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## Production Studies and Documentary Participants: A Method

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It was only after I finished my PhD thesis that I learned that my research related to *production studies*. Departing from the question of ethics in documentary filmmaking, I investigated both the perspective of filmmakers and participants on ethical issues in the documentary filmmaking practice, using quantitative and qualitative research methods respectively (Sanders, 2012). For the latter, I extensively interviewed four participants who had participated in documentary film projects. The analysis of the participants' interview accounts resulted not just in an understanding of their take on ethical issues in documentary filmmaking, but also in an understanding of the complexity of their involvement in documentary film projects, which included contributing unsolicited content and the taking on of production responsibilities, such as arranging for locations and recruiting additional participants. Hence, I theorized them as co-creators, who contribute to their own representation in the resulting film. My research was firmly situated within documentary film studies and I refrained from including perspectives from media ethics and journalism ethics explicitly, arguing that the former is too general and the latter too specific. I also excluded discussion of other – more or less documentary – formats such as docu-soaps and reality TV. Instead, I approached documentary filmmaking as an artistic practice of its own.

Although I have tried to use additional methods to research participation in my case studies, this did not work out for several reasons, which I will address below. This prompted me to think of yet other ways to include participants in my research. In this chapter I propose a method to do so. Below, I will first argue the role participants play in production

processes and briefly discuss the context of participant research in terms of technologies of representation and self-presentation. I will then talk about the challenge of access to documentary production more extensively, discuss visual research methods, and propose a three-level method, including using both the film text and raw and test footage. With raw and test footage I mean the material not included in the final film (raw footage) as well as any footage not intended to be included, such as set-ups for interviews and location shoots, sound checks, and rehearsals (test footage). For reasons of convenience, I will refer to all this material as raw footage.

In this chapter, I will focus on documentary filmmaking, because it seems to be the least institutionalized practice (less so than docu-soaps and current affairs reports), and because single documentary projects are generally smaller than documentary and non-fiction series, which makes them more accessible at a practical level. Arguably however, the method should be applicable for other non-fiction and reality genres as well, provided material with the participant is pre-recorded (that is, raw material exists).

## **Participants and production studies**

The proliferation of non-fiction formats includes documentary films, docu-soaps, reality TV, scripted reality, unscripted entertainment, and interactive Web documentaries, all of which often rely on the participation of 'ordinary people' in processes of representation. This proliferation has inspired attention for those contributing in front of the camera in quite different ways, most notably with respect to reality TV. Apart from an interest in the experiences of reality TV participants (Patterson, 2013; Shufeldt and Gale, 2007), there are questions about the use of ordinary people as labourforce (Hearn, 2006) and about the production of celebrity (Boyle and Kelly, 2010; Curnutt, 2009; Grindstaff, 2014).

The basis for these investigations is often the media text. Participation – be it of ordinary people, 'ordinary celebrities' (Grindstaff, 2014: 324), or celebrities – is seldom investigated as a contribution to production processes as such.<sup>1</sup> Hearn (2006) bases her argument about the way participants construct and mould their image within an enforced tight production framework on an analysis of the media text and a few very general and partly anonymously published quotes from participants. This can, in my view, impossibly result in a profound understanding of the meaning of participation. Production studies researchers have mainly focused on professional creators in institutional contexts (see,

for instance, Caldwell, 2008; Dornfeld, 1998; Hemmingway, 2008; Mayer et al., 2009; Silverstone, 1985). Documentary participants have so far been theorized in terms of ethics, exploitation and vulnerability (see Sanders, 2012, for an extensive discussion), and in terms of performance within the documentary text (see, for instance, Lacey and McElroy, 2010; Marquis, 2013). However, (amateur) participants contribute to documentary production as do filmmakers and other professionals in the creative and media industries (Sanders, 2012). But non-fiction participants usually are not regarded as part of the institutional context in which non-fiction projects are produced, and are thus easily excluded from production studies research. Scholars who do investigate the participation of ordinary people in reality TV rely predominantly on interviews to do so (Boyle and Kelly, 2010; Grindstaff, 2009; Patterson, 2013). Although labour-intensive, interviews seem to be an obvious method if you want to find out how people think about their experiences (Galletta, 2012).

The lack of participant research in documentary studies mentioned above might be related to documentary's problematic but nonetheless long-standing claims to truth and the myth of transparency. Truth claims continue to fuel romantic ideas about participants displaying spontaneous and authentic actions and behaviour. Turner illustrates this when he discusses 'the putative ordinariness of the participants' (2010: 43) as a key issue in the critical discussion of reality TV. About this ordinariness he says: 'Not such a problem with the more documentary "fly-on-the-wall" (or what in the UK tends to classify as "docu-soap") end of the format' (2010: 43; see also Bonner, 2003), confirming the perpetual myth of participants just being themselves, going about their business, in observational documentary texts. However, to properly understand the meaning of participation in the production of culture through documentary film, the way participation is unavoidably constructed, it is necessary to include participants in empirical approaches such as production studies. My first argument, therefore, is to consider participants in documentary and in non-fiction in general as integral to the production process and hence include them in empirical studies of such production processes, rather than view them as objects for the camera's attention. A short exploration of the technologies of representation will elucidate this point.

## **Technologies of representation**

The technology to represent – or reproduce – reality was traditionally ascribed to photography, and, Winston (1995) argues, realist painting

before that. With the development of film, this claim to capturing reality transferred to the now moving images, and non-fiction started its development into the variety of forms and formats mentioned above. Specifically in documentary film, the relationship between the person behind and the person in front of the camera has, traditionally, been considered one of inequality (see, for instance, Gross et al., 1988; Rosenthal, 1988; Winston, 1988), raising a variety of questions about ethics and documentary film and filmmaking.

The technology for representing others, in the meantime, developed, to include not only video, cine film, and streaming media, but also lightweight cameras and sync sound, ever smaller video recorders, surveillance cameras, and mobile telephones and screens. In line with 'home' photography, people started to make home videos, capturing themselves and others, and sharing the material with family members and friends. Such technologies thus facilitated early forms of representation and self-presentation. The development of these technologies also facilitated groups and individuals who felt underrepresented in the mainstream media to produce and distribute their own stories. More recently, technological developments have opened up opportunities for a much wider distribution of such materials. The Internet and social media platforms as well as mobile devices make it possible to share material instantly, with people known personally but also with an unknown worldwide crowd (see for research on the latter, for instance, Hew, 2011; Lange, 2007; Leurs, 2012). The coexistence of technologies for representation and technologies for self-presentation prompts questions about how these might be related. In other words, in a society in which individuals increasingly use technologies to present themselves to the outside world – through video and through sites and technologies such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter – and in societies in which this is also demanded from them – for instance, through company websites with personal profiles – how do individuals respond to being represented? And what is their role in processes of representation?

With respect to reality TV, Andrejevic (2004), relying on media reports, interviews with participants, fans, and producers, and audience surveys, places participation in relation to the creation of personality as commodity and participation as self-commodification. Curnutt (2009) used in-depth interviews, correspondence, pictures and articles to research the participation of Susie Meister in *The Real World* (1992–). He concludes, among others, that his case study suggests 'a broader compulsion to participate with the media at the level of its manufacture' (Curnutt, 2009: 15). Grindstaff (2009), based on participant-observation

while functioning as production assistant and on interviews with makers and participants, concludes that there is a wide variety of motivations to participate, including a desire for celebrity or for a prize, publicity for a cause, sharing a life-changing experience, sharing information, getting acknowledged, countering stereotypes, increasing minority visibility, and experiencing something out of the ordinary. In relation to such motivations, participants consider their role and its possible interpretation by viewers (Grindstaff, 2009).

In the research discussed above, there appears a tension between understanding participation as commodification and understanding participation as an embodied experience in a complex production process. More research is needed to better understand this tension and the involvement and perspective of participants in technologies of representation. The question I am addressing here is how to research such experiences of, on the one hand, participation, which echoes an active involvement (Sanders, 2012), and on the other hand, being represented, which reflects a passive submission to the maker's whims. Previous interview-based research has indicated that documentary participants and filmmakers have complex relationships (Nash, 2009). Also, power-relationships shift: both filmmaker and participant depend on each other, though the former in fear of loss of the participant, and the latter in fear of being damaged through the representation (Nash, 2009). In addition, documentary participants contribute to projects in various ways, at various levels, and to various extents by, for instance, continuous negotiation of their disclosure and consent, by contributing unsolicited content, and by taking on production responsibilities (Sanders, 2012). As discussed above, conducting interviews has been the preferred method of data collection to capture the dynamics and complexities of documentary and reality TV participation, necessarily relying on reconstruction, memory, and reflection. Therefore, my second argument, to which the majority of this chapter is devoted, is to use visual methods rather than 'just' interviews to research participation. However, the perpetual myth of authenticity and spontaneity mentioned above underlies some of the specific challenges that surround research on participants' contributions, the main one being getting access to the production process, which I will discuss next.

### **The challenge of access**

In order to tap into the experience of what it is like to participate in a documentary film production, it seems to make sense to collect data

about this as the experience is unfolding; that is, during the period in which the participant is involved in a project. In an effort to defend film studies as a distinct discipline, Roberts calls for rigorous methodologies for production studies and for theorizing 'from within' (2011: 3). This 'from within' would ideally include production sites and shoots. In the case of documentary film, a number of challenges exist for the researcher not involved in the production process; several barriers hinder such access. These barriers include the filmmaker's pursuit of spontaneity and authenticity and the researcher's extra demands on the participant. Below, I will discuss these based on my own experiences working in the documentary field and preparing participant research for my PhD thesis.<sup>2</sup>

### **Spontaneity and authenticity**

Certainly in the case of documentaries, but I would say at the core of all non-fiction programmes, is the idea that such programmes capture and include authentic and spontaneous behaviours and actions of their participants (see Turner, 2010, quoted above). Although this is very much open to question, in terms of ontological as well as epistemological issues, this idea legitimizes its production as non-fiction and invites that understanding by the audience. A reflection on the behaviour and actions involved is considered a threat to this perceived authenticity: if a participant is invited to describe, evaluate, and reflect on the experience of participating while that participation is ongoing, she might reconsider that experience and the behaviour and actions displayed in it. As a consequence, such reconsidered behaviour loses its authenticity and spontaneity and is thus perceived as less 'true' or 'real'. Allowing a researcher to enter the production ground and ask the participant to reflect on, reconsider, or even think or talk about her behaviour in any way, is thus considered a threat to the spontaneous and authentic behaviour and actions needed for a proper documentary work. Patterson observed that reality TV participants in her research had become 'learned in the art of media interviews' through their experience as participants, using 'mediaspeak or talking points' (2013: 60). This might be less the case in individual one-off documentaries, but it is plausible that respondents will increasingly consider their self-presentation and what makes proper or valid speak. The question of authenticity thus becomes increasingly complex.

### **Extra demands on participants**

Another impediment to access to participants during production is the nature of the relationship between filmmaker and participant. Certainly

in traditional documentary projects, the relationship between filmmaker and participant is considered complex, personal, intimate, and possibly fragile. Specifically in projects that address personal and private topics and experiences, documentary filmmakers aim to protect the relationship of trust they have, over time, managed to build with a participant, and are wary to let an outsider enter this relationship, for instance, by being present on set for direct or participating observation, or for interviewing the participant. The fear is that the outsider might invite a different reading of, for instance, the aims, intentions, level of honesty, and professionalism of the filmmaker, and disturb the relationship, and thus the working conditions and the project.

The challenges to access discussed above prevent, for instance, the option of participants keeping written or taped diaries or taking photographs to mediate their understanding of the experience of being filmed or interviewed for a documentary project. They also prevent the researcher from entering production sites and filming locations to observe the participant and her interactions with the filmmakers.

In addition, being involved in a documentary project can be an intense experience. Having a crew around to film can turn an everyday situation upside down and be quite demanding. In any case, for most participants it will be an exceptional situation, which demands more energy and feels more intense than any other 'ordinary' day. If at the end of such a day the participant is also asked to reflect on it, one runs the risk of fatigue getting in the way of that reflection. Rather than serving to answer the question of one's contribution to a documentary project, such data might illustrate the effect of such a day on a participant; as a consequence, such data would harm the validity of the research outcomes.

Accepting that the production spaces are off limits for observation and interrogation, alternative ways of tapping into the experiences of documentary participants are needed. Also, to prevent participant fatigue, it seems doing this retrospectively after the experience, or at least after filming is completed, when the collection of material can no longer be affected, and the anxiety associated with filming has passed, is most viable. As discussed above, in past research, documentary participants have been asked to remember experiences through interview accounts. These interviews took place shortly (Sanders, 2012) or somewhat longer (Nash, 2009) after their actual participation. To overcome some of the disadvantages of this method, such as not memorizing all events and a focus on the most salient ones, rather than asking participants to recount their experiences in general, asking them to reflect with the

help of filmed material might prompt them to remember details that might otherwise get lost, or evoke and elicit thoughts and ideas in ways that interviews cannot. What I propose there is a way to 'get closer' to the production process than through mere recollection or recounting in the form of participant interviews. And that is through visual methods and, more specifically, through using both the film text and the raw footage recorded with a participant, as a more direct link to the production process.

## **Visual research**

In ethnography, there is a long tradition of using film and video for research purposes. Buckingham sketched a 'broader "shift to the visual"', to the use of visual methods, in many disciplines (2009: 633). In various social sciences, such as education and therapy, video-assisted conversations have been used to address previous interactions or experiences (Burford and Jahoda, 2012; Pomerantz, 2005; Rowe, 2009; Welsh and Dickson, 2005). Interestingly, the first efforts in using video for therapy were conducted in TV studios, because that was where the equipment and the expertise were available (Welsh and Dickson, 2005).

Welsh and Dickson (2005) discuss the use of video-recall methods in various fields of research and in clinical practices. Here, actions such as therapy sessions or research sessions are videotaped, and the participants are then asked to view the tape and comment on what they see; these comments may relate to their own behaviour, the behaviour of others, or both. Welsh and Dickson (2005) describe this method as an extension of direct observation, with the advantage of eliciting subjective meanings and emotions, as well as notions of purpose or intent, and significance. Also, personal aspects, such as cultural identities, might be taken into consideration in understanding experiences of participants in media productions (Welsh and Dickson, 2005). Pomerantz (2005) distinguishes video-recall, aimed at 'reconstructing' earlier thoughts and feelings, from video-stimulated comments, aimed at eliciting present thoughts and ideas. She discusses the possibility of clarifying one's actions, pointing to significant elements researchers might overlook, as well as providing evidence of researchers' inferences through video-stimulated comments, as gains of this method.

While there are advantages in combining the analysis of an interaction with comments on that interaction by an interactor, several challenges face those who research individuals' accounts and narratives, specifically when these individuals are talking about previous interactions and

experiences (Pomerantz, 2005). It will be difficult to determine whether comments on previous interactions relate to the interaction as it originally occurred or to the reviewing of the interaction. Also, thoughts, feelings, and interpretations, which are experienced mentally, occur in messy ways: thoughts and ideas can replace each other like waves on a beach; intuitive associations and mental leaps may be impossible to convey in coherent and linear conversational sentences. In addition, sharing thoughts and interpretations in a research setting invites making them accessible to an outsider, who might need more information about the original interaction (Pomerantz, 2005). Also, interlocutors might not share a common language. Finally, as Pomerantz (2005) mentioned, contrary to the original interaction, in a review setting, the participant knows the outcome of an interaction and might adjust thoughts and interpretations in line with the outcome. This obscures the relationship between the experience of the original interaction and the reflection on it through comments on video-replay of the action.

Notwithstanding such disadvantages and challenges, video-recall and comment methods do have something to bring to the research on documentary participation. They provide opportunities for a reflection on experiences which usually remain hidden and unaddressed, and they confront the participant with a representation of the events, avoiding a singular reliance on memory and recollection. They also provide an opportunity to include material usually discarded but potentially rich in clues about the participant's involvement with the project and the crew. In addition to the participant reflecting on the documentary itself, I therefore propose to invite the participant to review and respond to raw material shot with her. I also propose to analyse the raw material.

Pink (2001) discusses the distinction made between research film and 'creative' film: the former is supposed to be a neutral or 'objective' representation of the phenomenon being studied, which might serve as research data; the latter a narrativized and edited account, subjective to the maker's selection and construction. Raw documentary footage would be situated somewhere in between. It might include shots conceived for the film but not included, for instance, because it contains slips of the tongue and other mistakes, which provide entry points for discussing the construction of participation; these might be regarded as part of the creative footage. It might also include test footage (set-ups, rehearsals), including negotiations and extra-textual interactions between participant and filmmaker(s), which might in turn refer to interactions not recorded. Such footage might be regarded as research data. Both however, as Pink (2001) argues, might serve as research material: 'In the broadest sense a

video is “ethnographic” when its viewer(s) judge that it represents information of ethnographic interest’ (p. 79). Raw footage will provide opportunities for the participant to recount interactions and other elements of her participation in the project and for the researcher to ask questions about these. Previous research suggests that participants ‘relived’ experiences while watching them a few days later as they were displayed on video (Lingel and Naaman, 2012). Similarly, reviewing taped experiences might help ‘get closer’ to the original experiences than just talking about them in an interview format or on the basis of the final film. This brings me to my three-level method for studying documentary participation.

### **A three-level method for documentary participant studies**

In trying to understand the nature and meaning of participation in documentary production, one needs to somehow capture the participant’s thoughts, ideas, and reflection on the experience. Given the media-saturated world we live in, Holliday argues for examination of both text and experience to study any culture: ‘[But] more important than either of these is the interplay of both with each other’ (2000: 509), as the ‘consumption’ of cultural texts informs our understanding of our identity and in turn informs the production of such texts. I argue that to understand documentary participation, studying the experience as well as texts capturing that experience is desirable. And although Buckingham (2009) points to the need to distinguish between audience research and media production research, this research seems to be in between, as participants are contributors to creative production and thus co-creators, but only partially, with respect to their contribution (Sanders, 2012); for the remaining parts, they are audiences. Their responses to the resulting film, however, might provide powerful insights into their perspectives on the experience. The use of both raw footage and the resulting film will encourage the participant’s talk about and reflection on the experience, assuming that raw footage provides an alternative form of access to the production process. Because raw footage might be messy and there might be a lot of it, a selection might be made based on a rationale relevant to the research. I propose a three-level method to investigate participants’ experiences: video comments to the film; analysis of raw footage; and video comments to raw footage in interaction with the researcher.

#### **Video comments on the film**

The finished film presents, among others, a selection of all the material shot with a participant, her actions and interactions with the filmmaker,

and her contribution within the context of the whole narrative, possibly intercut with selected material with other participants. This is the represented interaction, the interaction as represented by the filmmaker through the film. This represented interaction constitutes the public face of the participant, the one that is accessible for the audience. The participant will have an idea about this representation, which might be quite nuanced. As discussed above, a specific motivation might underlie the participant's contribution. This representation itself, however, does not suffice to address the experience of the participant in the production process. Watching the whole film rather than just scenes containing the represented interaction leaves open the option of other material being, or becoming, relevant to the perspective of the participant. Therefore, watching the whole film might be a fruitful experience to try and understand the represented interaction and how the participant relates to it.

Wood (2007) developed a method to describe the various ways in which female viewers of daytime television talk shows interacted with the television text. She recorded the responses of these viewers, produced as they were watching. Wood (2007) differentiates three ways in which these women spontaneously interacted with and related to the content of the programme. She distinguishes primary responses, which include the use of second-person pronouns, directed at a participant, as well as 'minimal responses' such as 'yeh, mhm', and the completion of the sentence of a studio participant; secondary responses, which interrogate and comment on the broadcast text; and tertiary responses, which invoke personal experiences, and relate the text to oneself. Although documentaries are not aimed at a sense of interaction with the audience at the text level the way that talk shows are, I consider Wood's a worthwhile method to elicit and invite an initial response to one's representation within a film. This text-in-action method might be used with a participant as 'audience' of the programme she participated in. Pink pointed to the need to not just elicit comments, but to engage in dialogue with the respondent to try and understand how 'informants situate themselves as viewers of the footage' (2001: 89). Hence, a dialogue might be conducted with the participant to understand how she relates to the represented interaction. However, to prevent participant fatigue, I propose to limit this first level to video comments and possibly a few prompts to keep them going, and to reserve interaction with the participant for the third level, discussed below.

Investigating the participant's response to the viewing of the film she participated in and inviting her to comment out loud hopefully elicits her initial subjective understanding of her appearance in the programme

and her participation in the project. Specifically, it invites reflection on her own participation and contribution to the narrative as a whole. Viewing the film at home rather than in a research setting might further facilitate this. Apart from the represented interaction, material generally exists that remains unused or was never intended to be used, which I have described above as raw footage. This material might contain many clues for further discussing and understanding the participant's involvement in the documentary project. The second level of my method therefore includes analysing raw footage.

### **Analysing raw footage**

Any media-production comes into being in a process of decision-making and selection: what will be included (images, text, artefacts, audio, video, links), to which extent, and in which configuration? In the production of media of representation, there usually is a discrepancy between what is recorded and what is eventually used in the film. Raw material concerns images and sounds surrounding the edited takes included in the media text, including 'mistakes' and successive takes. Test material might include rehearsals and set-ups. The interactions captured here might be referred to as the original interaction, as it is not represented and not edited. Such material can include clues to the negotiations between media-maker(s) and participant with respect to their collaboration and the participant's contribution. Negotiations might concern issues of disclosure, representation, and address; they might concern re-enactments, interview questions, and scenes to be included or excluded; they might include discussions of authenticity, spontaneity, performance and motivation; they might concern production practicalities; they might include clues for understanding the relationship between filmmaker and participant. A careful analysis of this material might give insight in all these aspects as well as raise further questions about the involvement of the participant in the production process, as it might refer to interactions and experiences not recorded. That is one reason to include it in this method. However, combining levels one and two provides for a third level. Here the participant views and comments on the raw footage or a selection thereof, in interaction with the researcher, who then has the opportunity to pose questions and prompts.

### **Video comment on the raw footage**

The third level I propose consists of participant video comments to raw footage in interaction with the researcher. This might take the shape of a

dialogue or an interview. Interview accounts are, after all, constructed in interaction; it is in the mutual response of interviewer and interviewee that narratives are constructed and meaning is created (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Rapley, 2004).

After having analysed the footage, the researcher now invites the participant to comment on the original interaction represented in the raw footage and respond to further questions, queries, and prompts. Comments and responses to questions and prompts together construct a rich account of and reflection on the experience of participating in a documentary project. This way, a level is added which allows for further analysis and understanding of the experience of the participant in documentary production, as raw footage will include specific clues for understanding the participant's involvement in and contribution to the project. The researcher might decide to limit this level to outtakes of the raw footage based on the analysis at level two, or some other rationale relevant to the research. As discussed above, the interaction with the researcher in the form of questions, queries, and prompts is reserved for this level, to prevent participant fatigue.

### **Recoding the research**

Levels one and three of the method proposed here include the participant and researcher watching material. Both levels might be recorded for research purposes. Video rather than audio recording allows for the analysis of the interaction and dialogue between researcher and respondent as well as of their body language. Specifically because the participant is watching video material in which she is featured, and can point to or even imitate behaviour displayed in the video material, it seems valuable to video-record the reviews.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued for the inclusion of documentary participants in production studies research. I have proposed a three-level method for researching documentary participation, including video comments on the documentary film, an analysis of raw footage, and video comments on raw footage in interaction with the researcher.

The method proposed here brings with it a number of challenges. First of all, it seems more common to have respondents or informants produce creative material as data for reflection on experiences or perspectives (see, for instance, Luttrell and Chalfen, 2010; Packard, 2008). Indeed, there is a need, as Buckingham (2009) argues, to reflect on the research

methods and materials themselves, to try and understand how the configuration of the research enables respondents to speak and share, while acknowledging that in the end, the research is the researcher's work – as it should be.

Second, the raw footage I propose to use was never recorded to be included in a research project such as the one proposed here. This invites practical and ethical considerations. On a practical level, I believe many production studies projects depend on the collaboration of the community under investigation. Some researchers might be able and willing to conduct participating observation, but many researchers will not be able or might not be willing to do this. So collaboration and consent are necessary and arguably desirable. Hopefully, the idea of using raw footage is considered less risky than having someone observe a shoot. In the digital age we live in, it might be necessary to arrange beforehand the safeguarding of the material with the makers, before it is deleted. Of course, sensitive material might be included in the raw footage, but it is up to the researcher to convince those involved that it is not her aim to judge behaviour on an individual level but to understand what is going on. These practical issues make the method more suitable for smaller projects, such as individual documentary films, than for more institutionalized practices, such as documentary and reality TV series.

On an ethical level, there is the need to negotiate the use of raw material with both the legal and moral owners, and get their explicit consent to use it in the research context. In addition, as the research report forms another form of representation, this time of the documentary participant as research respondent, a member check seems desirable to allow the represented to comment on the representation and correct blatant mistakes and omissions. Such research practices have been used in the social sciences for many years. Also, to protect individual respondents, research might be published on the basis of anonymity. Finally, there is the question of what this raw material might be exactly, and how, if necessary, a selection might be made and accounted for. This will have to be addressed at the level of individual research projects.

Despite these considerations, I believe including participants in production studies and including raw footage in our research methods will provide an additional opportunity to investigate and understand the complexities of documentary film production. The material exists and is, at least in theory, readily available. Although it is important to not understand this material as representing any kind of unmediated reality or to be comprehensive or transparent in any way, despite its possibly spontaneous character or lack of immediate purpose (Buckingham,

2009), it does provide rich data for studying documentary participation, and is potentially full of clues about the practice of media making and the involvement of ‘ordinary people’. I therefore believe using it would enrich our research into documentary production and, possibly, other non-fiction genres.

## Notes

1. Grindstaff (2014) uses the concept of ‘ordinary celebrity’ to describe the celebrity of non-professional actors whose ‘fame’ tends to be temporary and related to a specific programme or event rather than it being sustained and intertextual.
2. These observations are based on conversations with documentary filmmakers and producers, held both formally and informally, over the course of the past 15 years or so. Whether they are valid for other non-fiction productions remains to be seen.

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