A VEIL OF DEVIANCE: AN EXAMINATION OF GENDER PERFORMANCE AND MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN REALITY TELEVISION

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Korin Raquel Vallejo

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by

Korin Raquel Vallejo

Approved by:

______________________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Todd Migliaccio

______________________________, Second Reader
Dr. Kevin Wehr

______________________________
Date
Student: Korin Raquel Vallejo

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_______________________________, Graduate Coordinator

Dr. Amy Lui

Department of Sociology

Date
Abstract

of

A VEIL OF DEVIANCE: AN EXAMINATION OF GENDER PERFORMANCE AND MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN REALITY TELEVISION

by

Korin Raquel Vallejo

Following Norman K. Denzin’s theory on media message transmittance and audience engagement this study sought to examine the gendered messages being communicated through the reality television program “The Bad Girls Club”. Season four of the show was transcribed in an ethnographic approach; with efforts to fully engulf in the culture and sub-society of “The Bad Girls Club” and with the self-proclaimed deviant women on the program through a social constructionist lens. To grasp media engagement, two public viewings were held in which the researcher played participant observer in order to gage the audiences’ interaction, receipt, and implantation of gendered messages.

This study uncovered many traditional feminine performances; often times masked behind masculine displays as well as the dependency of masculine performances on feminine ones; whether in others or within individuals themselves. The public viewings were able to show audience engagement all the way to an implementation stage
within a one hour showing. Further researcher in gendered message transmission and media engagement by audiences is called for in the lesser studied area of non-competitive, non-celebrity reality television.

______________________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Todd Migliaccio

______________________________
Date
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Chapter 1: Introduction

A study recently conducted by the Nielsen Research Foundation on media consumption found the average American spends up to twenty percent of their day watching television, which equates to a little less than 60 hours a week. This same report estimates that in 2012 over 56% of American households will own three or more televisions; with 97% of households owning at least one television. This is a large jump from the less than 60% of households that owned only 1 television in 1975 (Nielsen Research Group 2010-2011 Television Audience Report). Essentially, television viewing has become a daily and consistent activity in people’s lives and the increase in the amount of televisions in the household only seems to be aiding in the rise of television consumption. With almost one fourth of a person’s day being filled with television media it is vital to examine what is being watched in order to grasp the messages and effects that may be emitted from this source and thus the effects of this media type. The study of what is being communicated through television is vital because “television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (mostly the form of entertainment) of otherwise heterogeneous populations” (Gerbner 1998:177).

The current variety of television shows and programming choices are vast and continue to expand daily. There are channels dedicated specifically to sports, to do-it-yourself projects, to history, to animals and many more and varying topics, themes, and varieties. As with most aspects of society there are trends and waves of television
programs that become popular and are strongly viewed. For example, media trends showed in 2006-2007 14% of the television viewing was featured films, but by 2009-2010 featured films percentage had fallen to less than 6% of all television consumption (Nielsen Research Group). An increasingly popular television program type in America is reality television (which was not studied as a category in the Nielsen report). Reality television has been described as “popular factual programming” and has had a more massive marketing push by producers and a more enthusiastic response from audiences and viewers than any other television program type in history (Holmes and Jermyn 2004:1). This popularity and upsurge of reality television may be partly due to the increase in televisions in the household and/or the amounts of television consumption in general, but it is still important to study reality television, independently from other programming types, as a major media source for American television viewers due to its increasing popularity.

Reality television is supposed to present the “real” lives and actions of those on the screen but often it is more of a “fusion of popular elements of television entertainment” (Brancato 2007). Much research has been conducted to examine the trends and themes of television programs; findings related to reality television specifically include an increase in social networking use for viewers (Stefanone, Lackaff, Rosen 2010), overgeneralization of women stereotypes and roles (Engstrom 2003, Cavender and Jurik 2004, Cohen and Waimann 2009), and an over sexualization and objectification of women (Stern 2005; Ron and Bissell 2006). Some
research has also shown that through aspects such as “social cognitive theory” or “cultivation theory” individuals may model a character they believe to represent themselves or believe what they are viewing on television is an accurate portrayal of reality (Stefanone, Lackaff, and Rosen 2010; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan Signorielli and Shanahan 2002). Supporting research conducted on this idea has shown that individuals may model behavior despite the socially undesirable attributes of such behavior and that young women are the more susceptible to this theory than others (Cato and Carpentier 2010). Due to these findings it is vital to understand what aspects are being represented in reality television as they may be reflected back into society by viewers.

As reality television continues to dominate the media, it is important to examine what representations are being presented through this media source. Many aspects of society are presented within reality television, one in particular, in which this study will focus on, is gender. Distinct from one’s sex, gender is created, learned from and monitored by the society and culture from which one lives, yet traditionally falls into two labeled categories of masculinity or femininity. Gender is viewed as a process through which all individuals undergo throughout life; something that is continuously learned, structured, and readapted to cultural standards (Lorber 2010; West and Zimmerman 1987; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). This ever present facet of human life effects individuals on multiple levels, “…involving cultural beliefs and distribution of resources at the macro level, patterns of behavior and situational
structures at the interactions level, and selves and identities at the individual level” making gender an inescapable aspect of life (Ridgeway and Correll 2000). Society attaches different standards and expectations for females, who are to be feminine, and males, who are to be masculine. For example, there are gender expectations for a person’s physical body determined on whether that person is male or female (Lorber 2010). These distinctive categorization and unavoidable effects of gender also leads to issue of inequality, as males receive and are allowed to replicate different messages than females and vice versa. Uncovering these messages is not always clear or simple, as “it [gendered messages] can be communicated overtly and explicitly, and they can also be communicated subtly, inadvertently, and unobtrusively through culture” (Denny 2011). It is important to examine how gender is being presented in our culture, as gender has such a considerably unavoidable affect on individual’s lives and can sometimes go unnoticed due to its covert messages. This project hopes to explore how the female gender is being represented in the reality television program, “The Bad Girls Club” from the cable channel the Oxygen Network. This program was selected because all of the participants are female, and since the goal is to examine the cultural representation of the female gender, it was deemed appropriate. Having examined all previous seasons, season four was selected for research due to its high levels of viewership (www.oxygennetork.com). The goal of this study will be to examine how the women in “The Bad Girls Club” are doing gender in their day-to-day lives including words, behaviors, actions, and personal video diaries that are kept
throughout the season. The researcher will approach the data with a social constructionist perspective on gender and gender in society and culture. With no explicit hypothesis or preconceived outcomes, the researcher will be making use of Norman Denzin’s theories on media message dissemination and media engagement, as well as using an intricate coding system of the data, in revealing and discussing the findings to ensure the results are of an empirical nature.

With this research I intend to examine messages of gender that are displayed through this reality television program and to speak on the effects of these messages in society and culture. Consistent messages overtime have an effect on society; “…gendered messages shape our view of the world and deepest values… define[ing] what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil” (Kellner 1995:1). This potential impact on people and society makes the examination of gender and gendered messages vital for understanding our society. As “The Bad Girls Club” is centered around eight self-proclaimed deviant, yet proud women, it is interesting to identify what messages are being sent out regarding gender from this program. In viewing “…television as the distinct and dominant cultural force of our age” it is imperative that examinations, such as this, are done in order to study the messages being communicated to society (Gerbner 1998:191).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Gender

According to the American Sociological Association, gender is defined as “the traits and behaviors that are socially designated as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ in a particular society” (Persell 1996). Many different sociological schools of thought approach, construct and explain gender differently. The social constructionist perspective believes that sex differences are isolated from gender and gender differences. Social constructionist ideals are unique in that they believe gender is “produced and maintained by social processes” (Lorber 2010:244). It is the idea that people are constantly engaging in gendering and gendered behavior and actions, from the time of birth, throughout childhood and into adulthood, because one’s gender is a part of one’s identity. “Gender is an ‘invisible hand’, a set of cultural rules that pattern face-to-face encounters. This [is a] taken for granted frame works as long as participants live by gendered rules, as they generally do” (Lorber 2010:251; Acker 1992). Gender is something people are groomed into from birth and then becomes a continually adapting part of who the person sees themselves as being, thus affecting the person’s interactions, behaviors, practices, and all other aspects of the self in the public sphere.

One of the more popular works of theory from this school of thought was done by Candace West and Don Zimmerman, titled “Doing Gender”. In their work, the researchers argued that members of society become forced to engage in certain
types of gendered behavior and actions and are essentially “hostage to its [gender] production” (West and Zimmerman 1987:126; Allen 2004). They claim that as members of society we are being evaluated and judged according to our gender; in order to remain an acceptable member of society, one must play by the prescribed roles of one’s gender. But by doing so we are perpetuating the system; a system traditionally full of patriarchy, lower statuses for women, and traditional roles for both the sexes (Connell 2010). By maintaining the status quo, others in society are forced into following and abiding by the prescribed rules as well. West and Zimmerman argue that individuals’ sexes are hidden, since the determination of this is most commonly covered by clothing, therefore society socializes individuals to act according to their different sexes, i.e. designating people into sex categories so the according sex can be easily determined by others and segregation between the sexes can be enforced (West and Zimmerman 1987; Rakow and Wackwitz 1998). Once a person’s gender is established and enforced by society the expression of it is often seen as a natural occurrence; this is due to the societal pressure and gender socializations the individual goes through. West and Zimmerman argue that this natural assumption is used to explain differences in career choice, futures, societal roles, sexuality, etc. between men and women. What is being missed is the “self-regulating process” that an individual goes through daily in order to stay in line with society’s gender standards and the standards taught to them through socialization (West and Zimmerman 1987:140; Allen 2004). For example in Kathleen Denny’s
examination of Boy Scout and Girl Scout handbooks, which were believed to represent the interests of the children for who they were created, she found that the girls’ handbook contained more group and artistic activities while the boy’s contained more independent and science-based work. Denny (2011) concluded that these handbooks further the cultural standard for boys and girls because they are being molded into prescribed characteristics determined by their sex. The handbooks served to regulate behaviors for these children which are then incorrectly assumed to be natural characteristics of the individual.

It is a generally accepted thought that this difference between the sexes leads to inequality, as one category gets a superior placement due to the misconceived notion of a natural origin of gender (West and Zimmerman 2009; Connell 2010). West and Zimmerman stress the importance of understanding sex and gender as interlocking but separate concepts, the recognition of the historical and structural influences and control that exists over gender in society, and the accountability on an individual level (West and Zimmerman 2009). Many studies have been conducted in order to explore or display the effects of gendered identities and the effects it creates between the sexes. There are generally two approaches, the first being to show the differences between male and female identities. Some have stressed the social construction of gender and the conscious actions of gendered behavior and actions between men and women which leads to inequality (Berkowitz et al. 2010; Ohannessian 2009). The production of inequality is also supported by others aspects
such as “hegemonic masculinity” which is the superiority of the masculine identity defining what socially acceptable for individuals. Femininity is defined as what masculinity is not and devalues its worth by doing so (McGuffrey, Shawn and Lindsay 1999; Weitzer and Kubrin 2009). These studies have shown that one’s sex often dictates the acceptable gendered behavior one is allowed but also has shed light on the inequalities and restrictions such meanings have created in our society. Others have shown the presence of inequality by examining those who have made the gender and sexual transition from one category to another. Schilt and Westbrook found that female to male transgendered individuals found the transition much easier and more acceptable than those who transitioned from male to female. Through interviews and case studies, the researchers concluded that current gender standards create an atmosphere in where masculinity is viewed as superior, therefore society questioned and challenged male to female transgendered people more for their decision to make the transition to an inferior sex and gender (Schilt and Westbrook 2009).

The other common method used to challenge the belief of the natural differences between the sexes is done by showing similarities between the two. Through the use of a likert scale, Perrin and his research team challenged “John Gray’s Mars-Venus” idea which advocated those women’s experiences and feelings towards love and relationships were different from men’s (Perrin et al. 2011). John Gray argued that men thought more on a physical level, with a goal to impregnate as many women as possible, while women were more on an emotional level looking for
a supportive male figure. Perrin and his team found that there were actually more similarities than differences between the sexes in their desires and expectations from relationships. Furthermore, they argued that when there were differences, such as a women’s greater desire for relationship support, it coincided with traditional gender roles which they traced back to socialization (Perrin et al. 2011). Other studies examining similarities between men and women have found that they both share an identical desire for a physical body predictive of overall health in their partner (Montoya 2007), both manage same-sex conflicts with friends through finding communal goals (Keener, Strough, and DiDonato 2012), both structure same-sex groups through a hierarchical structuring and rank order (Mast 2001). Even similarities in communication styles have been shown between men and women when expressing support (Gooden and Winefield 2007) and through modern technology such as Instant Messaging (Fox et al. 2007).

It is important to frame gender through the social constructionist lens, as this is how gender will be approached throughout this study. The main take-away being that gender is socially constructed for individuals and it is continuously being developed and crafted throughout one’s interactions, behaviors, and throughout life. Sex and gender are not synonymous and are instead two distinctively different aspects for individuals in society. Gendered existences are supported and reproduced through individual’s continuous performance of gender. Yet, individuals conduct gender performance because of unavoidable societal pressure and socialization from birth.
This continues cycle of gender performance and production has and continuous to support a level of inequality through patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and lower statuses for women and femininity in our society.

Themes of Women on Television

This concept of inequality has led many researchers to other areas, including media outlets such as television, to explore if its presence is perpetuated through this sphere. Women in television have been shown to be under-represented compared to their male counterparts (Genderwatch 2000; Escoffery 2006), over sexualized and given less amounts of power, even when they are the main character of a program (Whitney 2001; Stern 2005; Netzley 2010). Even television presented for women has been shown to present hegemonic portrayals of feminine roles, behaviors and expectations (Engstrom 2003; Banet-Wesier and Portwood-Stacer 2006; Murray and Ouellette 2004; Holmes and Jermyn 2004). When women are presented in less common roles, such as Gary Cavender and Nancy Jurik’s study on a female lead detective program or Stacy Mckenna’s study on a program covering women with drug addictions, the female characters are given shortcomings. In Cavender and Jurick’s study the female lead is constantly being challenged by male counterparts and her successful public life is presented with a loss of a private one (Cavender and Jurick 2004). Mckenna’s study found women’s reasoning for drug use leaned more towards the stereotypical feminine ideal, such as staying thin and maintaining a
certain physical body type or attempts to meet a supermom lifestyle which includes managing the home-life, children, work and overcoming tiredness from daily stresses and the pressures of living up to this ideal (Mckenna 2011). A similar study conducted in Europe examined the presence of women in comedy (a traditionally male dominated sphere) and found that women comedians were more often marginalized and were considered less likely to reach across to opposite sex audiences then men due to traditional ideals on women’s roles and restricting behaviors for women (Bore 2010).

When women attempt to deviate from their gender standard, as women in a study of the program “The Apprentice” did, they are shown higher levels of pushback from their team and overall found it harder to adopt the opposite sex’s gendered behavior than men experienced in adopting stereotypical women’s behaviors (Cheung and Sung 2011). Even when the design of the program allows women to venture from their gender norm, such a Marla Harris’s study on “Paradise Hotel”, which is a dating competition show, the women still found themselves facing backlash. Harris concluded that women on the program were judged more than men for switching partners and engaging in multiple personal relationships. Also, there was a socially acceptable limit to the competitiveness women were allowed to portray; if the women were more strong-willed and domineering they risked being labeled a “bitch” and being voted off the show. If the women who won decided not to split their winnings with their partner they were labeled as “selfish”; a label not placed on the men for the
same decision (Harris 2004). Harris concluded that the program depicted a stereotypical woman’s need to be a part of a heterosexual coupling, or they faced the risk of being seen as abnormal (and fell into either being accused of having too many partners or having an inability to partner at all), and as a consequence they were kicked off (Harris 2004).

Over sexualization and objectification are also seen as a common theme for women on television (Stern 2005; Banet-Wesier and Portwood-Stacer 2006). A 2009 study conducted by the American Psychological Association Task Force concluded that the strong presence of sexuality for women in television held negative consequences for both men and women. They stated that for women, the effects included negative body image and self-esteem issues due to the pressure of living up the media’s image of women. For men, the study concluded that the media enforced a standard of a singular female identity that men hold women to, limiting women’s roles and abilities in society (Lerum and Dworkin 2009). The idea of living up to the feminine ideal was also present in the “Paradise Hotel” study conducted by Harris. She found that women who portrayed common female traits such as passivity or less amount of physical or emotional strength compared to men were considered weak and unnecessary and they were often dismissed. Lastly, Harris found that women engaged in more altercations and arguments with other women than men with other men, but when the women engaged one another the validity of the argument was viewed with less merit than that of the men’s disagreement (Harris 2004).
Women are also shown less credit in the sports world, through less air time and differences in the language used by commentators to describe the female athlete versus the male athlete (Halbert and Latimer 1994; Cunningham et al. 2004). When women are shown to be skillful at a sport, there is usually a level of extra femininity attached to the women; commonly known as the “feminine apologetic”; this being the idea that women who engage in a high level of competition must counter this traditional masculine trait with large amounts of traditional feminine traits outside and inside of the sporting world (Festle 1996, Eitzen 1999, Schell and Rodriguez 2000). Example can include, having nicely polished hair, always appearing well-put together even when participating in the sport, being seen as kind and welcoming to the public or any other trait society may label as feminine. Griffin describes a female athlete as having to appear “heterosexy” meaning they must appear heterosexual and physically attractive according to cultural standards in order to balance out their masculine participation in sports (Griffin 1992). This pervasive pressure by society to exaggerate levels of femininity for female athletes can “trivialize and impede women’s effort to realize their full potential” (Shell and Rodriguez 2000:1). Not only does this societal pressure place restrictions on women, if they wish to play competitively in sport, it is a pressure that does not exist for male athletes simply because the idea of competitiveness, participation in sports, and other traits such as these are traditionally masculine traits therefore acceptable with no conditions for men (Griffin 1992; Shell and Rodriguez 2000; Festle 1996, Eitzen 1999). When
women are shown on competition shows, similar trends are seen. Women are presented as being less smart, and their incompetency is shown as acceptable if a standard of socially acceptable beauty is present (Cato 2008).

According to Lisa Bennet this presence of inequality between men and women is dangerous because it endorses gender inequalities in our society. The National Organization for Women (NOW) claims the media, that portrays these inequalities on public airways, are in violation of the 1937 Communications Act which states television should “serve the public interest” and the government is not holding them responsible for this (Bennet 2002). Although there have been many studies and examinations of women and women’s representation in television programs, there seems to be a significantly smaller amount of examinations conducted in the reality television sphere. This is most likely due to the newer nature of this media type. Reality television is portrayed as a reflection of the real world and since “…television [may] contribute to the establishment of dominate cultural norms” it is important to stop and examine what is being portrayed in all of different types of television media (Cato 2008:23).

*Media Engagement*

As with many other portals of socialization in our society, the media is an outlet through which individuals engage with and often times use in defining their identity. Norman K. Denzin argues that media is “a self-reflective mirror that enters
into and structures lived experience” (1989:50). Media consumption is therefore more than a simple one-way interaction; the media is sending messages and at the same time the viewer is actively interacting with those messages. The viewers are not passive in this interaction between individuals and the media; they play a vital role in the acceptance, interpretation and applicable use of the messages being disseminated. In sum, there is control by the media, as they are the creators and broadcasters of the messages being distributed, yet, the individual maintains an amount of agency as they are active in this process. Yet, there is an even greater control in this process- social expectation. Denzin claims that the messages and interactions that take place between the media and the viewers are mediated by social and cultural expectations and realities (Denzin 1989; 1995; 1997). Therefore the cultural standards and realities of gender (including inequalities, stereotypes, and expectations) are being reflected through media messages as they are hostage to society’s standards. It is vital to examine the messages and interactions being circulated as they are used in the creation of identities for media consumers.

The messages being transmitted through media are understandably affected by many factors: the actors/participants, the editors, the directors, etc. These messages are constructed by the “negotiation of symbolic meaning pertaining to various codes [in society]” according to the perspective of the individual who is creating them (Vannini 2004; Denzin 1991, 1992). These “symbolic meanings” that both Vannini and Denzin refer to can only come from one mutual place- the societal reality of
which we are all a part. Denzin argues the messages being sent from the media, no matter the source, are structured by the status quo of society and used to support and maintain the societal regularity (Denzin 1989; 1991; 1995; 1997). Messages reflecting the status quo of society are easy for viewers to accept, even if only subconsciously, because the status quo is a relatable factor for all viewers no matter their individuality. They may be messages the viewer does not agree with, but they are understood as these messages reflect the societal status quo and the viewers are members of society.

Television, as a media source, is capable of dispersing many messages depending upon the viewers preferred channel or program. Therefore when an individual makes a channel or program choice there must be something appeasing about the source to which the individual is drawn. It is a decision by the viewer to engage with certain messages being distributed from a specific channel or program over others. This may not be a conscious decision, but the decision is important because the messages viewers receive “shape and define situated cultural identities…They mediate structures of meaning” for the viewer (Denzin 2012:339). From this perspective, it would seem the viewer maintains high levels of agency, but this is the not case. As mentioned, the messages, no matter the program choice, are structured as reflections of the status quo in society and therefore work to maintain the status quo (Denzin 1988; 1995; 1997). Denzin also argues that the social outlet of media specifically targets certain messages for certain individuals (Denzin 2012).
Therefore, the messages being transmitted from a sports program will cater the societal reality of men, as men are the majority of sports viewers, while a talk-show will cater to women, for the same reason. In this way the individual may believe they have control over their media consumption, yet, there is a high probability that the program they are selecting is sending messages that were created specifically for them.

Viewers do maintain a level of agency as the receivers of these messages. As the recipients, viewers are capable of differing understandings or interpretations based on their personal, unique lived experiences. Phillip Vannini describes this as the “meso level, where the micro level of personal experiences and the macro level of cultural and structural dynamics are mediated” (Vannini 2004:65). No matter what the crafted messages being distributed from the media source, it is the viewer who is left to determine its importance, meaningfulness, and applicability based on the unique individual’s lived experience. In this way the mass messages being sent out can be altered to fit certain individuals. This agency most likely takes place on a subconscious level, as a person may not be aware of how their individuality is affecting the message intake. The messages from the media are all related—propagating the status quo—yet, it is the individuality of each person that shapes the process of applying the messages by the media in the consumers’ lives (Denzin 1995; Vannini 2004).
Even with this level of agency on the part of the viewer the strong socially constructed messages from the media work to maintain the status quo of society (Denzin 1989). How the individual reflects the message may change person by person, but the main message remains the same and the goal of the message—perpetuating the status quo—is attained (Denzin 1989; 1992; 1995). Take, for example, the sexual objectification of women, a common message transmitted by the media and useful for this study. Depending upon the person’s social class, race, age, etc. expressions of sexual objectification may vary, yet, women no matter their agency, often abide by the societal expectation of sexual objectification. Therefore, although the viewers are actively engaging with the media the messages being transmitted and accepted by the consumers work to maintain the status quo of sexual objectification of women. Individuals may have some agency in the expression of the messages, but the strong societal expectations are often times unavoidable and are perpetuated through the consumer.

There has been much work done in investigating this interaction between media and the individual. With the assumption that audiences socially construct reality by using media sources (Denzin 1997, 2002), John Atkinson, Rosemary Black and Allan Curtis’ study showed a new level of interactivity between “the new social movement networks and alternative media” (Atkinson 2008:485). Following Denzin’s concept on audience agency in message transmittance (Denzin 1995), Myrian Sepulveda dos Santos argues that a film can “illuminate multiple meaning”
dependent upon the viewer and their individual experiences (Sepulveda dos Santos 2003:61).

When examining the active communication between the media and the viewer it is important to identify all aspects of the process. Denzin advocates that the process is an active one, both by the media and the viewer, the media disseminates socially structured messages that work to maintain the status quo, while the individual’s personal lived experience shapes the reflection of these messages in the person’s life (Denzin 1991, 1992, 2002, 2012; Vannini 2004). The messages from the media are not random and are crafted to reflect cultural norms to the intended audience (Denzin 1989; 1992, 1995, 1997). Essentially, all media messages may vary in expression by an individual, yet the basic premise of each message is being perpetuated in society by the viewers. The goal of this research will be to make use of Denzin’s media message transmittance while applying it to the reality program “The Bad Girls Club”. Individuals are not unaffected by the media they consume, there is to some degree a level of response, reflection and engagement involved. This study hopes to closely examine the messages being sent through this reality program and to comment on their effect in society, in particular how people interact with them as a reflection of their own identities.
Reality Television

The use of real people and real events in television programming has become a cultural phenomenon; one that has effected television programming on a global scale. The origins of this programming type are unconfirmed, but some trace them back to as early as the 1950’s with game-show programs and humorous based television such as “Candid Camera” (Holmes and Jermyn 2004; Murray and Ouellette 2004). It is acceptable to say that “reality TV has rapidly come to occupy a place at the forefront of contemporary television culture” (Holmes and Jermyn 2004:1). Currently the term reality television is used to describe a wide array of programming types and no set and clear definition of the term has been accepted on a universal scale. It is this broad application that leads scholars in struggling to keep up with the fast changing and adaptive pace of reality television (Holmes and Jermyn 2004; Murray and Ouellette 2004). Reality television differentiated itself from other programming types by involving real people, not actors playing a part or role, often using videos in the character’s real environment or one similar to it. Reality television can be most similarly compared to documentaries, in the sense that they both attempt to capture real life, but unlike documentaries, all participants of reality television are individuals who have willingly chosen to participate in the filming process, clearing away any human subject issues that many documentary style films still encounter (Murray and Ouellette 2004).
The reason behind the rise of reality television is difficult to pin-point, but some suggested reasons include: a rise in surveillance and video recording in the private and governmental spheres which leads individuals to accept one’s life as being recorded, a rise in technology allowing easier recording devices to be used and leading to more natural scenes (Murray and Ouellette 2004) or simply the inexpensive nature of filming and creating reality television, and the possibility of quite a large financial gain if the show is successful (Escoffery 2006). As with other popular media outlets, reality television has fallen under scrutiny related to the morality and the cultural values it is portraying for society. Yet, at the same time, reality television has in some sense aided in the diversifying of television (Murray and Ouellette 2004). Essentially it is important to view this programming type through a lens of the culture in which it is being aired and filmed. What is socially acceptable behavior or actions for one culture may not be for the next, therefore the reality programming for each culture may differ as it will aim to be acceptable by the society with which it is being aired to. Due to its global success, reality television is viewed by a variety of cultures and societies, creating differing take-ways and representations (Holmes and Jermyn 2004).

Although titled “reality television” the validity of a real representation of a person’s life or interactions being shown through the show is weak. The final product which viewers watch at home is a much edited production of the actual events which might have taken place. Simply having cameras around may alter one’s actions or
reactions to something, not to mention the many producers and editors who combine footage, add sound, slow down scenes for added drama, etc. all in order to produce a more eventful or dramatic scene in hope of attracting a larger audience. Certain situations or interactions may even be designed, orchestrated, or caused by an outside source (such as a producer) in order to film the character’s reactions. This manufactured reality is understood and accepted by the audience who still seem to be drawn to this type of programming and may still believe there to some sense of reality being presented (Stern 2005). Although not fully a true representation of a person’s life, reality television can present an image or lifestyle of certain individuals which to some degree may accurately portray their life, interactions, daily routine, and who they are.

These images of individuals being portrayed through reality television, although understood not 100% real, are presented in a manner that would indicate otherwise. This false presentation of the reality of an individual’s life creates a unique experience for the audience. There are no fictional characters; instead the story lines involve around real people simply playing themselves and often times living their daily lives. In this sense, the messages related to societal standards and behaviors are presented in a different light because the veil of reality is over their interactions, behaviors, communications, etc. This sense of reality makes the behaviors and actions of the person in the program translate to the audience slightly different compared to that of an actor playing a made up role with a script. There is almost a sense of
stronger reliability and commonality between the person in the reality program and the individual audience because of the cover of realness presented in reality television.

The reasons for viewing reality television include “an opportunity to sample other lifestyles of reality”, the simplicity of the program type which allows viewers to pick up anywhere in the season and the ability to follow the story line, the minimal amount of attention needed when viewing, and the opportunity to view another person’s life and consider how one would react or respond to the situations on the show (Lundy, Ruth, and Park 2008:220). This ease and opportunity are what attract viewers and have helped to make reality television as successful as it has become. The genre of reality television is vast, and the amount of programs which fall under this category are varying dependent upon the channel or individual making the categorical decisions. Although reality television uses the real lives of real people in attracting audiences and gaining success, there is more to be examined through this media portal. Reality television can “show us social interactions, group dynamics, interpersonal struggles, the process of voting, and even, perhaps, the workings of power itself” (Escoffery 2006:2-3). The level of validity that reality television has in portraying an individual life is unimportant, instead this source can show a glimpse into the world of social interactions, cultures or subgroups unfamiliar to us, or lives we wish we had. Reality television advertises itself as authentic, and although this
may not be entirely true, information from this media outlet can still prove to be useful and valid for society.

Research in Reality Television

Reality television has been summed as shows that present real people living in real environments, but no universal definition is accepted in any discipline (Lundy, Ruth, and Park 2008:220). Yet attempts have been made in understanding how audiences categorize reality television based on their individual conclusions. A study conducted by Robin Nabi found that romance and competiveness were the two categories used most commonly by viewers in sorting reality programming, which may be attributed to unrealistic dating habits and the “meanness” of societal competitive nature (Nabi 2007:383). The study concluded with the importance of understanding the viewer’s perception of the show when studying the effects or else one risks assuming all reality television shares a common theme and effect on society which is simply not possible when considering the differing and plentiful amounts of available reality programming (Nabi 2007).

Further research has shed additional light on the effects of reality television on its audience. Monique Ward’s (2002) study found that those viewing higher levels of reality television were more likely to support stereotypes of sexual relationships, including women’s value being placed in their sexualization and men as being sex driven machines who engage in recreational sexual relationships more than women.
This study also found that those who were exposed to more reality television were more likely to believe in higher levels of sexual relations for their peers than those who were not as exposed (Ward 2002). Other studies have shown a connection with individual’s lives and reality television, such as an increase in accessing social network sites, the amount of friends on these sites, and an increase in the amount of sharing personal information and pictures for those who watch higher levels of reality television (Stefanone, Lackaff, and Rosen 2010). Yet, the images and messages of reality television, such as overgeneralization of the female identity and role (Brancato 2007) and hegemonic standards for women (Engstrom 2003; Banet-Wesier and Portwood-Stacer 2006; Murray and Ouellette 2004; Holmes and Jermyn 2004) do appear to be recognized by audiences. Concern over the effects of reality television on society have shown that individuals who consume high levels of reality television showed more concern for others than themselves regarding the effects of the programming style (Cohen 2009). Another study concluded that audiences were able to categorize reality television programming into good versus bad quality, with good focusing on improving lives or helping others and bad focusing on deception, psychical or emotion harm or ridicule. This study also recognized the audiences’ ability to identify exaggerative or exploited themes, ideas or topics (Lundy, Ruth, and Park 2008).

When examining differences between the sexes, studies have found that reality media affects individuals differently: higher levels of reality television has
shown a rise in anxiety for young girls but the opposite effect on young boys (Ohannnessina 2009). Also a correlation has been shown in young women with high levels of reality television consumption and sexual permissiveness if combined with sexual empowerment (Cato and Carpentier 2010). Yet, other research does suggest that female viewers can identify the difference between built up stereotypes for media and reality. In Danielle Stern’s focus group, which aimed at uncovering portrayals of sexuality in the MTV series “The Real Word”, the participants believed that often times the women on the show played up their sexuality for the camera, following the belief that sex sells. Yet, even with this recognition the general consensus of the focus group was that the show was a “real portrayal” of society, insinuating that female members of society must also feed into this sexual standards of the media (Stern 2005:20). The differences in portrayals of gender for the sexes have been shown to affect the people viewing it, yet, even when they recognize an exaggeration the audience still claims the program to represent cultural reality. Therefore, even with the extras and fluff that may exist in reality television, audiences are accepting it as real, and the messages being expressed through it, such as gendered behaviors, are also being accepted and are having an effect on society.

In sum, the majority of research in the reality television sphere has been approached through the audiences’ or viewers’ perception and has focused on the effects or connection to society. The results have shown many negative portrayals of women and possible negative effects for society. It is important to approach reality
television through many different aspects; as vital as audience interpretations may be, they vary, as audiences vary. For example, the report from the American Psychological Association described the sexuality of women on television as harmful to society, but other researches argue that sexual freedom and agency is something many feminists have argued in support of for many years. They view the restriction of female sexuality as taking steps backwards in the progression of women’s rights and not a productive maneuver towards equality for society (Lerum and Dworkin 2009). Therefore, simply viewing the cultural representation of reality television and showing what is being presented in the program is a gap that needs to be filled in the field. As informative as the previous literature may be on interpretations and audience’s take-away, it is important to enter the data with no preconceived notions of reality television.

The goal of this research will be to address the following gaps in the present literature; first, to examine the cultural representation of women’s gender through reality programming, which has a shorter research history than other television programming types, most likely due to the fact of it being a newer style. Second, to examine the specific female centered, non-competitive designed, reality program of “The Bad Girls Club”. Of the research being conducted on reality television, the majority falls within the competition sphere, with the expectation of “The Real World” but “The Real World” lacks the exclusive female example that is available only on “The Bad Girls Club”. Currently, there are numerous other programs that
simply follow the lived experiences of those on a specific show, but “The Bad Girls Club” is unique in that the women on this show are not celebrities, as most other participants of lived experience programs are. Finally, unlike most research conducted on reality television, this study will not be viewing the findings from solely an audience’s perception or understanding, instead the goal will be to identify the themes of gendered cultural representation being presented on the program by the participants and to possibly speak on the effects these messages may have on society as they are capable of “mediating and defining social life” for its viewers (Denzin 1995: 215). This will be conducted with the understanding that media consumption is an interactive process by the audience. Yet, the messages being transmitted through this media portal are strongly structured by societal expectations and are used to perpetuate the status quo of gendered norms (Denzin 1989; 1992; 1995, 1997, 2012).

With the completion of this study, the researcher hoped to add to the current literature on reality television through a gendered lens with the intention of developing a greater understanding of the “real” cultural representations of women on television.
Chapter 3: Methods

The goal of this study was to uncover displays of gender in the reality television program “The Bad Girls Club”. The inescapable presence of gender is something that is taught, monitored and controlled by culture (West and Zimmerman 1987, Ridgeway and Correll 2000, 2004, Lorber 2010). Culture being vast and broad, this research has chosen the cultural portal of television; in particular, reality television, as it has become a popular and ever dominating category within media thus being viewed by many members of society (Holmes and Jermyn 2004, Gerbner 1998, Murray and Ouellette 2004). The objective was to examine what gendered messages are being translated through the cultural gateway reality program, “The Bad Girls Club”, and possibly to speak on the effects of those messages.

Data: “The Bad Girls Club”

“The Bad Girls Club” is an American reality television show which began in 2006 and airs on the Oxygen cable network. The basis of “The Bad Girls Club” is the public viewing of seven self-proclaimed deviant women living together for three months while their every action both inside and outside of the house is recorded. Each season a new group of women is selected, ranging in ages from 21 to 27 (a standard established by the second season) and coming from various racial, ethic, and economic backgrounds (www.bad-girls-club.oxygen.com). Yet, a certain level of economical means is understood, as all the women are able to live somewhat financially stable for three months without work. As far as this researcher can
comprehend the housing is free but the women are still held responsible for providing all their food and leisure activities (such as road trips and alcohol). Characteristics of the women vary, but a description of a “Bad Girl” is given by the show and usually written somewhere publicly in the house:

“A Bad Girl knows what she wants and how to get it. She makes her own way, makes her own rules and she makes no apologies. A Bad Girl blazes her own trail and removes obstacles from her path. A Bad Girl fights and forces her way to the top with style and beauty. A Bad Girl believes in jumping first and looking later. People will love you. People will hate you. Other will secretly wish to be you. A Bad Girl is you.” – Bad Girl Club Oath (http://bad-girls-club.oxygen.com/)

Throughout their time in the house all members participate in a video diary which is a camera set up in a concealed location somewhere in the house. This allows the women time to reflect on, and discuss in private away from the other roommates, occurrences that take place; yet this footage is used for production in the airing of the show and all participants are made aware of this fact.

This research focused on season four which consisted of thirteen regular season episodes, had a total appearance of eight women and aired from December 2009 until the finale in March 2010. This season was selected because
of its popularity and high viewership; the premier episode was “the most watched season premier ever” in the shows history to date (The Futon Critic). All the women voluntarily chose to participate with the show and auditioned first with video tape submissions (these videos were not used for analysis as the researcher did not have access to their full length). They then went through a casting call process before the original seven women were chosen. Since the names and identity of the women have already been shown (as part of their participation on the show) no pseudonyms will be used. Throughout the research all the women are referred to as they were on the show; with only first names.

The cast members’ basic demographic information is listed below in Table 1. All race determinations were made by the researcher with the exception of Florina and Natalie who stated their race during the season. The first seven women were the original cast; Lexie was added mid-way through the season in response to Portia being forced to leave the house for violating the house rule against physical violence.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florina “Flo”</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Albanian American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine “Kate”</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendra</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Puerto Rican, Brazilian and Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

Every episode from season four of “The Bad Girls Club” was transcribed and notes were taken on actions, dress, behaviors, non-verbal communication, etc. in order to capture the entire scene during the analysis process and have a suitable amount of data to examine and study (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004). The two part season finale was excluded from the research because it is simply a reunion where the participants discuss events that took place throughout the season and it is their actions that take place in the house that is of interest for this study. Consistent accounts of time were also recorded so as to make the process easier to go back and review certain scenes or dialogue if needed.

**Ethnographic Qualitative Content Analysis**

Ethnographic research maintains culture as a central component of the data and as part of the data analysis, as often the goal is to examine how a specific culture forms and maintains itself through “interactions, roles, ceremonies, and rituals and
artifacts of the cultural group” (Marshall and Rossman 2011:19; Rossman and Rallis 2003). Traditionally this research method involves participant observation or some sort of involvement in the culture to grasp the culture’s reality within its natural setting or environment. The goal of this method is to establish the “recurring patterns of behavior and relationships” in the culture (Marshall and Rossman 2011:139). An intricate level of note keeping and reviewing allowed the researcher to find meaning in the patterns and behaviors and relate those meaning back to the specific actions (Patton 2002). Through this research method the researcher was able to analyze a deeper level of understanding of the culture, how it’s made and how it is maintained.

Traditionally memo writing is used throughout ethnographic examination as a place for the researcher to keep thoughts and organize analyses, in the design of this study it was this researchers plan to maintain a traditional memo book throughout data collection and analysis process. Yet, once transcription began, the researcher discovered that maintaining both the traditional memo and transcripts was too overwhelming. Therefore once the transcripts were complete the researcher then began the memos process. Doing so “help[ed] the researcher “(a) to grapple with ideas about the data (b) to set an analytical course (c) to refine categories (d) to define the relationship among various categories and (e) to gain a sense of competence and confidence in their ability to analyze data” (Denzin and Lincoln 2003:263). Through editing of the paper these memos were cleaned up and presented in a more professional format. All of the comparisons conducted through the coding process
were done in the memos because it was a space where the researcher could openly make connections and explore their support in the data. This memo process allowed the researcher to become completely engulfed in the data, therefore accurately capturing the reality of the subjects and the messages being expressed.

As this research is an examination of a reality television program, it is impossible for the researcher to engulf herself and live in, and with, the culture being studied as a traditional ethnographic study would be done. Thus, the goal of the note taking and memo writing was for the researcher to achieve as close a level as possible to understanding the culture, meaning, and messages from the reality television program. Essentially, the data is content: content from the transcriptions of the program. Therefore, the goal of this research will be to combine the ethnographic note taking and memo writing techniques with a qualitative content analysis examination of season four of “The Bad Girls Club”.

The use of content analysis as a method of data collection is most commonly a quantitative endeavor, in which the researcher looks for certain information and quantifies it accordingly, but when using this method for qualitative purposes the goal is in “isolating, defining and illustrating the categories” desired (Berelson 1952:115). Qualitative content analysis involves more complex themes and has less formalized categories than quantitative research. Interpretations in qualitative work tend to be a part of the analytical process, whereas they tend to follow the analytical process in
quantitative work. Yet, strong connections can exist between the two methods, even if as simply as counting how often themes emerge in the study (Berelson 1952). The operationalizing of definitions can be left for the end of the study; if the intent is to find meaning that arises from the material, the defining of key ideas will be created through the analysis process and presented in the findings and discussion (Berg 2009).

The data collection method for this study pulled from both traditional data analysis methods but also combines ethnographic approaches through the use of memo writing. The researcher recorded words, as traditional data analysis transcriptions would, but actions, dress, facial expressions, nonverbal communications, etc. are also recorded during the data collection. This gravitates this study towards a more ethnographic and qualitative work than a traditional data analysis examination would be. The goal of this broad data collection was to examine the complete expression of gender by the participants, and in order to fully grasp this information the research needed to capture more than the sharing of words, which is a goal most commonly associated in ethnographic studies. The memo writing, also from traditional ethnographic works, allowed the researcher to grapple with themes, trends, personal thoughts and analysis while arriving at determinations and findings. The hope was that the combination of these two methods, both ethnographic and content analysis, may allow the researcher the opportunity to delve deeper into the data and pull strongly supported patterns and
themes of gendered displays. This blending of methods, although not common, was necessary to properly access the deep level of analysis this researcher hoped to accomplish with this study.

Data: Media Engagement

As described in the previous chapter, the process of participating in media viewing is a dual interaction. The media distributes messages related to culture, society, etc. and the viewer engages with these messages and reflects them based upon their own experience (Denzin 1991, 1992, 2002). According to Norman K. Denzin, the messages are created based on the societal expectations of individuals in society, but, the individual shapes how those messages are portrayed in their own life (Vannini 2004; Denzin 1991, 1992, 2002). Moving beyond solely an analysis of the messages portrayed through the shows, this study also intended to analyze how others interact and engage with the show, since this factor may vary person to person. To examine this, two public viewings were held where participants watched two episodes of “The Bad Girls Club”. This allowed the researcher opportunities to observe people’s interactions and engagements with the messages being transmitted from the program.

The study used both convenience and snowballing sampling that was conducted by sending out an email to potential participants who were affiliated with the researcher, who then forwarded this email to their friends. Each person who
agreed to be in the study was asked to bring another person with them to the showing. The participants met at a public local restaurant and viewed the newest airing of the show, which was episode two of season ten and episode three of season eleven of “The Bad Girls Club”. The goal was to observe their reaction, engagement, and intake of the program therefore the different cast and season is less important. The researcher played the role of participant observer during the showing; taking notes on the episodes, participants and others in the restaurant, while occasionally engaging in conversation and dialogue so as to make it a more comfortable atmosphere for the participants. The researcher informed the participants of their option in declining to participate in the study prior to attendance and again before the show began. The researcher utilized similar memo writing methods to gather data as had been conducted with viewing the shows. This allowed for a continuity of the research by having similar data forms. As with the previous data collection, the analysis of the data from the public viewings followed identical methods as the analysis of the episodes. As this content was collected through participant observation methods this portion of the research leans even more heavily toward an ethnographic research model (Marshall and Rossman 2011).

_Data Analysis_

Keeping the researcher’s goal of exploration in mind throughout the analysis, it was decided this combination of ethnographic and qualitative content analysis
would best fit the parameters and goals of the study. Although not a traditional study, this work aims at being empirical nonetheless, by abiding by structural and guide lined analysis. The simultaneous involvement of data collection and data analysis allowed the researcher to closely examine what is taking place, develop a feel of useful data and gives room for self-awareness through memo writing. The finished research contained a limited amount of raw data so as to display the support for the categories, but not too much so as to distract or pull attention away from the categories themselves (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004). The analysis portion was complete when all categories had been compared, defined, defended, and labeled. The researcher’s goal was to explore this area of pop culture that seems to be somewhat prevalent in the media today. Other methods would not have given this work the exploratory nature desired by the researcher.

The analysis “consist[ed] of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range framework that explains the collected data” (Denzin and Lincoln 2003:249). Therefore, there was no hypothesis or introductory question when entering this data; instead the final conclusion emerged from the data itself. There was a topic of interest to start the research; which was to explore the reality pop culture world of deviant women, but no assumptions were made beforehand as to the conclusions making this work exploratory (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004). Through self-transcriptions and repetitive reading and analysis the
researcher hoped to clearly understand the subjects and the communications between them and to uncover meaning regarding the gender displays of the participants.

The researcher began with an open coding process, or line-by-line examinations, which entailed going through the transcripts one line at a time and simply writing down the actions taking place. In line-by-line coding, the simplicity of defining what is occurring also helps to avoid any personal ideas or thoughts that may belong to the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln 2003; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004). During this process it was the researcher’s goal to use “active terms” related to gender and public representations of gender that can be used further on in the analysis portion (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004:507).

Once line-by-line coding had been completed, the next analysis process involved looking for common trends or repeating patterns of action. This was done by examining the already described actions by “(a) comparing different people (such as their views, accounts, actions and experiences)(b) comparing data from the same individual with themselves at different points in time (c) comparing incident with incident” (Denzin and Lincoln 2003:260). This process uncovered strong and prevalent codes which the researcher then used in conducting focus or selective coding. This next level of coding allowed the researcher to go back to the data and conduct theoretical sampling if necessary, which involved revisiting the data to examine if the code may be present in other people, actions, scenes, etc. The purpose
of this process was not to enlarge the generalizability or sample but to ensure connections and ideas are clarified (Denzin and Lincoln 2003; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004). From this point, once connections and ideas were clearly formatted and supported the codes transformed into categories. These categories were examined again through a comparison format between “data, incidents, context and concepts” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004:511). It is vital to keep in mind the context from which the qualitative data came from, this context can and should play into the analysis and findings of the research (Jensen 2002). When dealing with television, and most especially reality television, the context of producer editing, acting, re-shooting, etc. all play into the final product of the program and these effects were discussed as a factor in the restrictions, conclusions and future research possibilities.
Chapter 4: Results

The title of “The Bad Girls Club” insinuates, in its simplistic definition, that these women are bad at being girls. The only way to reach such a conclusion would be to monitor their feminine behaviors which traditionally coincide with being a female or girl. It is assumed that since they are “bad” at being feminine their behaviors throughout the season would reflect non-traditional feminine behaviors, actions, interactions, etc. Therefore we will begin by discussing non-traditional feminine behaviors and actions of the Bad Girls and continue onto contrary actions to the idea of being bad at being girls. This topic will lead us into the ideal feminine role model of the show and then discussion of acceptable expressions of sexuality by the women and how this differed in the household throughout the show. Lastly, we will discuss the engagement concept by reviewing responses to the show that were taken during the public viewings. In sum, we will review the gendered behaviors to see how they reflect on the girls being bad and how the audience engaged with these messages from the show.

“Bad Girls”

As can be expected the roommates did not always see eye-to-eye or befriend every other participant. There were emotions of dislike, distrust, negativity and unfriendliness quite often throughout the season. The expression of these emotions often led to very resounding examples of nontraditional feminine performances.

Almost all of the women during the season engaged in some sort of face-to-face
argument with either another roommate or individual. Often times the cause of this type of altercation was simple dislike of the other person:

Amber tells Kate to get out of her [Amber’s] part of the room [as they share a room]. Amber says this little platform is hers [Amber’s] and Kate is sitting on a couch in this area. Amber says, “Because I’m higher up than you are; get down.” Kate says, “Do you know how stupid you sound?” Amber tells Kate to go; Kate says no. Amber says, “You want me to help you?” and walks over towards Kate, Kate says, “Don’t touch me.” Amber moves the couch off the platform, telling Kate, “You can stay down there ‘cuz you’re not welcome up here.” Amber continues to rant at Kate who stays quiet until Amber turns to leave, Kate says, “Are you done?” Amber answers, “No I’m not done, probably won’t be done all day.” Then Amber yells, “Can we send Kate home?” (Field Note 12.309-12.315).

Traditional feminine standards would dictate that when a woman is unhappy or unpleased they would suppress their emotions, but these women rarely suppressed their anger, dislike, or general feeling towards others. The women ignored feminine performance protocol and instead practiced very confrontational methods to their emotions, insisting on expressing their feelings and refusing to suppress them. Unlike the traditional expectation of feminine behavior, these women often engaged in arguments and verbal attacks on others, such as Kendra’s attack on Kate:
In the car on the way home, Kendra says to Kate, “Don’t be a rude ass bitch, Kate.” Kate says that she [Kate] is just sitting there with her mouth closed. Kate says that she [Kate] hasn’t done a thing all night “except try to get the bill comp’ed.” Natalie tells Kendra to stop. Kate tells Kendra to shut up and Kendra says, “Fuck you bitch, fuck you, you’re the bitch I’m after right now, watch yourself; watch yourself. Don’t show up now” (Field Note 8.271-8.275).

Kendra continues to express her anger towards Kate in her personal video diary entry and further harassment of Kate during the same episode:

“I’ve been frustrated with Kate ever since she decided to open her mouth in this house. So she wants to pick on everybody else, how about she pick on me [Smiles]?” (Video Diary: Kendra 8.276-8.277).

Back at the house Kendra asks Kate, “Miss Piggy right Kate?” Kate says, “Yah, right, I’m pretty sure I wasn’t the one that called Lexie that.” Kendra yells, “The bitch was yelling it out at the corner of the street. Kate, who was it then?” Lexie is also yelling “I’m Miss Piggy?” Kendra continues to yell at Kate, “Natalie’s on Annie, I’m on your ass bitch, who said Miss Piggy? Who did it?” Kate just sits on the floor with her head against the wall and her eyes closed (Field Note 8.278-8.282).

The women’s willingness towards aggression and verbal attacks stems from a general lack of fear. There is a belief that women do not traditionally conduct such
behavior out of fear of the response or how they will be perceived. The participants on this show do not show any concern for those matters and rarely submit to others. Instead they stand their ground refusing to give in, which causes many altercations as both sides refuse to surrender to a less dominant position. This lack of fear or consequence relates heavily with masculine gendered performance. As traditionally masculine traits would call for more of a dominant and fearless approach. As these women often portrayed:

Portia responds, “I’m not scared of anything.” Kendra asks, “So what the problem?” Portia says, “This is my bed, I’m taking this bed, if you have a problem with it take it up with somebody else not me, ‘cause this bitch is sleeping right here.” Natalie walks in asking “What happened?” They ignore Natalie as Kendra and Portia continue to argue, Kendra says that Portia is the only one who they have a problem with. Portia says, “I don’t give a fuck.” Annie goes back to Portia’s newly claimed bed and tries to convince Portia again to surrender the bed. Portia tells Annie to get her [Annie’s] shit and go somewhere else (Field Note 1.418-1.439).

Neither Portia nor Kendra were willing to let the issue drop as they argued their points; refusing to accept the others’ justification. A similar situation was seen later in the season between Kate and Amber, as Amber refused to submit to Kate’s confrontational questioning:
Kate walks away asking, “Kendra, what is your deal?” Kendra replies that Kate is a fucking bitch, Amber smiles, Kate sees this and asks Amber why she’s [Amber] smiling. Amber, who was lying down, gets up standing on her bed and says to Kate, “You wanna know how I feel? You talk shit about Kendra but then you’re the one who said if I was single I would be bringing home a different guy and doing him every night [swivels her hips in a circle].” Kendra begins laughing loudly, Amber continues as she gets off her bed and walks towards Kate, “You [Kate] said you’re embarrassed to do the screaming O but you can flip upside on the pole, how’d you learn that one?” Kate stands there with her mouth open and says nothing… Amber continues to yell at Kate and says, “I’m allowed to smile if I think that shit is funny. It’s funny to me, I’m allowed to sit in my bed and laugh at you anytime I want. Ha ha Kate, ha ha.” As she says this Amber walks back to her bed and lies down (Field Note 8.335-8.346).

The aggressive, confrontational and lack of fear approach comes from a desire for control and/or have dominance in the house. Even the emotions of negativity towards others stems from the women’s desire for dominance. When they feel challenged or overruled, the women resort to masculine performances of aggression: arguments, confrontations, yelling, etc. There is also a refusal to back down or submit to another, which is itself another masculine performance. These traditionally masculine traits of dominance, with little to no fear involved, also lead the women to
show little concern for others feelings as the individuals often see themselves as their only concern. This belief leads the women to often engage in more aggressive and insensitive verbal attacks on others. The combination of lack of fear, a desire for dominance, and self-centeredness often leads to personal attacks on those they felt threatened by. For example, when Lexie upsets Kate, Kate takes advantage of the situation to single out Lexie as different:

Lexie says to Paul, “So I heard something about 30 seconds?” Paul says, “Really?” Kate says that Lexie is being “Rude” and disrespectful to someone that Kate actually cares about and tells Lexie to “Shut the fuck up.”… Lexie is sitting quiet as Kate continues to yell, Kate says “You [Lexie] need a reality check like right the fuck now. You can’t just go around and walk up in this house acting like your one of us, you’re not, you’re the eighth bitch, that’s what you fucking are.” Lexie tries to lean forward and argue with Kate, but Kate yells, “Sit your ass down bitch, sit your ass down” (Field Note 6.203-6.209).

Kate, following masculine traits of self-interest and a desire for dominance over Lexie, points out Lexie’s difference from the remainder of the group and holds that against Lexie as a lesser qualification. Kate was feeling her dominance and as an “original” member in the household and even she felt challenged by Lexie, Kate exerted her dominance by ostracizing Lexie as unequal.
In a household filled with masculine performance practicing women challenges to others dominance was frequent. Each participant wanted her own piece of control in the house and when they believed they were being offended or mistreated by another the women often jump to verbal attacks, physical threats or expressions of anger towards the person they feel wronged them in order to vouch and maintain for their claim of control:

Flo, Amber, Kate and Paul are in the limo and Flo is telling them how she tried to look out for Kendra but she [Kendra] didn’t listen. When Kendra gets into the limo, Flo says, “Bitch I was looking out for you. You want to act like a slut then go ahead let every guy and every girl in this world look at you like a skank ass whore. I was 22, I’ve never done no shit like that in my life.” Kendra does not say anything at first, the limo pulls away and then Flo continues, “I aint no stupid trashy bitch like you hoes [she slaps the window in the limo].” Kendra now is kneeling on the floor of the limo looking at Flo and Kendra says, “You want to fight me right now?” Flo says, “All we do is stick up for you in this house, all I do I stick up for you, I try to look out for you… and you told me to go fuck myself.” Kendra yells back that she [Kendra] did not say that. Flo continues to yell at Kendra telling her [Kendra] to act like a slut. Kendra yells, “Fuck you Flo, fuck you, you fucking flip flopper.” The two continue to yell over people as they are on opposite ends of the limo; Flo grabs the black light and smashes it into the side of limo breaking it. Paul and
the other roommates try to calm Flo down and get her and Kendra to sit down. Flo calls Kendra a “dumb bitch”…. Back in the house Flo is still upset about her argument with Kendra and yells, “This aint the whore club, this is The Bad Girls Club, not the prostitute on 22nd club. Bitch. Whores. Wanna act like little sluts, No baby.” Flo walks downstairs into the kitchen (Field Note 6.252-6.294).

As the season progressed, the positions of ultimate control in the house were in constant shift, as the roommates refused to take a subservient role to one another and all continued their desire and actions for dominance. A few verbal confrontations lead to physical fighting in which one roommate physically harmed another. This type of behavior is traditionally exclusive to masculine performance. Physical violence is the ultimate form of aggression, and as femininity does not usually consist of face-to-face aggression, the idea of taking this aggression to the next level and becoming physical further categorizes these women as “Bad”.

Portia opens the front door to find Natalie and Kendra sitting on the steps of the porch. Portia says, “Where are you, you fucking stupid bitch, you wanna bring my daughter up in this bitch huh?” As she says this she walks straight up to Natalie and pushes her [Natalie] in the face, grabbing at her [Natalie] hair. Natalie reaches up and grabs at Portia. Portia beings swinging and throwing punches onto Natalie’s head. Natalie who is sitting down pulls Portia to the ground and Portia rolls onto her [Portia] back. Kendra is yelling,
“Natalie, Portia stop it.” Once Portia is on the ground Natalie being punching at Portia but the two fall back onto the ground. The two women are clinging onto another’s hair and trying to punch the other at the same time. The production crew steps in and tries to pull them apart. The crew is saying “stop” and they have to physically pick up both women to pull them away from one another to end the fight (Field Note 4.371-4.379).

The reasons which lead to physical violence are the same as those which lead to the verbal attacks, a disagreement or belief in offense by another person. Yet, the attacker feels at some point that verbal methods are not accomplishing their goals of dominance, through masculine practices, the attacker must take an even more extreme approach; physical violence, in order to reclaim and/or maintain their dominance in the house. The idea of reaching this level of aggression is unheard of in traditional feminine behavior, as physical aggressive performances are exclusively masculine traits. These levels of expressed anger would categorize the women as extremely unfeminine by traditional standards:

Amber takes off her jackets and throws it on the ground. She yells at Flo, “Hit me. I was already dead you, you stupid bitch, I don’t give a flying fuck.” Flo yells back, “I’m going to beat the fucking shit out of you.” Amber goes over to Flo and says, “Hit me right now” and Flo continues to repeat, “Your dead bitch”…. Flo is still standing in the pool complaining about her ankle and Amber is pacing around her saying, “You are nothing.” Flo exits the pool and
walks over to Amber who is sitting on the poolside couch. Amber says, “Hit me them.” Flo wobbles up to her and says, “Do you know who the fuck I am, bitch?” and grabs Amber by the hair, Annie and Lexie try to get in the middle and break them up but they cannot. Flo pulls Amber off the couch by her [Amber] hair and flings her [Amber] across the patio, Amber goes rolling on her back…. After throwing Amber onto the patio floor, Flo goes up to Amber but Amber kicks her [Flo] away then Lexie and Annie jump in between them (Field Note 7.265-7.280).

Feeling challenged by Flo, Amber refuses to back down. Flo feeling similarly by Amber then takes their altercation to a physical level as a display of dominance over Amber. When both women felt their original attempts of verbal attacks no longer satisfied their desire for control; their aggression escalated to a physical level. This escalation was present in many other women as well. As the season continued, the women seemed to be less content with verbal attacks, because both women involved almost always refused to surrender to the other meaning there was a lingering desire for dominance. This desire seemed to strengthen throughout the season, which was the cause of two of largest physical altercation that took place during the last few episodes:

Kendra and Natalie continue to yell and argue over almost getting arrested and who got the ticket. Kendra says Natalie can pay it in the mail, Natalie protests that she [Natalie] can’t. Suddenly Kendra pushes Natalie back, and Natalie
comes forwards towards Kendra. Kendra holds her [Natalie] back saying, “We’re not gunna fight.” Natalie pushes Kendra backwards saying, “No, you’re not gunna do that.” Then Kendra falls backwards and Natalie lands right on top of her [Kendra], as Natalie is still yelling, “I got the ticket.” Natalie stands up and tries to grab at Kendra who is still on the ground in some bushes. Kendra begins to kick at Natalie, and then Natalie gets back on the ground as the two women grab at one another hair and start swinging punches. Amber and Lexie come over to try to pull them a part; they grab Natalie and tell her [Natalie] to get off Kendra, as Natalie is on top. Natalie says, “No, get off Amber” and pulls a chunks of Lexie’s hair in the process. Natalie suddenly turns and grabs Amber by the hair, letting go of both Lexie and Kendra who are able to get up and move away from the scuffle. Amber is yelling to Natalie, “I’m trying to help you, get off my hair.” The production crew comes over to pull Amber and Natalie apart, who both have one another by the hair, when the crew lifts the two off the ground they begin to kick at one another and try to punch the other one, yelling “Bitch” and “Fuck you.” The crew finally gets them apart and Natalie yells, “No! Let me go, let me at Amber” (Field Note 11.452-11.465).

The most violent and physical altercations took place in the end of the season because the women were in a constant battle with one another for control. In the beginning expressions of verbal attacks sustained their attempts, but as the season
continued the women needed more extreme methods to win their battle for dominance. Therefore their performances of aggression had to be increased to physical violence. Any level of physical expressions of anger or frustration falls dominantly in the sphere of masculinity; these women are displayed the strongest behaviors of anti-femininity towards the end of the season:

Amber comes out to the porch and approaches Kate asking, “So you just smack Annie? Why? For what purpose?” Kate says to Amber, “Because I was supposed to smack you but she got in the way.” Amber says, “So smack me” but Kate says “No.” Amber says Kate hit Annie because Kate knew Annie would not hit her [Kate] back but Kate knows Amber will hit her [Kate] back. Kate walks closer to Amber and says “I’m sorry” and swings her arm towards Ambers faces. Almost instantly Amber swings her [Amber] arms back and grabs a hold of Kate’s hair. Lexie joins in and also grabs onto Kate’s hair, Amber M comes running out from the house and is yelling, “girls, girls, girls, stop!” Amber M is trying to split the three apart as the scuffle begins to spread into the driveway (Field Note 12.408-12.415).

The level of aggression and anger expressed by the women on this show would definitely place them outside of traditional feminine behavior. They expressed little fear in other’s reaction or in other’s perception of them as they regularly verbally and physically attacked one another throughout the season. Theirgendered performance in response to a desire for control often lead to very masculine
performances, which caused some roommates to leave the house for breaking rules against physical violence. These types of situations occurred often throughout the season in attempts to gain or maintain control and dominance in the house. As the season progressed, the levels of physical violence escalated due to the continued masculine performances and the desire to maintain control over another expressing similar performances of masculinity and refusing to submit. The roommates often showed little control over their aggressive expressions of anger and many times throughout the season properly categorized themselves as “Bad” at being “Girls”.

Although the desire for control and dominance in the house remains a common theme throughout the season, how the women seek this goal changes. As we have discussed thus far, often the women expressed this desire through extremely masculine and aggressive approaches: confrontations and verbal and physical violence against one another. Yet, the women did not always turn to these methods, and, as we will discuss in the next section often made use of very traditional feminine performances and expressions of anger. The women were not exclusively “Bad Girls” often they expressed themselves by very traditional feminine standards. Even when observing the same emotions: anger, offense, or dislike and desire for control and dominance. Not all their reactions would be described as a masculine aggressive classification, many times in the season the women portrayed much more traditional feminine approaches.
“Good Girls”

The women of “Bad Girls Club” did not always commit to being “Bad” in the understanding that their actions are going against feminine standards. Throughout the season, all of the women partook in very traditional feminine reactions to anger. Although their wording or belief in their own action may not follow a traditional role of femininity, their actions could be defined from a feminine standpoint. Therefore, the women could be labeled as “Bad” in that they engage in non-traditional feminine behaviors, such as physical violence, but their every actions or behavior on the show in total could not reach a conclusion as being solely “Bad”. Instead the women often portrayed very traditional feminine behaviors which could label them, at times, as being “Good” at being feminine, or female.

Following very traditionally feminine performance protocol, the women often made decision or based their actions as a way to avoid confrontation with a fellow roommate. These actions follow a more feminine standard of behavior as traditionally women are more likely to avoid conflict than men. Therefore in an effort to still accomplish their wish and avoid angering or upsetting another, the women would intentionally be dishonest. For example, when Kendra and Natalie wanted to go to a club, they plotted in the video diary room to leave Flo at home (Video Diary: Natalie and Kendra 9.214-9.218) then Natalie created a lie, informing Flo that there was a restriction out of Natalie’s control meaning Flo could not join them at the club (Field Note 9.237-9.242). In conducting these more feminine gender performances, the
women were able to avoid angering someone while still being able to accomplish their own goal. This traditionally feminine behavior is a less aggressive method of getting what is wanted without causing a scene or upsetting another person.

Another form of a very non-confrontational method was teasing or taunting someone behind their back. This concept of expressing one’s aggression/dislike to someone other than the individual who is the cause is considered extremely feminine, as traditional feministic behavior would dictate that a person should not cause a scene or confrontation by expressing her emotions. This method allows the individual to express their feelings of dislike or anger towards another in a private way without causing conflict and in most situations without the person in question even knowing.

Natalie asks what Lexie thinks of her [Portia’s] picture, Lexie says she thinks Natalie is cuter. Natalie says “Thanks” with a smile, then as Lexie leaves Natalie says to Kate “She’s [Lexie] really annoying I don’t like her” (Field Note 5.256-5.258).

Lexie, as the newest member of the household, fell victim to this type of passive aggressive teasing throughout her time on the show. Natalie, being most commonly the initiator of this action:

Kendra and Natalie are in a bedroom. Natalie says she [Lexie] has an ugly face and looks like a piglet “Oink oink” (Field Note 5.283-5.284).

Natalie and Kate are in the same bed under the blankets and Natalie says, “Miss piggy’s up.” Natalie laughs and Kate whispers, “Listen, listen. She’s
“Lexie” like, “I just ate ranch for like 30 minutes” [Flashes to Lexie eating chips in her bed] (Field Note 8.94-8.96).

This expression of dislike, anger, or objection is almost always expressed behind the individual’s back, which is considered a very traditional feminine action. Women are often expected to not cause an incident or be considered confrontational in any manner. In a way to avoid these labels often times women must express their emotions in private. Yet, because this is reality television we, as viewers, see these private moments either in the video diary room or with other roommates. By indirectly attacking, teasing, or taunting a person, the woman can express her emotions without facing a reaction of conflict or harm by the individual she is attacking. Often times the woman would wait to express her emotions until the individual who caused them was actually no longer in the house:

All the rest of the girls are in the video diary room saying, “We run LA now!” Annie says she has a personal message, “Natalie come *** my ass bitch.” The girls scream in excitement and Flo gives her a high five. Then in a bedroom, Flo asks Annie if she feels better now, and Annie says, “The person who picked on me is gone.” Flo hugs her. Next, Annie is seen jumping on a bed saying “Yay!” (Personal Video Diary: Multiple Roommates 2.454-2.457).

Annie expressed her feelings towards Natalie only once Natalie had left the house. Even the encouragement coming from the other roommates was not expressed
when Natalie was in the household. In a similar situation Amber expresses her true
feeling towards another roommate once the roommate had left:

Amber is standing right on the edge of the hot tub in order to reenact her
conflict with Flo, and Natalie and Kendra are holding Flo’s portrait saying,
“What are you gunna do?” Amber says, “I’m gunna push you in the pool” and
extends her [Amber] arms, as she does Flo’s portrait falls into the pool and all
three roommates cheer. Rich asks, “Soooo, you’re gunna leave her in the
pool?” Amber, standing over Flo’s portrait in the pool, responds, “Yah, I’m
gunna leave her in the pool, she said she was gunna drown me. Symbolically
she’s drowning in the pool.” Rich laughs and the two of them walk away
(Field Note 11.42-11.47).

Amber is able to show her dislike of Flo without risk of repercussions from
Flo herself because Flo has left the house. As the ultimate way to avoid conflict, some
roommates chose to wait until an individual had actually left the house before
expressing their true feeling towards them. These actions would be considered
extremely passive as the women openly express their emotions with no fear of
causing a scene because the other individual was no longer present. The women wait
until a safe time, meaning the attacker is no longer around, before expressing
aggression towards them.

As discussed in the previous section, there was a constant struggle in the
household for control and dominance between the roommates, but these feelings did
not always lead the women to masculine aggressive performances. Even when the goal was to upset or anger someone present, the women still made use of traditionally passive aggressive methods. As a way to express their anger towards another, the initiator often would do something that challenged the other without actually causing physical harm or being overly aggressive:

Kate is sitting on her bed and says, “It’s about to go off right now, I just threw all of Natalie’s shit out the window. Yah I just threw all her shit out the window.” Lexie begins to laugh quietly.

VD: Kate “Natalie loves her make-up, to put on a fake phony mask every day because the real her is so ugly inside and out, so I threw it out the window because I knew it was the most important thing to her. I don’t give a fuck, sorry” (Field Note 6.320-6.324).

There is no regret, as the purpose was to cause harm, annoyance, or anger the other in some way. Yet, the actions are passive aggressive as the initiator does not confront the individual with her feelings but makes her feeling regarding the other person known:

Natalie says, “Stupid bitch” and walks up to Kate’s room. Natalie says, “This bitch is going to have to live with it every day, this bitch is jealous” and begins to write in red marker “Jealous” over Kate’s bed. One of the other roommates is heard saying “don’t” but Natalie ignores it. Both Kendra and Lexie are shown looking shocked at what Natalie is doing. Natalie then writes
“jealous bitch” multiple times all over Kate’s white nightstand in the same red ink (Field Note 7.22-7.26).

Unlike masculine aggressive approaches, the women often chose to passively express their anger. The actions taken do not directly harm the individuals, but they do serve as challenges and as a refusal to submit. These passive aggressive actions follow a much more traditional feminine performance expectation; as feminine protocol would dictate it to be inappropriate for face-to-face confrontations to occur. The women avoid this by conducting passive challenges that fully express their feelings towards the other but in a non-aggressive manor.

Further aggressive passivity was used in the household during the season through other methods as well. For example, when a roommate was disliked or unpopular in the house, in almost every situation there was a group consensus or team unity by others in the house against the single outlying person. By having the support of others, one person’s dislike of another was validated or strengthened by those teaming up with them. This allowed the person who initiated the dislike to hide behind, and be included in, the validation of the group. The initiator could then openly display their dislike towards another person in a passive aggressive manner, as she was not the only one doing so, she could not be singled out as a sole attacker. Therefore the feelings of dislike are almost justified through the groups’ approval, allowing further actions to take place because of it:
“I was Florina’s last friend in the house. Sweetie, it’s over, everyone’s gunna be on my team and we’re all against you” (Video Diary: Natalie 9.324-9.325).

“I finally got the girls on the same page, Florina, you got to go [points her finger]” (Video Diary: Natalie 10.403).

Florina is the first in the house to experience this, as she begins to become less liked by Natalie the others increase their dislike as well and often refer to themselves as a “Team” against her. Besides Florina, Kate endears a similar situation of being ostracized by a group of others:

In the limo, Kendra is encouraging Amber to not “loose a second of energy, don’t lose a second of sleep worrying about why she [Kate] disappointed you.” As all the other women in the limo are talking. Kate sits left out of the conversation (Field Note 12.375-12.377).

“I can see Kate breaking down and I love it. Everyone is on my side and turning against her and tormenting her even more. Her days here are totally numbered” (Video Diary: Annie 12.378-12.379).

As women, traditional feminine standards would dictate that they are not allowed to openly express their feelings of dislike towards another person; by doing so women can face negative back lash such as being labeled a “bitch”. Therefore by creating a common consensus in the house, or with a group of other roommates, the women validate their feelings. It is the assumption that is it acceptable to not like another and treat the other poorly because the group or majority agrees that the
individual is disliked. It was a method used by the entire female household as a way to maneuver around traditional feminine restrictions on their feelings of dislike. If the majority of the household agrees with the initiator, than there is no one who can judge the initiator’s actions as unfeminine or unacceptable because the others’ actions are in agreement.

The roommates commonly used a team like force against their victim, who was also almost always solo in their defense. During these attacks the women did not always turn to physical violence, which would categorize them as masculine performances, as masculine team-like aggression is usually physically aggressive. Instead, they often made use of mental trickery, exclusion, or torment by turning others against the individual, or mentally tormenting the individual as a way to force the victim out. The women could not turn to physical aggression they made use of these relational passive aggressive methods as way to accomplish their goal. Most often these plots were expressed in the private video diary rooms:

“Kate you’re on my fucking list. Welcome to the bad girls house, were Kendra is on your ass. And I’ll make sure that your life is mother fucking miserable” (Video Diary: Kendra 8.355-8.386).

Similar feelings of aggression towards Kate were expressed by Amber in private:

“I want Kate to yell at me, I want Kate to yell at me because I’m gunna push her to point that she goes home” (Video Diary: Amber 12.373-12.374).
In doing this, the women are confrontational in a feminine manner. Instead of physically or verbally attacking the individual they decide to use relational aggression in order to achieve their goal, which is usually for the other person to leave the house. They control their anger, by not allowing it to lead to physical violence and instead use more traditional feminine behaviors including, exclusion, emotional pressure, and other non-physical methods. Yet, they express these plans in private in order to not be faced with negative backlash for these goals. Although each roommate partook in these actions at different times, there were a few roommates who made use of passive aggressive actions more than others, but no one partook in this action or behavioral type more than Annie:

Amber and Annie are in the kitchen looking for protein powder, Annie pours a white powder into it and Amber suggests sugar too.

VD Annie: “We’ve decided to mess with Kate’s protein shakes, so we put salt in it first, to make her bloat, and then we decided to put a whole bunch of sugar in it. So she’ll get really fat whenever she drinks a protein shake.”

Annie and Amber pour a large amount of sugar into the protein powder, shake it up and put in back in the self just the way it was when they found it. Annie says, “And we make Kate fat.” Annie and Amber walk out of the kitchen laughing (Field Note 9.124-9.131).

Annie’s actions allowed her to express her emotions towards Kate without actually having to be seen as aggressive, which allows her to maintain a traditional
feminine appropriate role. Annie’s personality and character often left her ostracized and distant from the other roommates, as she tended to make use of more traditional feminine actions, behaviors, and roles much more often than any other participant. Annie is worth exploring as she fulfilled a role which contradicts the title of the show. 

Annie

The women of “The Bad Girls Club” portrayed actions that would both support the assumption given by the title of the show, that they are “Bad” at being “Girls”, as well as discredit it; for many of their behaviors followed closely with traditional feminine standards. In sum of the women’s actions/behaviors/performances one character stands out distinctively as always landing on the more feminine side of the spectrum: Annie. Throughout the season Annie seemed to serve as juxtaposition for the other roommates. Out of all the roommates Annie most closely followed a more traditional approach to gendered behavior than any other participant. Annie would definitely qualify as the least aggressive in the house and at times served as an outlet for the other roommates to express their aggression, anger, or dominance in the house. From the beginning of the season Annie was openly against expressions of aggression or anger:

“Florina very much has a right to be upset but she doesn’t have a right to be knocking picture form the wall and screaming and calling everybody names. I just wish that everybody could keep their emotions in check” (Video Diary: Annie 3.294-3.296).
One of Annie’s largest complaints regarding the others was their aggression and physical violence which she was strongly against:

“I have no urge to fight, when I get frustrated I turn to my trusted friend; Potatoes chips” (Personal Video Diary: Annie 5.143).

Annie uniquely found herself the only roommates to not aggressively engage in conflict for control or dominance in the house. While the other women felt compelled to turn to verbal and physical attacks on one another (including Annie at times), Annie disliked this method of expression so much that often when violence erupted in the house she would attempt to separate herself from it as much as possible. For example when conflict or violence would erupt in the house, Annie would often times be seen exiting the area:

Annie is seen coming out from around the corner and going out the front door and shuts it behind her. [VD: Annie]: “The house is just irrupting in complete and utter chaos and I really don’t want to be involved so I’m just going to go far away and hide” (Field Note 6.343-6.346).

Unaccustomed to the level of aggression by the other roommates Annie physically removes herself from the house when the aggression is too much for her to bear. Annie followed a traditional feministic belief that one’s emotions or feeling should never escalate into causing a public altercation in any way, and most especially not violently. Annie abided by emotional control and avoided angering
others or, which allowed her to also avoid characteristically masculine forms of aggression by all means.

Although never one to cause a physical altercation, Annie did throughout the season express dislike or anger towards other roommates. Yet her performances related to these emotions were expressed exclusively through passive aggressive means, which makes her unique in this point alone. At one time or another all of the other roommates partook in some form of physical or verbal attack on another. Annie remained the exclusion and never used these aggressive forms. Instead, when expressing her emotions Annie always resorted to passive aggressive methods:

Annie is in the kitchen and is shown cutting a chunk of butter and microwaving it into liquid then pours it into a carton of egg whites. And shakes up the cartons and puts them back in the refrigerator.

VD: Annie: “Kate likes to make fun of me because she knows as mad as I’m ever gunna get, I’m never gunna hit her but just cuz I’m not gunna hit her doesn’t mean I won’t do other things to her. So I’ve decided to melt butter and put it in Kate’s egg whites. Watch out bitch” (Field Note 9.2-9.6).

Even though Annie maintained strong feels of dislike towards Kate she remains true to her traditionally feministic performance and chose to seek her revenge and anger towards Kate passively. As discussed in the previous section, using these methods allows Annie to express her emotions without concern of causing a
confrontation because it is done in private. Annie takes her vengeance a step further by using information she has learned about Kate to her advantage:

Annie is upstairs emptying two bottles of hair spray by just holding the lids down nonstop. Then places the spray can back in the drawer.

VD: Annie: “Kate actually had her mom send her more of her hair spray, so I’m just spraying even though it’s bad for the ozone layer. Kate is as dumb as a box of rocks and trashy” (Field Note 12.101-12.104).

Compared to the other roommates, Annie did not hold a desire for control and dominance in the house and when she did harbor ill feelings towards someone she expressed her emotions in very passive aggressive ways. Annie refused to partake in the struggle for control in the house, instead willingly taking a weaker role, and remaining true to traditionally feminine characteristics and performance. She thought very poorly of the aggressive and violent tendencies of the other roommates, which marginalized her while in the house.

Other feministic tendencies of Annie often made her very unique in the house, for example, throughout the season Annie made comments on individual’s use of grammar and correct spelling. This behavior further categorized Annie as someone who is very aware of how others view her and considerate of others opinions of her, an attribute much more prevalent in feminine standards. She used this focus on grammar as a way to separate herself from others she disliked, yet still in her passive aggressive, non-confrontational way:
Annie and Rich are sitting downstairs and Annie says, “Yay, Flo is gone.” Rich says the only reason they all wanted her [Flo] gone is because they [The roommates] were scared of her [Flo]. Annie says, “No I wanted her gone because she burps and uses improper grammar and she’s crass and rude.” Rich responds asking, “Improper grammar? Are you serious?” Annie says that is the main reason (Field Note 11.15-11.18).

With roommates coming from different areas around the country it is understandable that each individual may have different dialects, slang and general pronunciations of words. Language and grammar usage did not seem to be even a slight issue to anyone else in the house except for Annie. Quite often, Annie brought up this issue, never in a confrontational way, as Annie followed more traditional feministic roles and only made her comments to others or after the individual was out of hearing distance, thus abiding by traditional feminine passive aggressive standards. Annie continued to differ from the other roommates in other topics such as sexual encounters with others as well:

Annie says she is fine with nakedness because it’s natural. Kendra walks in and says, “Sex is natural too.” But Annie disagrees and says it should be done in private, and says no one has to agree with her [Annie] but it’s how she feels (Field Note 6.147-6.149).
Annie used her difference in opinion on sexuality to separate herself from others, just as she did with her focus on grammar. Annie had much more conservative beliefs on expressions of sexuality and sexual practices:

Amber asks, “Haven’t you had sex before?” Annie answers, “Not on the first date.” Kendra comments that it’s not Natalie and Rodrick’s first date, it is their second. Annie says, “Not with the lights on and the door open with six girls running around” (Field Note 9.180-9.182).

The difference between Annie and the other roommates on acceptable sexual behavior seemed to cause the largest divide between Annie and the others. The other women all practiced many more adventurous sexual encounters and were much more accepting of others doing so as well. Annie’s feelings on sexual relationships followed a more traditional feminine role. Annie was the only roommates to not partake in a sexual relationship of some manner with someone while living in the house.

Inevitably, Annie’s differences in beliefs and practices caused a major divide between herself and her fellow roommates. She verbally put down their masculine and aggressive actions both publicly and privately and maintained her dedication to feminine characteristics throughout the season. Annie’s actions, beliefs and behaviors often lead her to be a marginalized victim of others attacks:

Annie is driving and Natalie attempts to teach Annie how to “ride like a chulo.” Annie lowers the seat but has an uncomfortable look. Both women
laugh. Natalie says Annie has to practice on how to hold the steering wheel and pretends she [Natalie] is driving with one hand as an example. Annie says, “Ten and two baby. Ten and two.” Natalie responds, “Fuck ten and two Annie” and continues to try to get Annie to drive like she [Natalie] is. Annie does and yells “Oh my God.” Natalie says she wants Annie to “feel the moment and go with the flow” because Annie is “real uptight and so…” mmmm…. Ten and two ten and two” in a condescending voice than laughs. Annie sits quietly; visibly unhappy (Field Note 2.91-2.96).

All of the other members of the household recognized Annie’s difference in gendered practices and often pointed them out, using Annie as an outlet for their aggressive methods. Annie’s differences even cause her Bad Girl status to be put into question by some because Annie did not express her emotions in masculine forms as the other did.

VD: Kate: “Here comes Annie with her gloves on and her sponge. Yelling at everyone in the house. She’s Miss tidy. She’s Miss librarian. Stop being a mom start being a bad girl” (Video Diary: Kate 2.151-2.152).

Annie was often the victim of others anger, and because the others practiced more “bad” girl qualities, i.e. masculine expressions of anger, Annie was often the recipient:

Kate grabs the jugs full of juice and pours two of them over Annie’s head. Annie protests at first but then just stands there and lets it happen and even
dances once Kate runs out. Kate turns around and dances with Trish again.

Amber who is sitting in the booth laughs as she gives Annie a drink from her cup and Annie continues dancing (Field Note 8.421-8.424).

While another roommate’s reaction to this may have led to a physical confrontation, Annie who completely rejects such masculine expressions, instead resorted to ignoring Kate’s harassment. Even in situations when Annie could have confronted Kate to express her anger towards Kate, Annie abides by traditional feminine protocol and dismissed her feeling and emotions so as not to cause an altercation with Kate. For example, when Kate caused Annie to cry by flirting with a man Annie was interested in, Annie refused to discuss it because she was so angry. By doing this Annie avoids an argument and puts her emotions aside to save face. In similar situations it is safe to assume any other participant in the house would have chosen a much more aggressive reaction towards Kate. Annie, instead, chose to avoid the issue and publicly dismiss Kate and her emotions (Field Note 12.80-12.94).

Even when Annie was picked on, singled out, and made to endure others offense she never resorted to physical or verbal violence. It was almost as if, Annie’s purpose was to serve as the complete opposite of the rest of the house. Annie was often the only “good” girl in a house full of “bad” girls, in the sense that Annie abided by a very traditional feminine role throughout her time in the house almost unquestionably. Annie never faltered from her belief and practice in traditionally feminine performances, but because of this she often found herself as an outlet for
others expressions of aggression. Annie’s actions and behaviors throughout the season caused certain roommates to question her purpose on the show as she differed so drastically from every other participant. She was often the victim of harassment and teasing, yet never strayed from her traditional beliefs in feminine practices and behaviors which included anti-violence, passive aggressive anger tactics, conservative ideals on sexual relationships, and a focus on others opinions of intelligence and femininity. Annie served as a quintessential example of the perfect traditionally feminine role, which seems to differ completely than the focus of the show, which is woman being “Bad”. Yet, perhaps by having Annie on the show as the “Good Girl”, the “Bad” behavior of the other women was more pronounced, as Annie served as a counter role to everyone else. Annie’s presence allowed other women to express dominance, aggression, and at times violence which exemplified the title of the show. Annie was not always the recipient of these expressions but her behaviors portrayed a counter option for an expression of these emotions, and further emphasized the “Bad” in the other women.

Acceptable Sexuality

As can be seen thus far, the women of “The Bad Girls Club” display both masculine and feminine characteristics and behaviors. This co-gendered expression can be found in the women’s sexuality as well, throughout the season the “Bad Girls” were good at being girls at times, while still maintaining their “Bad” status at other times. For example, sexual aggressiveness is a trait strongly associated by masculine
characteristics. Throughout the season different roommates expressed differing levels of sexuality and sexual aggressiveness, yet their expression seemed to almost go hand-in-hand with their general aggressiveness. For example, Natalie, as one of the most aggressive women in the house, also practiced very dominant and in-charge flirtation with men throughout the season:

They walk into the club and Natalie starts immediately dancing on this man, she walks away and says to Annie “You want him?” Natalie laughs and pulls Annie in another direction (Field Note 1.310-1.312).

On multiple occasions Natalie initiated physical contact with the person she was interested in:

Natalie points to the same gentleman Annie was talking to earlier, gives him an innocent looks and indicates for him to come over. He points at himself in question, and then walks over to her. She [Natalie] comes in close to him and begins whispering into his ear and holding his hand and dancing with him (Field Note 2.217-2.219).

Sexual aggression, just as standard aggression, is traditionally trademarks of masculine characteristics. Males are categorized as more of the hunter, on the prowl looking for a partner. While, in comparison women are considered the prey; the individuals the men are after. Yet the women of this show often flip this traditional script and take it upon themselves to pursue someone they are interested in or are attracted to:
There is a knock at the door and Annie opens it to find a man there to water their plants. Flo walks up, shakes his hand and suggest he does the work with his shirt off, Flo says, “I don’t like shirts.” Annie says they should show the man the plants inside too. Flo grabs the man’s shirt and lifts it to expose his abdomen, the two girls shriek and one says, “Oh my God.” Annie takes the man into the house pointing out plants throughout; Flo says, “I told you if you’re watering plants you cannot wear your shirt.” Flo continues to ask the man to take his shirt off, he finally lifts it to expose his abdomen again, this time Flo rubs her hands on his abs and Annie touches them as well. Flo says, “Oh my God” and he says, “Thank you very much” and gives Annie a high five. The man continues to follow Annie and Flo walks behind him pretending to squeeze his buttocks. He begins watering plants and Flo decides to sit down and watch him do his job.[VD: Flo]: “If there’s one thing that I love it’s eye candy. If he’s hot, I wanna stare at him.”

FN: The man finally takes his shirt completely off and Flo spills her drink as she watches him. Flo says, “Oh my God, I love my life.” Flo walks up the man telling him that he is the most beautiful thing in LA that she has seen so far and shares a hug with the man as she does so she says, “Oh you’re warm” and follows him outside. He continues to water plants and Flo continues to watch saying a dying plant will be happier once he touches it. VD: Flo “I just want to lick everything off of his body, he is so sexy” (Field Note 5.13-5.29).
Traditional femininity would dictate that women are to play a more modest role in the pursuit of attraction. The women on the show usually ignored this gendered standard. The Bad Girls followed a more masculine approach to sexual attraction and thusly did not follow the traditional subordinate role of femininity. When it comes to sexual expression the women displayed strong characteristics; initiating and acting on their sexual interests. Their masculine traits were even further displayed through their discussions and openness regarding sex. The women can be seen as very forward and assertive about sex in public:

The roommates are shown walking around Venice Beach, playing in the sand and water and shopping. Natalie walks up to a male street vender dressed with a claw necklace and wearing a Speedo and says, “I just wanna ask you how big your penis is?” He laughs. She says she “loves his outfit” and tells him he looks like a Rockstar and that his penis looks very large. All the roommates are shown walking along Venice Beach boardwalk laughing and talking to men (Field Note 4.25-4.29).

The concept of openness towards sex and a desire for sex is most commonly held in the masculine sphere. For women, are traditionally expected to appear to be available for sex but not be forceful or overly desiring sex. As the prey, traditional femininity would dictate not only that men initiate sexual interaction but are also the ones who desire it. Yet, the Bad Girls very often throughout the season expressed their open and strong interest in sex:
“I’m probably the horniest bad girl in the house. I like to have sex; I’m not going to lie and I just need to have somebody to have sex with” (Video Diary: Kendra 2.202-2.203).

The women even defend their actions in the house based on their need and lack of sex:

Natalie and Kendra are discussing how sexually frustrated they are. Natalie says, “Seven girls cooped up in a house ready to fucking explode on each other” (Field Note 2.344-2.353).

Society most commonly categorizes men as the ones with high sex drives. For a man, sex is traditionally seen more as a need which must be fulfilled or else expressions of frustrations may result. Yet, the women in “The Bad Girls Club” relate these sexual needs to themselves as well and even excuse their hostile communications with one another due to a lack of sex. As a solution to this desire, the women are often openly sexually explicit in discussing their use of masturbation and sex toys:

Flo says there is a lot of sexual frustration in the house, like Kendra yelling she [Kendra] is horny, but she admits that she [Flo] has “taken care of herself a few times so I’m good” (Video Diary: Flo 2.345).

They even encourage one another in hopes that by satisfying this desire the house will be more peaceful:
Flo says that they are all horny and left guys at home who they use to have sex with and now are in a house with “no penises” and that’s why they are going crazy. She tells them to masturbate. Kendra laughs. She [Flo] offers her assistance to Natalie if she [Natalie] needs it (Field Note 2.327-2.329).

In sum, the masculine trait of strong sexual desire was very acceptable and almost generally understood in the house. The women’s strong sexual appetite and aggressiveness, both publicly and privately, can be strongly categorized masculine behaviors. In this respect the women did not follow traditional feminine protocol in the slightest form, and instead aligned themselves with masculine dictations of sexual expressions. Yet, even though the Bad Girls often took a more masculine approach to sexual expression, they usually did so by abiding by certain societal pre-described roles of sexuality for women. Concepts such as sexual physical attributes do align with femininity and were followed closely by the group. For example, methods used to attract men usually involved overt signs of sexual availability:

Lexie and Natalie are introduced on stage and they go up and begin dancing and grinding on each other (Field Note: 5.373).

What are acceptable expressions of sexuality was not always agreed upon by the entire household. Yet even Annie, the most modest of the roommates, engaged in strong sexual activity to attract men:

A group of men arrive at the house and Annie lets them in, they are all friends with Jeremy [Natalie’s friend] and the men and women introduce themselves.
Next Flo and Annie are in a bedroom with a man and Annie is dancing on the stripper pole. He mentions money but Flo says, “We don’t need no money.” Annie does not catch on at first but finally does and laughs (Field Note 4.177).

Throughout the season, the women spend much time and attention on their physical appearance around men. Every episode contained at least one scene of the women in the dressing room, doing their hair, make-up or choosing appropriate outfit for their outing. It was obvious that appearance was a high priority to the women at all times. Even though the women went against traditional feminine standards of initiation and aggressiveness, they played a proper feminine role in abiding by sexual standards of appearance and availability. Yet the levels of sexual expressions and activity were not always agreed upon unanimously in the house. One of the largest disagreements dealt with the idea of a roommate staying sexually faithful to her boyfriend while in the Bad Girls house:

Kate and Amber are outside by the pool talking about Natalie. Kate says, “Natalie is a bitch, I have a boyfriend and you will never see me cheat on him.” Amber agrees. Kate says Natalie will be punished for cheating on Olimade either here on the show or after. Kate says Gabe must be “some cracked out shit” to want to sleep with Natalie (Field Note 5.418-5.426).

When entering the house at the beginning of the season, Natalie, Amber, Kate and Portia were all in relationships. When Natalie began to express sexual interest in other men, some of the other roommates immediately disapproved of her actions:
Natalie is talking to her friend Jeremy about why it’s good she is a hustler and says “If some else brakes bread on me, I flip that ten times more.” The other roommates notice Natalie’s attention to Jeremy as she [Natalie] begins to dance and rub her body on him. VD: Amber: “Natalie is dancing around she supposedly has a boyfriend and she looks like a big huge slut butt. If she really cared about Olimade she wouldn’t do it” (Field Note 4.169-44.173).

Natalie’s attention towards this man violated the other roommates’ standards of faithfulness towards Natalie’s boyfriend. The other roommates seemed to align themselves more towards traditional feminine behavior which dictates a women’s role in being honest to one partner at a time. Yet, Natalie followed a much more masculine approach by attracting and engaging in sexual acts with multiple partners. It is somewhat understandable that Natalie, being one of the more aggressive in the house would follow a more masculine role in sexuality, but, the other large violator of the traditional feminine role was Annie, in her confession of often having relationships with married men:

VD Annie: “I’ve dates married men before, my last boyfriend was married the whole time we were dating [shrugs shoulders].”

FN: Kendra says, “You’re a home wrecker” to Annie and Amber begins questioning Annie about how she [Annie] would feel and if she [Annie] ever wants to get married in the future. Amber says it’s ok “to have a crush, but to
be like he’s married but I don’t care I would fuck him still, I don’t know, I think that weird” (Field Note 4.57-4.59).

The entire house was unsupportive of Annie’s previous relationships with married men. The other roommates saw this as a complete offense on Annie’s behalf: Flo, Amber, Kendra, Portia, Annie, and Kate all take a house vehicle to a restaurant. Once there and sitting, Annie says she does not know married men who wear wedding rings and that’s why she gets into trouble. Flo says a person is married if they go home at a certain time. Annie says he [her ex-boyfriend who was married] didn’t do that. Amber asks Annie, “Don’t you feel like your second to somebody else?” Annie says she had a problem with that but that she “was already invested.” Annie said she justified the relationship in her head by arguing that “his wife got pregnant and he had to marry her, he didn’t want to.” Portia says, “Even if the home is broken that is not your responsibility to go into that home and break up what they have. That’s selfish. That’s so selfish.”

14: 06 VD Portia: “I like Annie. I just really don’t think she sees the big picture. Like if he’s really married with two kids, like I wouldn’t do that it’s just not right” (Field Note 4.134-4.147).

In this circumstance even the most sexually aggressive members of the household did not support Annie in dating married men. As we discussed in the previous section, Annie served as the quintessential feminine role in the house except
in this matter, or so it would appear. Annie admittedly broke the concept of faithfulness by having relationships with married men, yet, a closer look at this situation uncovers deeper reasoning. It could be argued that Annie, being the proper feminine role model, was in fact following feminine protocol by making herself available to men no matter the man’s circumstance. The facts of the man’s relationship status fell inferior to the feminine ideal of availability. Also, Annie remained true to her partner and therefore was staying true to a devoted relationship (regardless of the man doing the same). Annie’s actions put the fault, and masculine characteristics, on her partner, while she remained true to her feminine ideal of availability and loyalty.

Annie’s actions were viewed with heavy disapproval by the other household members. Although masculine standards would dictate a wide array of sexual partners, the household (excluding Annie) did not consider married men an option. In this situation the women abided by more a traditional feminine code, in that, a married couple are to only engage in sex with one another. The women defended monogamous relationships in this aspect. There were limits to the socially acceptable behavior towards sexuality in the house and there was often disagreement. Nonetheless there was a general acceptable standard of more aggressive forms of sexual attraction then traditional femininity would dictate, although even this depended on the relationship status of the women and man involved.
When viewing the sexual practices of the women on the show it is clear that they practiced strong masculine behaviors: sexual assertiveness, confidence and openness. Yet, while conducting these masculine actions the women also were following very traditional feminine standards of societal beauty, attractiveness and sexual availability. Going back to the original assumptions from the title that these women are “Bad” at being “Girls”, could be supported by their vast displays of masculine traits, yet, the women often displayed strong feminine characteristics as well which would make them successful at being “Girls”. In the next chapter we will discuss these dual gender characteristics and the meaning behind the messages being transmitted through “The Bad Girls Club”.

*Public Viewing*

The two public viewings were held as an attempt to identify the engagement the audience has with the messages that are being disseminated from “The Bad Girls Club.” Almost all of the participants either never heard of the program or had never seen an episode. The most pronounced reaction to “The Bad Girls Club” was the shock value it produced in the audience. From the start of each episode the participants were in awe of almost every aspect of the women on the show, from their dress, to their language, to the aggression- the participants were immediately shocked within the first few seconds of each episode. This initial shock seemed to continue into undisturbed interest throughout the one-hour program. Even when discussion would get side-tracked at the table (for example: when food arrived or there was a
commercial break) the show would quickly regain everyone’s attention and in little
time they were all refocused on the program.

This reaction was seen in the participants as well as others in the restaurant. In
the first showing, the restaurant had “The Bad Girls Club” playing throughout the
dining area on about a dozen televisions. During the showing, on multiple occasions,
employees of the restaurant were seen stopping, sometimes in groups, to watch the
program. Other customers could be seen watching the television or gathering in the
lobby area to watch the show. The program was clearly grabbing people’s attention;
in fact, full tables of customers were seen neither talking to one another nor eating,
but starring at the screen. During the second viewing, the participants were placed in
a separate bar area with only two televisions. Yet, even with this smaller availability
of screens, employees and customers were drawn to the program and paused for a few
seconds to watch. During this occasion, it was even noticed that employees from the
kitchen were standing in view of the television to watch the program for small
amounts of time. The restaurant was designed so customers had to walk by the bar
area to get to the main dining and multiple people paused to watch the show on the
way to their table.

The attention grabbing nature of the show would indicate that the messages
being disseminated from the show are being communicated (i.e. distributed). As the
audience is watching a reality television, ideally representing the factual lives of
individuals, certain cultural messages exist, including those related to gender. The
fact the audience was interested from the beginning to the end of each episodes
ensures that messages are transmitted as the audience is not distracted and focus was
maintained. The acceptance of messages may vary, but the obvious and consistent
interest, at the very least, would indicate that cultural messages, including those
regarding gender are being translated through “The Bad Girls Club”. While, both of
the viewings were able to capture and maintain the participants, and others interests,
their reactions throughout the episodes varied.

The participants would often comment on the physical attractiveness of the
bad girls, “She could be really pretty like a model or something” or “I think that girl
is cute, she’s all matching and stuff”. When there was clear approval or positive
reaction it was related to the physical attractiveness or beauty of the Bad Girl. These
reactions display the acceptance of the Bad Girls by the audience, as well as the
general understanding and cooperation with the importance of the feminine standards
of attractiveness for women. The audience approved of the Bad Girls based on their
feminine expression of beauty and the audiences’ understanding of this. When it
came to the appearance of the Bad Girls the participants were generally in an
agreement of acceptance.

In a few instances the participants attempted to rationalize the Bad Girls’
behavior by comparing it to their own. For example, there were many negative
comments on how the Bad Girls chose minimal clothing options throughout the
episodes, one participant asked the table “Yah, but who doesn’t walk around their
own house in their underwear?” In response a few participants admitted to doing so. There were a few instances where a certain outfit choice was complimented by the participants or a participant admitted to having or wanting similar styles of clothing. There were also a few gasps and reactions to the dirty status of the house the Bad Girls lived in. After one comment about the dirty house another participant mentioned that she had little room to complain because her own desk at work is just as disorganized. Lastly, during one of the episodes the women of “The Bad Girls Club” were seen stripping, and when some at the table seemed to disapprove, one participant announced that she had taken some stripping classes herself. This voluntary confession actually changed the general feeling at the table as other participants admitted to being interested in taking stripping lessons as well.

At this point in the viewing, the participants took their acceptance of the women one step further by finding similarities between the Bad Girls and their private lives. The participants rationalized the Bad Girls behavior by giving examples and using situations from their own experiences. This not only states acceptance of the Bad Girls but clarifies similarities and commonalities between the audiences’ viewing the show and the messages being translated. The audience has now applied the Bad Girls behavior to themselves making the connection between what they see on television and their own lives, which is vital in message transmittal, acceptance, and implementation. Although most of the reactions to the women on “The Bad Girls
Club” at first appeared negative, in some situations the participants seemed to accept the behavior, and even defend or relate it to their own lives.

As the episode viewings progressed there was clearly more use of profanity, explicitly, and vulgarity by the participants. In general, even the phrases and comments became crasser and almost began to sounds more like the ways in which the bad girls speak on the program. Even the volume of the participants grew louder throughout the episodes. This evolution could be seen in each participant. As they commented poorly on the behaviors and actions of the Bad Girls, they began to react in behavior more similar to the Bad Girls than when the viewing initially began. To add to this change in behavior, the participants even began to mockingly threaten or copy the aggressiveness shown by the bad girls. For example, in the first showing the female participants all took notice of the physical attractiveness of the waiter, they discussed and giggled about it in private throughout the episode, but it wasn’t until the end of the episode that the female participants informed the waiter about their thoughts. Also during both showing, the participants would mockingly challenge one another, saying “You wanna fight” or “Let’s go right now” in reaction to another who they disagreed with. The group often made jokes about engaging in fights themselves, which caused great laughter at both events. Lastly, during the second showing a few participants even purposed a toast, cheered, and chanted “Bad Girls” as they laughed about starting their own Bad Girls Club.
This positively identifies the translation of messages as the women are now mimicking the behavior of “The Bad Girls Club.” In a one hour episode the audience was able to clearly engage with the messages being disseminated. It began with acceptance, as the audience identified positive attributes about the Bad Girls. This moved to rationalization and discovering similarities with the Bad Girls and their own private lives. Finally, the audience implanted the messages they received by copying the behavior and actions of the Bad Girls. Although, the threats of violence were in a joking manner, the conduct of the audience changed drastically from the beginning of the episode to the end which means certain messages were communicated, received, and put to use supporting the idea of audience engagement.

This is not to infer that all messages were openly accepted by the audience; quite the contrary, there was quite a bit of shock and disapproval throughout the episodes as well. The most common reaction by non-participants (i.e. others in the restaurant) was a general disgust; one woman was seen covering her mouth and shaking her head, but she did not look away from the screen for a significant amount of time. Coinciding with the shock value of the show there were comments such as “Nasty” “Gross” and “Oh my god” over fifteen times during the two showings. The participants were clearly taken aback by the women on the show and it was obvious that an overwhelming majority of the shock steamed from disapproval. The leading topic of disapproval was in the clothing, or lack of clothing, worn by the Bad Girls. Statements such as, “I can’t believe what they wear”, “She has clothes on, that’s the
first time she has had clothes on and she still looks like shit” and “Again with the thong wearing girl” summarize the general feelings of dislike from the clothing choices on the program. Another noticed reaction held solely by the older participants was disapproval for the body modification the bad girls had chosen. Statements included: “Are her dimples pierced?” “That one girl right here is why makeup companies make millions of dollars” and side discussions on tattoos and piercings. These comments were held only by the older participants (those over the age of 40), and were not as universally agreed upon as those related to clothing.

The Bad Girls are presenting messages of gendered behavior and actions, and the audience, who is intensely viewing, are receiving those messages. But unlike the ones discussed previously, these messages seem to cross the line of appropriate gendered messages (based on the individual’s ideal of appropriate gender expectations) therefore they were rejected. Yet, this does not mean that messages were not transmitted. The audience takes away from these scenes ideas of inappropriate gendered behavior. These ideas still frame their actions, behaviors, ideals, etc. just not in as obvious a way the previous ones. Instead these messages inform the audience of inappropriate behavior that should not be reflected, which is why the audience was so quick to verbally dismiss them. The participants were still distributed gendered messages, this is clear by the engagement heard and seen by the researcher, but they were implemented differently because they fall into an unsuitable sphere.
All message implantation is depended upon the individual receiving the message. Because of this, and because the basis of this research is gendered messages, it is important to identify the engagement difference between the male and female participants. At both showings the number of women participants heavily outweighed the men; the first showing included 8 women and 2 men while the second included 11 women and 2 men. Yet, for both showings there was a male viewer present, and although in both instances they were the quieter participants in the group there were a few reactions worth noting. In general the men shared the initial shock value and disapproval of certain behaviors displayed by the Bad Girls just like the women participants. Yet, their most distinguishable difference involved the provocative nature of the women on “The Bad Girls Club.” Both viewings included scenes of the Bad Girls going out to club or bars, where the women danced erotically, often times stripping, grinding, kissing, and engaging in provocative behaviors with one another and others. Even when the women participants seemed to be shocked and disapproving the male participants were clearly not having the same reaction. At one point, another participant called out one of the men for smiling and the man defended himself saying, “Hey she’s a grown women she can do what she wants” (in reference to the Bad Girls dancing on one another in the episode). On another occasion, the Bad Girls were stripping on table tops and one man yelled out, “Where is this club? I need to go.” The other female participants did not seem to be bothered by the men’s
interest, which was so blatantly different from their own; the women did point it out once or twice but nothing further was said.

The male participants held very different acceptances of the messages that the Bad Girls were disseminating when it involved levels of acceptable sexuality and being provocative compared to the female viewers. While the females believed these messages were beyond their level of acceptability, the men seemed very accepting, even encouraging. As men, who are more prone to masculine traits, it is understood why the men would have this reaction to these messages. As feminine sexual protocol dictates sexual availability, the men were in agreement with these messages. The men bring to the table a different view point, as they would not be considered to mimic or replicate certain actions by the Bad Girls, so the messages from their perspective would never reach this stage. Instead, what the men do by accepting this behavior is reinforce the feminine protocol for sexual availability. The men of the group therefore engage with “The Bad Girls Club” slightly different, they still are receiving transmitted messages, buy they, as men, would not be expected to replicate female behavior from the television show but they are capable of reinforcing or supporting the standards for females, which they did.

It is clear that messages were being communicated from “The Bad Girls Club” to the viewers; both participants of the study and passer-bys. This can be seen in their reaction, acceptance, rejection, and implantation of those messages while watching. Displays of engagement with the messages differed based on the individual. As “The
Bad Girls Club” is designed as a reality television program, it is ideally supposed to represent real life; which includes gendered behaviors, actions, expressions, etc. Therefore, the audience was engaging with specifically gendered messages while watching the program; some of which developed into full implantation, while others were rejected. Still, even the male participants found themselves receiving and engaging with gendered messages during the public viewing.
Chapter 5: Discussion

“The Bad Girls Club” centers around a group of women who are “Bad” at being “Girls”, thus their feminine characteristics are put into question simply by the title of the show. The aggressive nature displayed by some of the women would seem to validate this belief. There are multiple scenes of physical and verbal confrontations, attacks, and, at first glance, masculine expressions of emotion. Yet, it would be overly eager to fully categorize each woman as completely “Bad” at being feminine because, many of the actions, responses, and communications in the house also reflect very traditional feminine performances. The women of this show seem to walk a line between traditionally masculine performances and traditionally feminine performances.

The most obvious contradiction to the title of the show, yet perfect example of feminine standards, was Annie because she aligned herself most closely with traditional feminine characteristics throughout the season. Annie’s entire persona on the show was a message to the female viewers of the proper feminine ideal by traditional standards. Even when she did express non-traditional practices like revenge or anger it was done passively and through socially acceptable feminine expressions. The viewers who may be off-put by the aggression and violence of the other women can look to Annie and see how the traditional feminine expressions of handling emotions like anger and dislike are dealt with. Those who mirror Annie’s behaviors are mirroring traditionally feminine characteristics. Annie served as an
alter-ego to the other women in the house (i.e. the ultra-feminine) often times allowing the other women the opportunity to express their dominance. Annie’s meek and understated character combined with her unwillingness to be as aggressive as the others, lead her roommates to often express their dominance over her or even in protection of her. Without Annie the entire dynamics of the household would have been very different; meaning, that without Annie many of the other roommates might not have had an opportunity to express their masculine performances.

This leads to the idea of the dependency of masculinity on femininity; in order for someone to be dominant another must be subordinate. The women of “The Bad Girls Club” needed Annie in order to express their “hegemonic masculine” traits at times. As “hegemonic masculinity” uses its superior standing in the gender hierarchy to define what constitutes femininity, it therefore needs femininity to serve as it’s “other”. Masculinity cannot be expressed or used without the co-existence of femininity to serve as subordinate and opposite (McGuffrey, Shawn and Rich 1999; Weitzer and Kubrin 2009). The battle for power within the Bad Girl’s house led to verbal and physical fights, but there was always Annie who served as the subservient feminine to another’s dominance and masculine performance. This message speaks to the connection between gendered behaviors, and how a pure existence of masculine traits depends upon and cannot be fully expressed without femininity.

Complete masculine performances did not dominate the show; there were plenty of expressions of proper feminine characteristics. There was a significant
amount of time throughout the season where the participants were grooming, dressing or physically preparing themselves to go out in public. They were putting in large amounts of effort to reach the social standards of beauty in our culture as a way to attract men and achieve the feminine standard of beauty in society. The women also used appearances of strong sexual availability in attracting men. These images clearly send messages in support of traditional feminine standards as they are teaching women how to achieve feminine standards of attractiveness and by doing so are thus perpetuating the status quo of gendered societal standards for women in society.

Many of the altercations on the show resulted in non-traditional feminine behaviors, yet, can still be seen as reflective and often times based on feminine standards and expectations. Some were caused by means of protection, one woman standing up for another (such as was very common for Annie) others were reinforced by a relational aggression (encouragement and reinforcement by others). These actions fall within feminine expressions of behavior (not exclusively, but would qualify as feminine nonetheless). Following this logic, it may be possible to conclude that without the relational passive aggressive support, or need of protection for another, these emotions and feelings may not have even led to a masculine level of aggression. It is important to indentify that these aggressive expressions were created from and supported by traditional feminine characteristics. In this way the end result was very “Bad” at being feminine (the expression of verbal or physical violence) but
the cause and creation behind it would argue just the opposite, that these women followed very traditional feminine roles, behaviors and actions.

Similar levels of aggression can be seen in women’s expressions of sexuality. As the women could be categorized as masculine for their sexual aggressiveness one can also see that they abided by societal pre-described codes of femininity while conducting this behavior. It was usually at night, in bars, clubs, or acceptable areas and times of attraction when the women made use of their sexual aggressiveness. By being sexually aggressive the Bad Girls also made clear their sexual availability, which is a standard for feminine sexuality. Therefore, although they may have followed more aggressive forms of attractions than socially pre-described for women, they did so by also complying with societal feminine standards. Denzin argues that messages disseminated through the media are crafted by, and therefore reflections of, societal norms (1992; 1995; 2002). This commonality is the reason why certain individuals make certain media selections, because they are drawn to them; because they are relatable. Thus, even in a program which is advertised to portray women of deviant or unfeminine characteristics, actions, and behaviors, these women are transmitting messages of standard traditional feminine performances. Even certain actions which may at first appear to contradict the traditional feminine ideal, in fact are based from or abide by them nonetheless. The women of the show must at times appear feminine in order for the messages to abide by society’s gendered standards.
At first glance it would appear these misconceptions are simply media messaging techniques, but what are the deeper meanings of these messages? Denzin summarized that media messages reflect society and by doing so reinforce and work to maintain the status quo (1997, 2002). If a television program aimed at displaying nontraditional feminine behaviors and characteristics is actually transmitting traditional standards, then female audiences who view the program are simply being feed the same feminine messages regardless of the program type. This being true, the societal standards of femininity remain the same, unchanging and unchallenged by television media, the audiences, and societal reality. The messages of traditional femininity from “The Bad Girls Club” defend and ideally summarize Denzin’s argument: Media crafts messages reflective of society and by doing so works to maintain societal gendered norms (1997, 2002).

Not one of the women on this show could be categorized as representing solely masculine or non-traditional feminine behaviors throughout the entire season. Instead the women walked a tight-rope between masculine and feminine expressions, and although some may have ventured more towards one side or the other, they all throughout the show presented a dual expression of masculine and feminine performances. Therefore it would appear the same co-presence of femininity in the expression of hegemonic masculinity in society existed within each woman (McGuffrey, Shawn and Rich 1999; Weitzer and Kubrin 2009). We have already established that in order for the audience to relate to the Bad Girls there must be some
presence recognized societal norm of femininity, and that many of the Bad Girls masculine traits originate from or are understood to abide by feminine standards. Therefore when the Bad Girls appear to be performing masculine expressions they are in actuality co-expressing feminine ones as well. This connection can be linked to individual events, such as sexual permissiveness (masculine) connected to sexual availability (feminine). Although as times the girls may have displayed violence or physical aggression (masculine) they almost always stemmed from means of protections or relational aggression (feminine). This presence of feminine norms makes the Bad Girls relatable to the audience, as the audience understands and recognizes the societal norms for femininity. Which are created as Denizin argues as messages are reflections of society. Yet, the continuing distribution of status quo messages also perpetuates the current societal norms of gendered performances (Denzin 1997, 2002).

As Denzin argues, these gendered messages, as we have shown in the engagement section, are reaching audiences and influencing their behavior within society (Denzin 2002). The shock value of the show was able to quickly gain the audience’s attention: the violence, the crass language, the obscene dress. Yet, the show was also able to maintain attention throughout both hour long public viewings. The initial interest may have relied heavily on the scandalous events of the show (which may in large part be credited to the editors) but in order for the attention to remain there must have been something present in the show that was relatable for the
participants. Since media messages are reflections of societal norms and we have shown how “The Bad Girls Club” is transmitting messages of feminine norms it is understandable to then make the connection that these norms are what allow the Bad Girls to connect to the audience. Although the initial audience reactions were of shock and disapproval, throughout the showing there were instances where audience members found commonalities between themselves and the Bad Girls. By making the Bad Girls relatable the women’s actions are then more easily accepted by the audience. The immediate mimicking of actions from the show, seen in the second public viewing, further argues Denzin’s engagement theory, that the audience is taking in the messages from the show, evaluating, and implanting them into their own lives. The audience was able to accept the Bad Girls masculine expression because they coexisted with relatable feminine ones. Expressions of transmittance, acceptance and implantation of gendered messages could be seen within a one hour showing.

Even in a show designed to present the polar opposite of traditional femininity an examination of the actions, behaviors, and characteristics of the women on ”The Bad Girls Club” shows this not to be so, at least not fully. When the women seemed to be expressing masculinity, it was often masked feminine expressions, or was later balanced by traditional feminine norms, for as we discussed these gendered traits must co-exist. There was restrictions and limitation to the amount of masculinity the women expressed due to their sex as women. The Bad Girls, who at times were
masculine, also expressed femininity throughout the season, this co-expression allowed the audience to relate and accept them, thus maintaining interest in the television program. Yet, the expressions of feminine messages adequately reflect the gendered reality within society, as Denzin argues. This program can arguably serve as a mirror and advocator for the status quo of women in society. For although the women acted masculine at times, these actions were justified by proper traditional feminine behavior throughout the season. These messages work to maintain societal status quo and limit the acceptable expressions of women (Denzin 1992, 2002). In sum, this program presents a veil of deviance by women while in actuality maintaining and supporting gendered norms in society.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine the gendered messages being communicated to audiences from the reality television program, “The Bad Girls Club”. Although the program was presented to audiences as a show of deviant women, this study has highlighted the covert traditional feminine messages that are being transmitted to the audience. These gendered messages coincide with Denzin’s theory that media messages reflect societal and cultural norms (1995, 1997 and 2002). Even when the women did display masculine or deviant traits, a closer examination showed feminine ties or reasoning. Also, masculine traits performed by the women were always balanced out by the individual with traditional feminine ones. These standard feminine characteristics are what made the Bad Girls gendered messages relatable to an audience as they reflect the status quo of gendered reality in our culture. The public viewings showed that the audience was able to connect with the program, often through these types of status quo gendered messages. The effects of these messages are vital, as Denzin argues; they work to perpetuate the status quo of societal standards for women in society (1995, 1997 and 2002). If the messages being communicated through television are simply reiterating gender norms, and it is these norms that perpetuate the gender inequality, then nothing is done to change or challenge the gendered reality in our society. The audience members who believe they are watching nontraditional feminine behavior are in truth being exposed to traditional feminine standards. The audience then takes these messages and applies
them in their own lives which limit the possibility for change as they are simply reviewing and engaging reflections of current society.

This study was able to shed light on the duality that exists between masculine and feminine traits for women in our society. As many have argued the existence of “hegemonic masculinity” is contingent on the existence of its other, femininity (McGuffrey, Shawn and Rich 1999; Weitzer and Kubrin 2009). The Bad Girls consistently had a feminine other in Annie, while other times served as their own feminine other throughout the season; balancing out their overly masculine behavior with traditionally feminine behavior. This co-gendered behavior speaks to the gendered duality that exists in our society and within individual women. The issue arises as the hierarchical design of gendered practices places an inferior standing on femininity, even though its existence is needed with masculine performances. This inequality is being perpetuated through the gendered media messages of this program, which are only working to further the current inequalities that exist among men and women in our society.

The examination of reality television is not without fault. The program itself leads to falseness; as the name may read “reality” most individuals understand that there is a high level of production and editing that takes place. Therefore, although it consists of real people (i.e. not actors with scripts) what we see on our television is not a true reality, but instead a created form of it. This study was also limited in that it viewed only one season and held only two public showing. Although clear messages
were able to be identified, there is room for much more examination regarding the
media engagement that takes place with audiences. Further public showing (perhaps
in a more private laboratory) over a significant amount of time may give future
researchers an opportunity to better grasp the interactions with the show. Additional
elements such as pre- and post-personality surveys may also help to grasp the short
and long term effects these gendered messages are having on audience members.
Future research may examine the differing effects on audience members based on
aspects such as race, age, sex, socioeconomic class, all which play a vital role in the
implantation of messages from media outlets (Denzin 2002). As this study has shown
messages do reach and have an effect of audiences, therefore future examination is
vital in understanding the societal reality in which we live. This might include
examining other “reality” television shows to note if the same messages of gender
persist in shows that are not explicitly focused on gender dynamics.

As television, and specifically reality television, continues to grow as a
massive media outlet in our society, it is important for social scientists to examine
what messages are being communicated to society. These messages affect our culture
and the creation of the reality of gendered norms which we live in and must all abide
by. If the current gendered norms lead to inequality and inferior placement of
feminine expressions that we as a society must work to change the current societal
norm. Yet, change will never be found if continuous messages of traditional gender
norms are being communicated to society through the media. Therefore future
research must work to identify communications of gender inequalities and norms as well as advocate to the media for representations of more equal gendered messages. Doing so will allow change towards a society more equal and mutually accepting of both feminine and masculine performances by both sexes.
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