectacular showdowns through which Vee demonstrates her adolescent power to resist *NERVE*. However, I am more interested in the subtler ways Vee expresses her power against the game. Vee consistently resists *NERVE*'s power over her by using her voice to articulate her rejection of the game and to expose the hard reality of its cruel dares. Vee also works to open dialogues with the Watchers, first by urging them to help save her from *NERVE* and later to help her stop *NERVE*. Huizinga identifies the spoilsport as a player who, by deliberately resisting or disregarding the

rules, or by threatening to withdraw from the game, thus destroys the illusion of play and destabilises the game (11). The spoilsport's resistance to the game's rules constitutes power because "...as soon as the rules are transgressed the whole play-world collapses. The game is over" (Huizinga 11).

As the most reluctant and resistant Player, Vee embodies Huizinga's spoilsport. Vee's resistance begins in earnest during the climatic Final Round when *NERVE* issues handguns and dares the Players to shoot a designated victim. The rules for the Final Round state that if one Player quits, everyone loses their prizes. This rule insidiously binds the Players to the game, to each other, and to their own economic self-interests. As explained in chapter two, game-doc arenas and competitions immerse participants in neoliberal mentalities that induce ruthless competitiveness and self-enterprise. Naturally, the other Players eagerly comply with the dare and Vee is dismayed at their insistence that the danger of shooting each other is illusory. Unwilling to put herself in harm, Vee challenges the game's power by refusing to obey, and she encourages the other Players to reject the dare. When *NERVE* offers cash incentives to another Player to distribute the guns, Vee speaks out: "'Don't do it, Ty. This is totally *Lord of the Flies*. *NERVE* wants to turn us into savages. Show them that you're your own man'" (*Nerve* 224). She reminds Ty of his humanity and urges him to reclaim his own autonomy by resisting the game's control over him.

When she fails to convince Ty to stop distributing the handguns, Vee takes matters into her own hands and vocalises her rejection of the game with two ongoing chants:

I cross my arms and start chanting loudly, "Whoever's watching, call 911. Whoever's watching, call 911"

(*Nerve* 224).

"Time to let me quit. I quit. I quit..." I alternate this with pleas to the audience to call 911..." (*Nerve* 225).

In her first chant, Vee opens a dialogue with the public by directly addressing the Watchers. By asking for their assistance, Vee prompts the Watchers not to remain passive but to take action as individuals and as a community to help the Players. Her request for the police emphasises the gravity of the dare and exposes *NERVE*'s ultimate illusion – that it is a game. As she confronts the Watchers with the reality that the Players are in genuine peril, she breaks the rules by exposing the game-world's illusion. In her second chant, Vee verbalises her intention to exit the game. By renouncing her status as Player, Vee attempts to deny *NERVE* its right to continue exerting power and control over her. Hence, Vee demonstrates a sharp understanding of the power of her voice, and she weaponizes her articulations to expose and disrupt the game: "I keep repeating the request...they can't keep censoring me...There'd be no show. Eventually, they'll either have to let us go...Either way, the game is over. Screw fashion school" (*Nerve* 225). Her decision to forfeit her fashion school prize which she initially pinned her future hopes upon thus denies *NERVE* of influence over her any longer.

The power of the spoilsport goes beyond simply disrupting the game. Huizinga explains that "...the spoil-sports in their turn make a new community with rules of its own. The outlaw, the revolutionary... a certain element of play is prominent in all their doings" (12). Vee proves that the spoilsport continues having power to resist the game even after she has left the game's physical arenas. One month after Vee and the other Players survive and escape from *NERVE*'s arena, Vee has taken on the role and responsibility of revolutionary as she starts a mission to raise public awareness about the dangers of playing *NERVE*. The game has given her widespread popularity, and she uses this attention to channel her power and extend her voice: "For now, I've got the attention of a whole bunch of people. So I'll use it (*Nerve* 288). Vee understands that she cannot fight the power of a giant corporation by herself, so she builds a community of supporters and allies. She starts an online campaign to mobilise the Watchers

and wider public to get involved in her mission of exposing the game-masters and taking *NERVE* offline permanently. She posts this message to her community:

DEAR WORLD,

I ALMOST GOT KILLED PLAYING NERVE,  
JUST SO THEY COULD MAKE A PROFIT.  
THEY THINK THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH  
ABUSING PLAYERS BECAUSE NO ONE  
REALLY CARES AND NO ONE CAN FIND  
THEM. BUT THEY'RE WRONG.

THEY CAN'T HIDE, NOT FROM ALL OF US.

SO USE WHATEVER COMPUTER SKILLS YOU  
HAVE, WHATEVER SKILLS YOUR FRIENDS  
HAVE, AND HUNT THESE BASTARDS DOWN.

I DARE YOU!

(*Nerve* 288)

Like Martha in *Cell 7*, Vee demonstrates the importance of interconnection and mutuality that Karen Coats says are integral to YA narratives (319). Vee cannot successfully operate as a one-person army but requires a community of others for help. She opens dialogues with her supporters and dares them to see that by caring about doing the right thing and by working *together*, they have power which institutions and corporations like *NERVE* underestimate and perhaps even fear. By *daring* her supporters to action, Vee appropriates for her own agendas the very discourses and logics of play that *NERVE* once used to control her. That Vee can so comfortably appropriate *NERVE*'s words as her own might appear a form of adolescent empowerment. As Huizinga says, the spoilsport creates a new community "with rules of its own". Vee does not create her own rules or discourses but uses those of the game to express her purpose and power. However, as I suggest in the Conclusion chapter, the YA novels I analyse in this thesis problematise easy conceptualisations of adolescent power and resistance

when adolescents continue expressing themselves by using the very neoliberal ideologies and discourses of Reality TV against which they have struggled.

*You saw: confronting/confessing the game-doc's end in *The Last One*.*

Of all the novels under consideration in this chapter, Oliva's *The Last One* is the only novel without conventional forms of resistance against Reality TV. When a pandemic strikes during the production of *In the Dark*, the game-doc ends abruptly. Mae does not realise the game is over and continues playing as its last remaining contestant. Oliva's narrative plays with varying depths of focalisation to compromise Mae's vision and perceptions of reality. When Mae breaks her glasses, it produces for her a curious doubled and halved vision; she simultaneously sees more than and less than what is real. Mae's confused vision allows her to indulge in cycles of self-deception that sustain the illusion of the game in order to preserve her sanity against the mounting reality of the pandemic. Since there is no longer any game-doc for her to resist, Mae must learn to resist the neoliberal game mentalities that have been deeply ingrained into her. She gradually recognises the need to see and speak the truth of her reality – that she can no longer use the game as a shield, but must confront and confess the mistakes she made towards others in the name of 'playing' the game.

Mae's doubled and halved vision induce an intense insularity and solipsism in her, and she uses the game mentalities of *In the Dark* to perceive the whole world as 'stage dressing' meant for her. For weeks Mae walks through pandemic-ravaged towns believing everything and everyone she encounters are props and actors placed by the production team. Even when she gains Brennan as a constant companion, Mae insists on dehumanising him as a Reality TV actor. Her extreme solipsism and detachment from others cause serious lapses in judgement and she makes mistakes that haunt her conscience. Mae can only begin to recover herself by acknowledging the truth of her surroundings and the truth of her self-deception. She begins

waking up to reality when she and Brennan are attacked by marauders and she is nearly raped and killed. She does not want her assailant's face to be the last image she sees before she dies, so: "I shift my line of sight" (*The Last One* 273). The physical shifting of her sight line triggers a deeper clarity of perception and Mae realises from the shocking violence of the assault that "This isn't part of the show... Nothing has been part of the show for a long time" (*The Last One* 274).

Something within me releases, an almost pleasant untightening. I don't have to explain anymore. I've fought. I've fought and struggled and strived – and I failed. There's peace in this...in failing without being at fault.  
At least I didn't quit.  
(*The Last One* 274)

Mae's sudden insight that the game-doc is over gives her some peace, but this peace arises from the fact that she feels blameless because like a good neoliberal game-doc participant, she never quit the game. Ironically, while she feels she cannot be faulted for not completing the game, her greatest fault is precisely that she continued playing by *In the Dark's* game rules at both her own and other people's expense. In this sense, Mae is the opposite of Huizinga's spoilsport, for she fought, struggled and strived not only to survive but to keep alive the illusion of the game-world. Nevertheless, from here onwards, Mae does not allow herself to indulge in further self-deception. Mae also actively denies herself any self-exculpation for her actions during the time she believed she was still playing on *In the Dark*. This is signalled by her forceful admission to herself: "But my glasses are broken and I – you saw" (*The Last One* 274). Fittingly, the next time she experiences clarity of (in)sight is when she gets new contact lenses at LensCrafters. With her vision restored, Mae is suddenly confronted by clear memories of the time she walked across dead children on a bus because she thought they were game props.

The bus.  
Those were real children.  
Those were *real* children and I walked past, blind.  
What did I step on?  
Who.



I take a seat in a creaky exam chair, bury my head in my hands. It feels like the rest of my life can only be an apology, that with each step forward I have to beg forgiveness for the last.

(*The Last One* 320-321)

That Mae's last question 'Who' lacks a question mark indicates that she is acknowledging 'Who' as a statement of fact more than a question in doubt. Mae's new contact lenses symbolically help her move past solipsism to recognise the reality and humanity of others – in this case, the schoolchildren whose bodies she callously stepped on because she believed they were fake. As she confronts her guilt, Mae sits on an optometrist's exam chair; this is fitting because she now self-examines her memories of the recent past and her actions during her time of self-deception. Akin to Martha on the electric chair in *Cell 7*, Mae puts herself on trial in the examination chair and finally confesses her guilt. However, unlike Martha, who confesses openly in dialogue with others, Mae feels that she can only confess her misdeeds to herself. Although her companion Brennan constantly urges her to share her pain, Mae is unwilling to confess anything to him, and so her confession remains monologic rather than dialogic. Since Mae has only herself to confess to and she is still not ready to forgive herself, her self-recovery remains uneven and incomplete despite her new clarity of vision and perception.

#### Adolescent empowerment and resistance against family-docs.

In this section, I discuss adolescent resistance against, within and even outside family-docs in *Reality Boy* and *Something Real*. These novels exemplify Trites's observation that "YA novels serve both to reflect and perpetuate the cultural mandate that teenagers rebel against their parents" due to the unequal power dynamics between adolescents and adults (69). When their families appear on family-docs, these power dynamics grow more tense as adolescents experience the power of media institutions and their own parents to construct and control the discourses and narratives surrounding their families' stories and personal identities. Borland, Sawin and Tye argue that because "families are made, not given", the narratives that make a

family's identity are dialogic (377). The multi-voiced narrativizing of family stories may also produce family dysfunction for various reasons (Borland, Sawin & Tye 388). Family members might remember, interpret and tell events differently or in conflicting ways; family trauma may also be hidden in "the gaps, silences, and narrative refusals" (Borland, Sawin & Tye 388). The narrativizing of a family's stories on family-docs bring into question and contention who has the right to tell the family's stories, whose versions are privileged, whose voice is silenced, and whether family trauma is neglected or exploited.

King's *Reality Boy* and Demetrios's *Something Real* are both narrated in first-person by adolescents who carry the trauma of being forced to star on family-docs. Gerald Faust and Chloe Baker each endure long-lasting media-induced damage to their personal reputations; Gerald as the infamous 'Crapper' from *Network Nanny*, while Chloe's attempted suicide was broadcasted by *Baker's Dozen*. Both adolescents are angry that their respective parents ignore, exploit and manipulate them, while allowing family-docs to broadcast their dysfunctional behaviours. Gerald resents his parents for allowing *Network Nanny* to exploit and pathologize his childhood defecatory behaviour. Chloe is outraged that her mother's memoir retells her attempted suicide in a new narrative. The confession is an integral convention for family-docs and both Gerald and Chloe's families openly disclose the worst aspects of their children's private selves. Hence, for Gerald and Chloe, the compulsion to confess on family-docs is debilitating to their sense of identity and has aggravated their various dysfunctional behaviours. Nevertheless, Gerald and Chloe eventually learn to positively use the confession in various ways to tell their versions of events and counter the dominant media narratives about themselves as pathological and unstable individuals. They learn to use their voices and sometimes silences to confess, reclaim and rehabilitate their identities.

I demand: Rehabilitation through dialogue and demands in *Reality Boy*.

“You all watched and gasped...as three different cameramen caught three different angles of me squeezing one out...”  
(*Reality Boy 2*).

I was so entertaining.  
Right?  
Wasn't I?  
(*Reality Boy 2*)

*Reality Boy* opens with Gerald posing the above statements and questions about his childhood on *Network Nanny*. As a first-person narrator, Gerald is presumably directing these questions and statements to the narratee. Interestingly, Gerald addresses the narratee as an imagined (former) viewer of *Network Nanny*. Fludernik explains that the narratee “is the intrafictional addressee of the narrator’s discourse” and may exist “offstage”, or in Gerald’s case, “offscreen” (23). Furthermore, Fludernik describes “the communicative situation” between narrator and narratee in narrative discourse as confessional (26). Similarly, Daley-Carey finds first-person narration in YA fiction mimics the confessional mode of speaking and thus allows the adolescent narrator to experience “the cathartic act of narrativising the self” to another (480). Although Gerald detested being forced to confess as a child, as an adolescent, he addresses his narratee/imagined viewer in the confessional mode as a means to narrativize his childhood in his own words. He does so to disabuse his imagined viewer of any negative perceptions s/he developed of him from watching *Network Nanny*. Gerald cannot help but be confrontational as he accuses and forcibly demands the narratee/imagined viewer to acknowledge their complicity in deriving entertainment from watching him being humiliated and pathologized on television.

ME:           How is a kid crapping on his parents’  
                  kitchen table entertaining?

ANYONE: I don’t know. But people seem to like it.

ME:           You hadn’t noticed that it’s a little  
                  perverted? Watching a kid poop on TV?

ANYONE: That’s ridiculous. Why would you say  
                  something like that?

ME:           Because it's true. Isn't that the only reason  
                  to ever say anything?  
(*Reality Boy* 97)

As the excerpt above demonstrates, Gerald's confessional mode to the narratee/imagined viewer develops into a full-fledged dialogue that King textually represents as actual dialogue using the extraliterary genre of TV scripts. Notably, just as the TV script format reflects the pervasive influence of mediation in Gerald's life, the singular narratee/imagined viewer is now represented as an amorphous collective of TV viewers called ANYONE. ANYONE is apt because in Gerald's mind, although not everyone watched *Network Nanny*, *anyone* could be a former viewer. Gerald struggles to form meaningful intersubjective relationships with others and his identity formation is stunted because he believes anyone he meets already has pre-conceived judgements of him as the Crapper. Unable to confront the public to reshape the narrative about himself as dirty and deviant, Gerald satisfies himself with imaginary dialogues with ANYONE. Rimmon-Kenan notes that when grown-up narrators speak about themselves as children, their discourse is "coloured" by their adult perceptions (86). In his conversations with ANYONE, Gerald speaks with the maturity of a sixteen-year-old, indicated by words like "perverted". He also shows the nuances of his maturity in his insistence on speaking the truths of his childhood, and he challenges ANYONE to admit the perversity of "watching a kid poop".

ANYONE responds by saying: "This is why we don't ask five-year-olds questions like this" (*Reality Boy* 97). ANYONE continues to infantilize Gerald and thus denies acknowledging his maturity. As an imaginary representative of the public, ANYONE indicates how public opinion of Gerald has remained static. Ironically, in the public's eyes, it is Gerald who has never changed. The people of his town continue regarding Gerald as the Crapper because they believe he has never grown up nor grown better from his dirty behaviour as the five-year-old they watched on TV. Most importantly, no matter how rich and insightful his conversations with

ANYONE are, Gerald is ultimately still conversing internally with an imaginary interlocuter. Hence, this dialogue remains entirely monologic and does not offer Gerald the rehabilitation that genuine dialogic conversations with an actual other can provide. Eventually, Gerald meets Hannah, who becomes his first girlfriend. Hannah is vital to rehabilitating Gerald's sense of self because she is his first true and non-familial intersubjective relationship. Gerald's relationship with Hannah allows him to establish meaningful and real dialogues with an other who does not perceive him as the Crapper. On Gerald's seventeenth birthday, Hannah gives him a card with the following message:

...and until you leave here, you will always be the boy from TV...

(*Reality Boy* 241)

...And I feel a bond with you because of this. Because neither of us is happy here and I want to find a way out...Of my life. Of my house, of my family...And it looks like you want that, too.

(*Reality Boy* 242)

In her card, Hannah demonstrates an understanding that adolescent identity is formed in relation to others. In Gerald's case, the people of their town (who form the amorphous ANYONE) are others that are openly contemptuous of him. Hannah reminds Gerald that he will always be defined by these others as "the boy from TV". She believes the only way for Gerald to emerge from the pathologized identity that *Network Nanny* constructed for him is to separate himself from anyone who still perceives him as the Crapper. The two adolescents find a comforting mutuality in their shared misery over their respective family situations and their desire to leave home to escape their pre-defined identities. They decide to 'kidnap themselves' and run away from home to discover themselves. Importantly, this self-discovery is undertaken with an other, and together. They prepare to send their parents ransom notes with a list of their demands about the changes they want in their lives. Before they leave, Gerald attempts to write his list of demands. He suddenly realises that "I don't have any demands. I don't know how to

demand” (*Reality Boy* 151). He manages to write “*Shit*” before crossing-out his demand “so no one can read them” (*Reality Boy* 151).

Gerald attributes his inability to make demands for himself to his anger-management coach Roger, whom he calls “my professional demand-remover” (*Reality Boy* 152). Roger, like Nanny, is an expert who trains Gerald to govern himself according to neoliberal ideologies. Gerald has been taught both to clean up the messes in his life by himself and that he does not deserve anything because “*Should* is a dirty word” (*Reality Boy* 152). According to Roger’s (and Nanny’s) neoliberal logics, Gerald should not expect his parents to improve the quality of his life for him, or recognise his misery as the Crapper, or even acknowledge their role in causing his unhappiness. Instead, he is to quietly accept the reality of his home life. Gerald is therefore initially rendered unable to imagine what he deserves, including a better existence. His knee-jerk reaction of crossing-out his written demand so others cannot read it indicates a tendency towards effacing his adolescent voice and desires. As long as Gerald continues both to prevent himself from expressing what he truly needs, and to deny others the opportunity to know what he wants, he cannot find the words to make his demands. With Hannah’s support, Gerald finally succeeds at articulating his first demand:

I clear my throat. “My first demand is a safe place to live. No more Tasha.”  
She nods and chews. “That’s a good one,” she says.  
“I’ve only been demanding that since I was born, I think,” I say. “Not like it ever worked.”  
(*Reality Boy* 288)

It is significant that the first time Gerald attempts to write (and then effaces) his demands, he is alone. Without an other, Gerald’s attempts to demand are monologic and end in failure. He is able to articulate his first demand only in the presence of another, Hannah, who shows him the importance of dialogue. Gerald’s primary demand is to have a home where he can be safe from his older sister Tasha, whom Gerald fears has homicidal tendencies that will kill him. He points out that his parents have always ignored his demands to acknowledge Tasha’s abusive

behaviour. To force his parents into action, Gerald applies the same neoliberal logics and disciplinary training Nanny taught his family. “Isn’t this what Nanny taught me?...You demand proper behaviour. And when they disobey you, you punish them. I have done what any responsible parent should do...to my parents” (*Reality Boy* 295). As an adolescent, Gerald empowers himself in an ironic twist by taking responsibility for his parents by punishing them for their neglect and demanding that they take responsibility as parents. It is only by taking the drastic step of ‘kidnapping’ himself that Gerald can force his parents to listen seriously to his demands.

Having learned from Hannah the benefits of dialogue, Gerald is ready to pursue relationships and dialogues with others. He feels a strong kinship with circus boy Joe because like Gerald, Joe also feels alienated from his unconventional family. Although Joe becomes Gerald’s best friend, Gerald initially fabricates his life story to conceal from Joe that he is the infamous Crapper. Thanks to his relationship with Hannah, Gerald grows more self-confident and towards the end of the novel, is ready to open a real dialogue with Joe to reveal his true self: ““Do you know who I am?” I ask. I don’t have control over my mouth” (*Reality Boy* 331). Gerald confesses to Joe that he is the Crapper: ““Hold on,” he says. “Is that you?” I raise my eyebrows and smirk. *I demand to be the Crapper and be proud of being the Crapper*” (*Reality Boy* 331). While Gerald has always disassociated himself from the Crapper and often wishes to violently annihilate the Crapper from himself, confessing his life story to Joe constitutes part of Gerald’s new demands to reclaim the totality of his identity. Once Gerald can embrace and verbalise who he is to Joe, Gerald returns home and opens his most significant dialogue with his father:

Dad and I talked about everything last night...He looked numb and didn’t say much, and just listened. He had a tear in his eye when he hugged me at the end. He told me he was sorry (*Reality Boy* 343)

Gerald is finally able to confess to his father Doug that his childhood and current dysfunctions were caused by the lifelong abuse he suffered from Tasha. By telling his version of family events, Gerald experiences the catharsis of self-narrativizing and confession. Gerald's confession forces Doug to acknowledge that he is guilty as a parent for misinterpreting and misremembering Tasha's abusive behaviour and for neglecting his son's wellbeing. While *Network Nanny* attempted to rehabilitate Gerald, Gerald helps himself to recover by opening dialogues with others, and these dialogues lead to actionable changes that improve his life. Doug takes seriously Gerald's demands for a secure home by moving himself and Gerald out of their house so they can separate themselves from Tasha and Gerald's mother, who is Tasha's biggest enabler. Gerald is impressed by his father's commitment to give him a better life: "We're moved in by Sunday night. Dad wasn't a pussy about it, either. He took what was his. The car. The gym equipment" (*Reality Boy* 345). They move into an expensive bachelor pad and start a new life that resembles a teenage boy's fantasy of freedom. Gerald concludes that "It's never a bad thing to have a list of demands" (*Reality Boy* 348).

#### Vow of silence: silent resistance as adolescent power in *Something Real*.

In *Something Real*, Chloe wants her own identity apart from her trademarked name Bonnie™ Baker. In her efforts to secure her chosen identity as Chloe, she begins to identify how her identity as Bonnie™ is constructed, controlled and commodified by her parents and the lifestyle experts from *Fresh Batch*. She recognises that they are all ultimately directed by Chuck, MetaReel's head producer. Observing Chuck's power, Chloe wonders: "He's not my dad, not my teacher, not someone who should have any authority over me at all. So why is he in control of my life?" (*Something Real* 346). While she accepts the legitimacy of certain authority figures, Chloe questions the appropriateness of a media representative dictating who she is. She begins resisting MetaReel and Chuck in small acts. For example, Chloe rejects wearing the Bonnie™ Lass Designs outfits that MetaReel markets for her: "I refuse to go back to being



trademarked, to only being known by a name that is a brand. I stuff the clothing...into the little trash can..." (*Something Real* 39). Chloe's refusal to change into her branded clothes resists MetaReel and Chuck's power to make her change herself into the marketable consumer persona and branded self that they have tailored for her.

Before *Fresh Batch* begins production, the entire Baker household is commodified and renovated to facilitate filming. Chloe laments that "Our house is not a home anymore, it's *the set*" (*Something Real* 21). MetaReel enjoys full rights to record the Bakers inside their house but requires special permission to film outside. Hence, Chloe decides to go running to put physical distance between herself and the 'set', MetaReel's cameras, and the pressures of commodification. Like Gerald from *Reality Boy*, Chloe leaves home to escape her Reality TV identity and find herself outside her family. The physical act of running has the unexpected effect of empowering her with a feeling of freedom that reassures her sense of self. As she runs, Chloe realises "...I just *am*...I'm the essence of her, the nontrademarked person the camera can never capture and my parents have no right to sign over...that MetaReel can never own" (*Something Real* 230). Unlike Gerald, who runs *away* from home, Chloe only runs *from* home. Once she feels recentred, she is ready to return home empowered in her renewed commitment to face MetaReel, Chuck, and her parents and fight for her identity: "...I turn back toward my house. I'm done running" (*Something Real* 230).

Chloe's newfound empowerment is soon severely tested when the media circulates rumours that she is pregnant. The scandal shatters her sense of self and despite her earlier commitment to stop running from her problems, she begins withdrawing into herself and away from others, as shown below in what Chloe calls:

Lunch conversation, a transcript:

**Tessa:** Chlo, talk to us

**Me:**

*(Something Real 282)*

**Me:** Guys...just...(sighs and throws away uneaten lunch)

**Tessa:** What can we do to help?

**Me:** Nothing. Seriously. I'll be okay.

**Mer:** Liar.

**Me:**

*(Something Real 283)*

Demetrios utilises the transcript format to represent Chloe's fragmenting identity. Chloe's internal breakdown is textually conveyed by the transcript in blanks, ellipses and clipped single word replies as the shame of the pregnancy rumours stops her from communicating with her friends. Chloe's friends are some of the only others in her life who recognise her as Chloe and not Bonnie™. Compared to Gerald, who initially only had the imaginary ANYONE, Chloe's friends offer genuine dialogue and support as they urge her to talk to them. However, after a lifetime of coerced confessions by MetaReel and the media, Chloe is understandably resistant when asked to disclose her feelings, even to friends. It is also particularly troubling that Chloe projects their conversation in transcript format. While Chloe knows she is free from MetaReel's cameras at school, the transcript format indicates how extensively the paranoia of mediation has permeated Chloe's existence, to the point where she projects a private conversation as already recorded for public broadcast and consumption. So, Chloe retreats into the safety of silence to prevent her words from being taken. Since adolescent identity is shaped in dialogue with others, Chloe's silence unfortunately closes dialogue and hampers the recovery of her self.

While the pregnancy rumours push Chloe into silence, others eagerly have their say to shape the public narrative of Chloe's adolescent identity for her. As Borland, Sawin and Tye explain, the narrativizing of family stories is a multi-voiced endeavour often fraught with conflict because individuals may emphasise, alter or neglect different family stories in crafting the family's narrative (378). Chloe's mother Beth wants to regain control of their family's narrative

in the public's eyes. She publishes a memoir to retell her daughter's attempted suicide and position herself as a mother who is blameless for Chloe's actions. When Chloe accuses her of retelling family history, Beth argues "I am trying to protect you, Bonnie™. It's important that we have the last word on the matter" (*Something Real* 120). By having the "last word", Beth hopes to close further public speculation and dialogue about her daughter. Although Chuck reassures Beth that "...you are the final word on how the world sees your family" (*Something Real* 66), Chloe recognises that "Chuck's word is law" (*Something Real* 67). As head producer, Chuck possesses more power than Chloe's parents to shape public opinions about her. However, he allows the pregnancy scandal as it benefits him by reducing Chloe's adolescent power.

Chloe's resistance to MetaReel was growing problematic for Chuck because she was openly uncooperative on camera and was actively drawing public attention to her misery on *Fresh Batch*. The scandal helps Chuck diminish the public's sympathy for Chloe as it reignites and reinforces the public's belief that she is an out-of-control and unstable teenager, a reputation Chloe gained and never truly lost since her attempted suicide was broadcasted. Chloe's sister Lexie™ rises to her defence and tries to salvage Chloe's spiralling reputation. Like their mother, Lexie™ attempts to control the public's opinion of Chloe, so she visits online forums to dispel the rumours and set their family's narrative straight for the public by declaring definitively that her sister is not pregnant. Demetrios textually represents these online forums to depict how such formats sustain a polyphony of voices and opinions, many of which are unfavourable towards the Bakers. Like Martha discovers in *Cell 7*, if the adolescent truly wishes to engage in genuine dialogues with the public, Lexie™ must be prepared to encounter hostile others and voices. However, unlike Martha, who shows her adolescent power by managing the antagonistic crowd with maturity, Lexie devolves to name-calling Internet trolls, as evidenced below:

Lexie™ Baker @reallexie™baker  
Don't believe everything you read, people.  
#BonnieBakerIsn'tPregnant!!

(*Something Real* 284)

Phat Boy @phatboy  
I'd do her

Lexie™ Baker @reallexie™baker  
You're a disgusting human being. She's a 17 year old girl.  
Get a life, creep! #BonnieBakerIsn'tPregnant!!

Phat Boy @phatboy  
I'd do you too

(*Something Real* 284)

Lexie™'s arguments with others online hinders her attempts at dialogue and side-tracks her from her mission of salvaging Chloe's public reputation. Unfortunately, Lexie™ also unintentionally perpetuates MetaReel's power over Chloe. For even as she defends Chloe on the online forums, Lexie™ refers to her sister by her trademarked name Bonnie™. Unwittingly, Lexie™ discursively perpetuates her sister's commercialised persona while denying her chosen identity as Chloe. Seeing others speaking about her and for her, Chloe again resolves to act. She gathers her friends and brother Benton™ in the school gym to strategize ideas to resist MetaReel and reclaim her identity. "We sit there, thinking and breathing resistance. The gym becomes so silent, it's loud. *Loud*" (*Something Real* 332). Although the pregnancy scandal may have caused her to go silent in ways detrimental to her identity, Chloe suddenly realises that when applied in specific contexts, silence can give her power to be heard. As Foucault says, "[t]here is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (*History of Sexuality* 27). Chloe proposes using silence as her strategy to resist MetaReel: "What if we took a vow of silence?" I ask" (*Something Real* 332).

Chloe proposes that she and Benton™ take their vow of silence at the Ultimate Reality™ Expo which MetaReel is hosting so the press and public can interview the Bakers. The Expo is the most high-profile opportunity for them to stage their resistance against MetaReel. The siblings would not be the first to discover and use the power of silence to resist light entertainment formats like Reality TV. Laura Grindstaff has found that when guests on talk shows are unhappy with the expectations of the producers or hosts, they sometimes resort to silence as a tactic to express their disapproval and resistance (193). Chloe and Benton™'s refusal to speak at the Expo openly subverts the confession impulse and disrupts dialogue with the public. Before they go on-stage at the Expo, the siblings tape one another's mouths, and Benton™ asks Chloe: "Any last words?" I smile. "*Dismiss whatever insults your soul.*"...And then I feel the tape against my lips" (*Something Real* 335). While Chuck and Beth want to have the last word on how the public sees her, Chloe's vow of silence is a public statement that lets her have the last word about who she is and dismiss who she is not.

Although the siblings refrain from speaking at the Expo, they have a message for the public. When they go on-stage with their duct-taped mouths, they pass the Expo host a letter to read aloud:

To Whom It May Concern:

We, Bonnie™ and Benton™ Baker, are taking a vow of silence as an act of peaceful resistance against the continued presence of MetaReel in our home and lives...

...Being on *Baker's Dozen* was never something we had a choice in...we strongly object to our lives being used for entertainment purposes. Thank you.

Bonnie™ and Benton™ Baker

(*Something Real* 339)

Chloe is aware of the powerful imagery her duct taped mouth has: "...it's a scary image, violent almost. It makes you think of kidnappers" (*Something Real* 337). Like Gerald and Hannah, Chloe and Benton™ have essentially 'kidnapped' themselves and they declare their

demands that their parents must stop MetaReel from filming their lives. Though the siblings remain silent, their letter empowers their adolescent voices because it is their controlled confession to the public and family that they are miserable with their mediated lives. Their vow of silence and accompanying letter is their first public and formal articulation of their grievances against MetaReel, and it has immediate disruptive effects for MetaReel. Chloe gleefully realises that “We are a PR disaster” (*Something Real* 338). Although Chuck is furious with them, as long as they are on-stage and in front of the crowd and cameras, he is powerless to stop them because “It wouldn’t be good for our illusion of reality if the producer started stage-managing us” (*Something Real* 338). Though she normally despises the cameras, Chloe eagerly exploits the visibility they confer to her resistance: “Instead of shying away, I stare right at the lenses, daring them to capture me” (*Something Real* 337).

#### Chapter conclusion.

In this chapter, I explored how the adolescent protagonists in the focus YA novels express their empowerment and resistance against and within Reality TV. These adolescents learn to question and identify who has power over them, understand how power is used, and recognise that they too possess power which they can tap into and use in various ways. These adolescents use Reality TV itself as a public platform to spectacularise their resistance. Many use the confession as a strategy for resistance to articulate, expose and disrupt Reality TV’s neoliberal power to govern participants. These adolescents learn to empower their voices and open dialogues with others to change their world or recover and reclaim their identities from Reality TV.

Yet as Chloe exemplifies in *Something Real*, adolescent empowerment and resistance to Reality TV in these novels are ultimately still grounded in Reality TV’s conventions, neoliberal discourses and ideologies. In her letter to the public, Chloe uses her despised trademark name

Bonnie™. Even as she articulates her resistance, she continues referring to herself using MetaReel's discourses, thereby perpetuating MetaReel's power over her. In the Conclusion chapter, I evaluate the final chapters and final pages of these YA novels to consider how successful the young protagonists are at resisting Reality TV, when their empowerment and resistance draws upon and extends Reality TV's neoliberal power, discourses and ideologies.

## Conclusion.

As the global popularity and presence of Reality TV expands unabated, fictional Reality TV programmes are being imagined and represented in novels with increasing regularity. The YA novels analysed in this thesis are representatives of this small but significant and undeniably growing niche in twenty-first century literature. In their representations of Reality TV, these YA novels provide important and interesting responses to the contemporary challenges young people experience growing up in highly mediated and neoliberal societies. The adolescent protagonists in these novels must navigate Reality TV's power to discursively and ideologically govern their identities, conduct and daily lives. Yet despite the sharp and topical commentary offered by this subset of literature that represents Reality TV, it has remained surprisingly under-examined in Literary Studies. The *Hunger Games* trilogy's commercial and popular success initially courted scholarly interest that should have set the stage for more in-depth research from Literary Studies. But while the number of Reality TV themed novels has risen steadily, they have received little to no academic attention, perhaps due to a lack of awareness of the novels themselves. While Jeanne Ryan's *Nerve* was adapted into a film of the same name in 2016, the other focus novels are not especially well known.

As discussed in the Introduction chapter, when Literary Studies scholars have tackled novels that depict Reality TV, their discussions neglect to consider Reality TV's *televisual* qualities and conventions. These scholars have largely underutilised existing Media Studies scholarship that would deepen their analysis. Furthermore, critical discussions of such novels have also been deficient in acknowledging that Reality TV is a *neoliberal* genre that is simultaneously informed by and extends neoliberalism. This thesis addresses these gaps in scholarship in the following ways. On the broadest level, this thesis showcases the intellectual value of analysing novels that represent Reality TV. By compiling a sample of twenty-first century YA novels that thematically and textually represent Reality TV, this thesis aims to spark and direct



academic interest towards this exciting subset of Literature. More importantly, this thesis breaks ground by bringing a sustained interdisciplinary application of Media Studies theories to YA novels. By applying theoretical concepts from Media Studies to analyse Reality TV in YA novels, this thesis demonstrates that not only are dialogues between two usually disparate disciplines possible, but that such dialogues lead to interesting interdisciplinary exchanges that enrich literary analysis with new depths and critical perspectives.

Throughout this thesis, I explored how the focus novels represent adolescent identity as formed in relation to Reality TV. I discussed how these novels represent Reality TV's power to discursively and ideologically construct, impose and govern neoliberal identities for adolescents. To demonstrate that Reality TV in YA novels operate as neoliberal apparatuses, I pursued several interconnected lines of inquiry and applied an interdisciplinary analytical framework. I established that like 'real world' Reality TV, the televisual conventions and techniques of fictional Reality TV are aligned with and aggressively promote neoliberal rationalities like privatisation, self-responsibility and self-enterprise. Among the televisual conventions and techniques that I discussed at length were the host, the expert, and the ever-present confession. I examined how the Reality TV programmes in the novels incorporate and utilise hosts, experts and confessions to extend neoliberalism by interpellating and training adolescent participants with neoliberal discourses and identities. Significantly, the novels each prominently represent major Reality TV subgenres, which I identified as reality-crime, the game-doc and the family-doc. I closely examined the unique ways each subgenre governs, disciplines, rewards and penalizes participants to embrace neoliberal rationalities and display subgenre-specific neoliberal identities. Finally, I considered how the novels imagine possibilities for adolescents to resist Reality TV.

It would be easy to end this thesis by concluding that the adolescent protagonists in the novels are ultimately triumphant against the Reality TV programmes they struggled so hard to

overcome. On the surface, the novels provide the uplifting impression that these adolescents emerge victorious in their various missions to defeat Reality TV. Martha's actions cause *Death is Justice* to be cancelled. Others like Vee free themselves by escaping the physical arenas of Reality TV. However, closer inspection of the narrative endings of these novels reveals that they incorporate elements of thematic, textual and ideological ambiguity that actually defy and deny providing adolescents with clear-cut empowerment and resistance against Reality TV. In this Conclusion chapter, I evaluate the narrative endings of each novel by examining the final chapter, pages and paragraphs. I consider the extent that these endings problematise the success of adolescent empowerment and resistance. The ambiguous ways these YA novels conclude their narratives indicate that adolescent empowerment and resistance can never be taken for granted as finished endeavours. Furthermore, the endings of these novels demand an uncomfortable acknowledgement that these adolescents may actually be reifying Reality TV's neoliberal ideologies precisely through expressing their empowerment and resistance.

That the focus novels belong to the YA genre may explain their postmodern inclination towards ambiguous narrative closures that complicate certainty about adolescent empowerment and resistance. YA fiction is a genre positioned between conflicting ideologies and paradoxical demands. On one hand, many conventional YA narratives seemingly endorse humanistic perceptions of subjectivity. Such narratives place importance on individual agency, conceived as "the capacity to act independently of social restraint" (McCallum 7). The development of adolescent subjectivity is often imagined as an "ultimately empowering process" in which individual agency is both possible and "highly desirable" (Daley-Carey 467; 473). The adolescent protagonist's personal power and agency are celebrated through their ability to navigate the challenges of overcoming institutional power. However, as McCallum rightly points out, uncritical representations of adolescent characters who grow so thoroughly empowered in their freedom to make choices in life heedless of social powers and constraints

is problematic; this is because such empowerment may be unrealistic or unattainable for many young readers (257). Hence, YA fiction has progressively gravitated towards more postmodern representations of the self as imbricated with and influenced by institutional power and ideologies. Furthermore, many YA narratives like the focus novels now “display a self-conscious scepticism towards ideological and interpretive certainty” (Daley-Carey 468).

Hence, contemporary YA fiction is wary of rosy narratives promising that adolescent protagonists will emerge wholly triumphant against social forces and authorities in the end. Instead, the genre increasingly takes the more realistic if pessimistic postmodern perspective that institutions have greater power than individuals (Trites 3). Trites argues that YA fiction represents “postmodern tension between individuals and institutions”, and this tension arises from institutions using discourses to govern individuals (52-53). Since discourses are used by institutions to extend dominant ideologies, and as identity is formed in relation to others like institutions, adolescents therefore cannot completely avoid being defined by the discourses and ideologies of the institutions within their societies. Thus, the genre demonstrates that the adolescent “is both comprised by institutional forces and compromised by them” (Trites 52). Even when adolescents rebel, the act of articulating their resistance must draw upon discourses. In so doing, adolescents ultimately if unintentionally perpetuate institutional power, ideologies and discourses. Hence, YA novels depict maturity as predicated upon adolescents learning to accept or compromise with rather than reject outright the realities of institutional power (Trites 20). The genre demonstrates a rather conservative ideological outlook that while adolescents may discover and embrace their power, they must necessarily also co-exist with the institutions that surround and define them.

The adolescent protagonists in the focus novels each appear to achieve varying degrees of success in their self-empowerment and resistance against Reality TV. However, the ambiguous endings of these novels signal that whatever empowerment these adolescents experience or

resistance they express are problematic for several reasons. First, precisely because they use Reality TV's televisual conventions to disrupt Reality TV's power, these adolescents cannot avoid engaging with the neoliberal ideologies and discourses embedded into Reality TV. Second, in their very desire to resist, these adolescents unwittingly embrace and validate Reality TV's neoliberal expectations. Ironically, to become capable of resisting the neoliberal identities that Reality TV constructs for them, adolescents must empower themselves into self-responsible, self-reliant and agentic neoliberal subjects. Third, even when these adolescents 'dismantle' Reality TV and exit from its arenas, they find that they cannot truly escape from neoliberalism, for even after returning to the 'real world', adolescents continue to be surrounded by the neoliberal ideologies permeating their societies. I examine the endings of the focus novels in the following order: starting with *The Last One*, the novel with the least ambiguous ending and clearest expression of resistance from its protagonist, to *Something Real*, the novel that most seriously undermines its protagonist's empowerment and resistance.

The last paragraph of *The Last One* ends the narrative as follows:

She does not feel blessed. It's over. It's just beginning. She will endure. The cameraman edges closer and the anchor tilts her microphone toward the woman's face. But the woman has no confession and these obstructions, these devices sucking in her breath, her image, these are all things that are no longer real. Her hard green gaze slides past the lens to the man behind it. 'Get the camera out of my face,' she says. 'Now.'

(*The Last One* 340)

Shortly after Mae's painful acceptance that *In the Dark* is over, she joins other pandemic survivors at a refugee camp. In the final chapter, a reporter visits the camp to interview survivors. Most survivors share that they feel blessed and safe now that their ordeal is over. However, when the reporter attempts to interview Mae, she forcefully rejects the reporter, the cameras, and their request that she confess her feelings to them. After her prolonged traumatic experiences with mediation, Mae is determined to protect her identity from further mediation.

Although Mae's outright refusal to engage with the cameras represents the clearest and 'cleanest' example of resistance in the focus novels, the final paragraph implies some troubling ambiguity. Mae might have corrected her doubled/halved vision with contact lenses, and rectified her faulty perception with context by acknowledging the game-doc's end, but she unconsciously continues to abide by the game-doc's rules and neoliberal rationalities. As before, Mae sees both more and less than what is. In postmodern fashion, she sees the future as uncertain; she believes their struggle is "over" yet "just beginning". So, like a good and strategic player, Mae resolves that she "will endure" by continuing to play this perpetual game of survival in a precarious pandemic world.

So far, my analysis of the *Cell 7* trilogy has focused entirely on the first two novels, *Cell 7* and *Day 7*. It is therefore appropriate to conclude my examination of the trilogy by discussing the third novel, *Final 7* (2018). *Final 7* ends with a two-chapter coda. The first chapter is narrated by Martha in first-person and she summarises the progress made since she successfully stopped *Death is Justice* and challenged the corrupt justice system. The programme has been cancelled and a better justice system has been promised to replace it. The Prime Minister has also been replaced; after Martha exposed his unethical involvement with *Death is Justice*, the PM was imprisoned and succeeded by Martha's ally Sofia. Martha has thus achieved her goal of waking the public from its apathy. After being the nation's most condemned individual, Martha's reputation has been restored and she is now a public figure for change. To celebrate their victories, Martha and her allies gather for a party in the coda's first chapter. In the coda's second chapter, Sofia speaks as the new PM on television, and reveals that she is spearheading reforms for a fairer justice system through a new reality-crime series called *The Daily Crime*.

While *The Daily Crime* does not execute criminals like *Death is Justice*, it extends to terrifying levels the state's powers to govern. *The Daily Crime* allows viewers to vote daily for crimes they want investigated, thus allowing citizens greater involvement in policing.

Insidiously, the programme starts a national DNA database to investigate crimes, thus subjecting the population to further intrusive surveillance. After all Martha's efforts to inspire the public to challenge *Death is Justice*, no one questions if *The Daily Crime* is an appropriate replacement. This disappointing development was foreshadowed in a conversation Martha had with Isaac's mother Patty in *Day 7*. Patty disagreed with Martha's mission to make people question the justice system, and she told Martha: "No. You need to let the people *believe* they are listened to and think they have some degree of power. You need to let them *believe* they live in a democracy. But it's a fallacy..." (*Day 7* 127). As pessimistic as Patty's outlook seemed in *Day 7*, it appears to be realised in *Final 7*. By allowing the public to vote for the crimes they want investigated, *The Daily Crime* proves Patty's insights that people want the comforting belief, however false, that they have some degree of power.

Martha's personal perceptions of *The Daily Crime* can be gleaned from the coda's first chapter, which significantly is also the final chapter that Martha narrates.

As Gus puts the TV on for something in the background – a new programme called *The Daily Crime* – the rest of us pull pizzas out of boxes...  
I look around, taking it all in.  
Finally I have my family, albeit a strange one, around me.  
And finally I feel at home.  
(*Final 7* 440-441)

Martha has formed a loyal community of friends who prove the importance of mutuality, dialogue and support from others to empower the adolescent's dreams for social change. On the surface, Martha's story ends happily with a sense of restoration and communal wellbeing as she is surrounded at home by abundant food and family. However, their success at defeating *Death is Justice* and overthrowing the corrupt justice system appear at risk of being undermined by *The Daily Crime*, which arises immediately and with no opposition from the public nor from Martha. As Foucault observes, the overthrowing of power "...is not acquired once and for all by a new control of the apparatuses nor by a new functioning or a destruction of the

institutions...” (*Discipline & Punish* 27). While Martha was certainly successful in defeating the corrupt justice system represented by *Death is Justice*, she cannot stop there. Any mission to campaign for reforms and for equitable judicial institutions require continuous effort and long-term commitment. Yet *Final 7* concludes by indicating that everything Martha and her friends achieved may soon be undone. The ending also implies that the once determined adolescent champion for justice is largely unconcerned about *The Daily Crime*, as it is “something in the background” for her.

The ending of *Nerve* shares similarities with *Final 7*. Just as Martha escapes from *Death is Justice*, Vee also successfully resists *NERVE* by escaping the arena during the Final Round. The last chapter of *Nerve* opens one month after Vee’s resistance stops the Final Round, and the chapter covers Vee’s continued efforts to fight *NERVE*. She now uses the fame she gained as a Player to build a community of followers, and is encouraging them to join her mission to officially cancel the game for good. As mentioned in chapter four, Vee “dares” her followers to challenge *NERVE*. In doing so, Vee actively integrates the game-doc’s discourses in her dialogue with her followers. She also punishes Watchers who continue to stalk her by dispensing a “consequence” – *NERVE*’s term for a penalty given to disruptive Players. Vee films Watchers who follow her and posts their bad behaviour online, essentially making herself a Watcher who punishes other Watchers for their invasive and disruptive behaviour. By taking and making the game-doc’s discourses and practices a part of her resistance, Vee empowers herself and diminishes *NERVE*’s power over her. Unfortunately, Vee’s sense of personal empowerment is severely destabilised when she receives the following messages:

I find a little silver envelope...Inside is a note that causes me to kneel slowly onto the cold floor.

***I’ll never get tired of watching you, and can’t wait to see you play again.***

(*Nerve* 293)

...I'm startled by a familiar sound. It's my phone, summoning me. But not with my generic, chiming ring tone. Instead it calls with the chanting of a spoiled child. (*Nerve* 294)

Although Vee has physically left the arena, the novel's ending clearly demonstrates that she has not escaped the game-doc's power to govern her. The letter and phone call from *NERVE* interpellate and summon Vee back as a Player. Despite her newfound empowerment, Vee is literally brought to her knees not only by *NERVE*'s call but also by the realisation that her efforts to fight *NERVE* have failed to truly free her. As disheartening as this realisation is, what is more disturbing is the moral ambiguity Vee demonstrates in the last chapter. Prior to being called back, Vee nurtures a secret wish: "As much as I want to shut down *NERVE*, a tiny part of me hopes they'll play the next round...if only to shift the focus to another set of players" (*Nerve* 290). Despite her campaign to stop *NERVE*, Vee realises that it would directly benefit her if she stopped resisting and allowed the game-doc to continue because *NERVE* and the Watchers would then have new Players to fixated upon. Vee's pragmatic if hypocritical wish proves Trites's point that youths in YA novels must realise that they cannot transcend institutional power, and instead learn to co-exist with institutions to survive (20).

On the surface, *Surviving Antarctica* seemingly ends with happiness and hope for all the adolescent protagonists. Steve is celebrated as a hero and honoured by the President herself because his courage as the Voice was instrumental in helping the *Historical Survivor* contestants survive. The Secretary meanwhile is under investigation for abusing the contestants on *Historical Survivor*. Her competition is officially cancelled and a rescue team is sent to bring the contestants back safely. While Robert and Grace decide to stay in Antarctica to finish their trek, Andrew, Polly and Billy are helicoptered home to their families and to cheering fans. Steve fulfils his dream of meeting the contestants when the President approves his request to greet them upon their arrival. The novel ends with the heart-warming scene of Andrew, Polly and Billy rushing to embrace Steve. However, true to the postmodern tradition of YA fiction,



*Surviving Antarctica* plants seeds of ideological ambiguity that deny the interpretive certainty of neat closures. When Steve remarks to the President that Robert and Grace will be the first youths in history to trek Antarctica by themselves, she responds: ““Yes,” the President said with a heavy sigh. “The world needs brave deeds now more than ever”” (*Surviving Antarctica* 424).

The President’s comment that Robert and Grace’s brave deeds are the inspiration their world needs now proves Coats observation that “...most young adult literature closes with a message of possibility and resilience, and this narrative is shored up by politicians who talk incessantly about hope, peace, and change” (326). Yet the President’s heavy sigh signals the ideological ambiguity of Robert and Grace’s decision to keep playing. This ambiguity can be traced to the young contestants’ reaction to being rescued four chapters earlier. When the rescue team announces that *Historical Survivor* is over and the contestants will be brought home, Billy responds: ““What if we don’t want to be rescued?” Billy surprised himself by saying. He wanted to go home...but in a way he was sorry to see an adult. He had gotten used to kids making the decisions” (*Surviving Antarctica* 395-396). Significantly, the rescuers represent the ultimate adult authority that cannot be resisted, as they were sent to Antarctica to extract the contestants on “Orders of the President” (*Surviving Antarctica* 396). The rescuers represent childhood’s end for the contestants as they must stop playing, and also the end of their newfound adult independence and freedom that they have experienced through play.

Instead of being thrilled, the contestants view the competition’s cancellation and their rescue as unwanted adult interference. Throughout the competition, the contestants were forced to survive without adult assistance. Hence, they have naturally developed strong neoliberal mentalities and now cherish their agency, self-reliance and self-responsibility. As Robert has always been the most demonstrably neoliberal contestant, he refuses to lose his autonomy by abandoning the competition, so he elects to finish their expedition with Grace. “If he left now,

he'd be turning away from a challenge" (*Surviving Antarctica* 402). That the President sighs heavily at Robert and Grace's commitment to stay in Antarctica signals the ideological and moral ambiguity of their decision. While choosing to keep playing allows them to exercise their adolescent empowerment and resist the President's orders to return, is their choice entirely commendable? Is their determination to complete the game truly their own, or a demonstration of the neoliberal rationalities that they learned while playing, and which now drives them to finish playing? Are they not thereby perpetuating *Historical Survivor's* power to govern them as neoliberal players? As a postmodern YA novel, *Surviving Antarctica* provides no interpretive certainty, and despite the novel's seemingly optimistic ending, Robert and Grace's survival remain unknown.

The ambiguous narrative closure of *Reality Boy* also undercuts the full possibility for optimistic and uncomplicated adolescent empowerment for Gerald. *Reality Boy* ends as below:

I'll just be another human on a planet full of humans, but better equipped because I have demands.  
 For my family.  
 For my life.  
 For the world.  
 For myself.  
*What acceptable behay-vyah.*  
*What acceptable behay-vyah.*  
 (*Reality Boy* 353)

By the novel's end, Gerald is decisively empowering himself in several ways. Gerald has learned the importance and power of vocalising his demands. As Gerald resolves that "*I demand to stop being such a \$%#\* pushover*" (*Reality Boy* 333), he works to improve his future by demanding more from his family and from himself. He is also recovering from his past traumas by making peace with his identity as the Crapper and by moving forward from the shame that *Network Nanny* inflicted upon him. Thus, Gerald now appears on his way to becoming the rehabilitated self that Nanny promised but failed to turn him into. Yet that the novel ends with Nanny's famous refrain "*What acceptable behay-vyah*" demonstrates that

Nanny continues to influence how Gerald governs himself. Although Gerald mockingly mimics Nanny's fake accent to undercut her power, it remains undeniable that he still lives by her words a decade on. In fact, all of Gerald's efforts to improve and rehabilitate himself with "acceptable behay-vyah" actually validate the neoliberal discourses and ideologies Nanny espoused. He is now a thoroughly neoliberal subject whose adolescent empowerment and rehabilitation are built upon practising the same neoliberal ideologies and training that he strenuously resisted on *Network Nanny*.

The final chapter of *Something Real* is full of ambiguity and contradictions as Chloe feels mixed emotions that confuse her certainty about her recent choices and future path. That the final chapter opens on Chloe's graduation day is symbolically significant as it marks several important milestones in her life. First, Chloe graduates from being Bonnie™. She has officially changed her name from the commercialised personae that MetaReel gave her to the name she chose for herself: "...MetaReel can have Bonnie™ and her trademark," I say. "I shall be forthwith known as Chloe Elizabeth Baker..." (*Something Real* 395). However, when her brother Benton™ asks if she feels different, Chloe responds: "Nope" (*Something Real* 395). While Chloe always believed that fulfilling her long-time dream of shedding her detested trademark name and publicly embracing her cherished identity as Chloe would feel liberating, she now replies in the negative. Chloe also graduates from her family and from *Fresh Batch*. She makes her emancipation official when she announces to her parents that she is leaving *Fresh Batch* permanently and follows through by moving out from the Baker home. As Trites remarks, "YA novels serve both to reflect and to perpetuate the cultural mandate that teenagers rebel against their parents" (69).

Having demanded independence from her family, Chloe must now live with the consequences of her choices. Cut off from her family and family fortune, she must learn to support herself financially and emotionally. What she did not anticipate was to feel the toll of this separation

so soon: “I’m finally free of *Baker’s Dozen*. So why do I feel as bad as ever?” (*Something Real* 380). Chloe feels the loss of her family most keenly on her graduation day. Outraged that her daughter abandoned *Fresh Batch*, Beth prevents the entire family from attending Chloe’s graduation. “The weight of their absence is heavy and strangely final” (*Something Real* 402). As a YA novel, *Something Real* does not end with heart-warming family restoration and refuses to sugar-coat the painful fallout of Chloe’s decision to strike out on her own. However, Chloe is not alone – like many of the adolescent protagonists in the focus novels, Chloe has developed a community of close friends and supporters who actively help her in her mission to fight MetaReel and free herself from MetaReel’s power and ownership. She is graduating happily alongside her friends, teachers, boyfriend Patrick, and brother Benton™, all of whom have been instrumental in encouraging her empowerment and resistance.

Upon receiving her high-school diploma, Chloe experiences the following emotions and realisations:

“Somehow, the pain and the rage and confusion of the past eighteen years dissolves until all that is left is this one perfect moment; unscripted, unedited, it’s ours and ours alone.

It won’t last forever. There are years of frustration ahead of us – a lawsuit, and who knows what else...I know one thing for certain: MetaReel doesn’t stand a chance against us”

(*Something Real* 403)

While Chloe enjoys her newfound freedoms on graduation day, she demonstrates maturity in her cogent acceptance that hers is not a fairy tale ending of bliss if she commits to fighting a powerful media corporation. Chloe understands that taking MetaReel to court for a lifetime of exploitation will entail enormous challenges and hardships, especially as she is a young adult now without her family’s support or finances. Nevertheless, before she begins in earnest to battle MetaReel, she intends to travel first. As Chloe is determined to celebrate the start of her new life, she and her boyfriend Patrick symbolically time their road trip so that they ride into the sunrise to mark the dawn of their entrance into adulthood. Yet *Something Real* ends

ambiguously with these problematic parting words from Chloe: “So begins season one, episode one of the rest of my life” (*Something Real* 404). Only hours earlier she described her graduation as perfect because it was unscripted and unedited. How free can Chloe be when she continues using media terminology to frame her new life as if it were another television series? Chloe thus indicates the extent that MetaReel still governs and owns her discursively and ideologically.

The true extent of MetaReel’s power over Chloe’s adolescent voice and identity is telegraphed by a section of the novel that occurs both before and beyond the narrative proper. On an unnumbered page preceding the first chapter, one finds this disclaimer:

**Disclaimer**

The views expressed in this memoir do not necessarily reflect those of the MetaReel Entertainment Corporation, *Baker’s Dozen*...or the Baker-Miller family. Bonnie™ Baker is a registered trademark. Any misuse is a violation of applicable laws.

Demetrios uses the disclaimer rather sophisticatedly as a narrative strategy that operates on multiple textual and ideological levels to shape how the novel is to be read. Superficially, the disclaimer appears to be a paratext. Paratexts are accompanying elements of a novel that are not part of the narrative proper but which frame it and convey information (Fludernik 23). Notably, this particular disclaimer is actually an *extraliterary genre* of a disclaimer disguised as an ‘in-text’ paratext. On the surface, the disclaimer informs readers that the novel is Chloe’s memoir. Chloe has ostensibly written this memoir to share, in a confessional tell-all, her version of life on *Baker’s Dozen* and *Fresh Batch*. The memoir is presumably her attempt to challenge the dominant public narrative that MetaReel has constructed of her as a rebellious ‘screwed-up’ teenager who hurts her family. Writing a memoir also allows her to discursively distance herself from Bonnie™ and assert her chosen identity as Chloe. That *Something Real* is narrated in first-person narration by Chloe already aligns readers with her self-identification as Chloe. On a textual level, the disclaimer seemingly functions to highlight the dominance of Chloe’s

first-person narration, adolescent voice and viewpoints throughout the memoir, thereby validating her antagonism towards MetaReel.

Yet the disclaimer has a darker purpose. The way the disclaimer is worded implies that it was written by MetaReel's representatives and not by Chloe herself because it frames MetaReel's legal and corporate interests above her own. The disclaimer reminds readers that Bonnie™ remains "a registered trademark" and that the views expressed in this memoir are not necessarily in accordance with MetaReel's official media narrative of Bonnie™'s life. Borland, Sawin and Tye say that when considering the public narrativizing of stories involving family dysfunction, one must ask questions like: "Who has or claims the right to tell which stories?" and "[a]mong whom are these rights contested, and how?" (388). The disclaimer is an excellent example of a postmodern twist of ambiguity that forces readers to confront such questions. On a textual level, the disclaimer sharply undermines the dominance and authority of Chloe's textual voice in the coming narrative. The lack of a page number signals that the disclaimer, as MetaReel's official textual voice, not only precedes but exists beyond the narrative, thereby surpassing and suppressing Chloe's voice, viewpoints and identity. Seeing that MetaReel's corporate power can still discursively intrude into the novel and the narrative, how much of Chloe's life story is still hers?

Mae will endure. Martha celebrates even as her victory might be undone. Vee secretly hopes *NERVE* will prevail. Robert and Grace choose to continue competing. Gerald demands *acceptable behay-vyah* from himself. Chloe begins her life anew as season one, episode one. Although these protagonists all fight valiantly against Reality TV, each of the focus novels end with adolescents conforming or confirming to an extent the neoliberal ideologies, discourses and identities endorsed by Reality TV. They do so, ironically, through their very attempts to empower themselves, reclaim their identities, and resist Reality TV. Their eventual acceptance of neoliberal mentalities may seem peculiar but this can be explained by looking at the

dominant ideologies supported by YA fiction. Trites argues that although YA fiction appears dedicated to empowering adolescents, the genre often delegitimises adolescence itself through the ideological message that adolescents must grow up and leave behind their immaturity (83). YA fiction positions adolescent maturity as predicated upon accepting several paradoxical truths (Trites 83). These include recognising that while institutions are indeed more powerful than individuals, power is everywhere and can be drawn upon by adolescents. My thesis demonstrates that because YA novels typically endorse social acceptance rather than pure resistance, adolescents ultimately learn that they cannot transcend their society's neoliberal ideologies and discourses. Hence, adolescents must learn to balance, negotiate, and even compromise their own power alongside institutional power.

The focus novels demonstrate that the tasks of empowering oneself and reclaiming one's identity from Reality TV and from other institutional powers is by nature and necessity an ongoing project that requires continual commitment. Similarly, I urge for research on YA novels that depict Reality TV to continue beyond this thesis. One of the new dimensions I propose is a Bakhtinian approach. While Bakhtin's concepts like dialogism and polyphony have been amply applied to novels, and some studies have discussed Bakhtin in relation to television texts, I believe that applying Bakhtin's concepts to examining Reality TV in novels has significant potential. Due to constraints, I set aside my original plans to integrate Bakhtin's concepts into my analytical framework. In upcoming projects, I intend to analyse how narrative strategies like extraliterary genres and multi-focalisation techniques, which are innately dialogic and polyphonic, are uniquely capable of creatively capturing and conveying in novelistic discourses Reality TV's dialogic and polyphonic qualities.

Furthermore, my research can be applied by scholars interested in analysing novelistic depictions of other forms of media besides Reality TV. For while most people will likely never participate on Reality TV, the vast majority of people, especially youths, *do* participate on

social media. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok allow a polyphony of voices to interact; furthermore, these sites afford adolescents opportunities to construct and play with various identities and personas. As social media platforms are owned by powerful corporations, they are flushed with the discourses and ideologies of capitalism and neoliberalism. Many YA novels raise concerns that young people who participate on social media inevitably find themselves participating in the global marketplace and consumer culture, and their adolescent identities are framed by corporate power. Hence, future research can employ the analytical framework I have provided in this thesis to examine how YA novels depict the neoliberal influence of social media on the development of adolescent identity and power. In conclusion, just as the adolescent protagonists in the focus novels open dialogues with others, I hope that my thesis similarly inspires others to open interdisciplinary dialogues to discuss this growing and topical branch of literature.



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