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Roles, Rules, and Rebellions: Creating the Carnivalesque through the Judges' Behaviors on *America's Next Top Model*

Tracey Owens Patton & Julie Snyder-Yuly

The concept of the carnival gained popularity from Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin. Through his work, Rabelais and his World, *Bakhtin reconstructs a type of folk humor that challenges the hegemonic hierarchy through humor, masquerades, and performance. This article is a critical analysis of the reality show,* America's Next Top Model. *We raise the notion of Bahktin's carnival to examine and critique how the show's judges use concepts of the carnival and carnivalesque in a postmodern, televisual era in order to invert standard themes of society through the fashion and modeling industries. We argue that the use of carnivalesque techniques by the judges provide a means of temporary power, where they would normally be marginalized or have less access to power in general society.*

Keywords: America's Next Top Model*; Bahktin; Carnival; Carnivalesque; Reality Television*

Introduction

"Ten beautiful women stand in front of me, but I only have nine photographs in my hand. These photographs represent the nine women still in the running for *America's Next Top Model*." The above statement is repeated every week during elimination by

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Tyra Banks, supermodel, producer, and creator of the show *America's Next Top Model* (*ANTM*). *ANTM* has been nominated for 14 awards including the GLAAD Media Award and Teen Choice Awards (IMDB database, n.d.-a) and is currently shown in over 120 countries. Now in its eighteenth cycle, *ANTM* began on UPN in May 2003 with Cycle 1 and involves narrowing down the female contestants from hundreds to 9–14 finalists. Each episode spans approximately a week of time and features a modeling theme, a training session, a competition, a photo shoot, and elimination where one contestant is sent home. During the elimination round, the contestants present themselves to a panel of four standard judges and one or two guest judges. The bottom two models are called forward; after their critique, Tyra reveals the photo of the model who will remain and the other model is told she must immediately leave the house. The eventual winner receives a featured spread in a magazine, a modeling contract with a prominent agency, and a $100,000 modeling contract from a cosmetics company. Although there have been some modifications between cycles as the producers refine the show, this remains the standard format.

The onset of reality television is most familiar to 1980s viewers of shows such as *Cops*, and in 1992 with MTV's *Real World*. However, reality television precedent was set in 1948 with Allen Funt's *Candid Camera* series[1] and competition shows such as the debut of the *Miss America Pageant* in 1954. One particular genre where reality shows have found wide audiences and exponential growth is that of fashion/beauty industry. Since 2000 in the United States, there have been at least 23 reality television shows focusing on the beauty/fashion industry. Most of these shows focus on some aspect of the beauty, design, and fashion industry from clothing and beauty makeovers: for example, *What Not to Wear* (2003–present); *Ambush Makeover* (2004–2005); and *Tim Gunn's Guide to Style* (2007–2008). Other reality shows in this genre show contestants competing to receive a job in the fashion industry: for example, *Project Runway* (2004–present); *The Cut* (2005); *The Fashionista Diaries* (2007); and *Running in Heels* (2009). *ANTM* is unique, because while there are modeling reality shows, like *Make Me A Super Model* (2008–2010) and *Remodeled* (2011–present), this is one of the few shows with the focus of the narrative centered on the judges. While there has been a major research focus on competition reality shows that let contestants or audiences choose who moves on, we find very little research on shows featuring judging panels.

The focus of this article is on the behavior and communication of reality show judges, specifically on the show *America's Next Top Model*. These judges are representative of diversity in their gender, race, and sexual orientation. Reality television continues to be a preferred mode of entertainment by industry executives looking to save money on more expensive productions, thus, it is fair to say that the prominence of this genre in popular culture will assuredly hold. While the average cost for a one-hour drama is about $2 million per episode, a one-hour reality show averages about $800,000 per episode (Gornstein, 2008). Therefore, given that there are no paid actors who command a large salary and generate a ratings pull, particularly in *ANTM*, the focus of the show naturally falls on the judges and their behavior and communication.

Fashion/beauty reality shows often feature judges who are known in a specific industry but are not necessarily known in mainstream popular culture. This mirrors other reality television shows in that they are not filled with well-known judges. For example, popular shows such as *American Idol* and *So You Think You Can Dance* have had relatively ''unknowns'' as judges. Paula Abdul was the ''Tyra'' of *American Idol*, but the other judges were seldom widely known celebrities before the show's success. According to Hasinoff (2008), *ANTM* capitalizes on diversity to market itself to a wider audience. The main actors on *ANTM* tend to represent some of the more marginalized people in our society, coupled with fashion celebrities, who may or may not mirror similar tendencies. On *ANTM*, it is the judges who command the power and generate audience ratings. It is the judges, not the models, who seek and receive the media attention. Casting directors go to great lengths to find cast members who will ''shake things up'' and draw in viewers. Just as casting of contestants on these shows is essential to the success of the show, so is casting of diverse individuals to serve as judges. For example, other judges have gained a career boon or revival being cast as a judge on a reality show; that is, drag queen RuPaul, fashion designer Michael Kohrs, and former model Janice Dickinson. In fact, Dickinson's willingness to say and do anything on *America's Next Top Model* not only brought her back in the spotlight but also allowed her to create other reality show opportunities after leaving *ANTM* (Huff, 2006).

Reality television is scripted television that is supposed to suggest chaos and an impromptu response to situations. This constructed and scripted chaos is what we term as the ''imaged-carnivalesque.'' We believe that a new form of the carnival, the imaged-carnivalesque, has been created through reality television. Imaged-carnivalesque refers to the idea that the carnivalesque in the Bakhtinan sense no longer exists because of the onset of electronic media (e.g., television). For example, Walter Ong (2002) talks about a ''second orality'' where electronic media reintroduce certain characteristics of oral culture/storytelling. Because of this secondary orality, we argue that what is seen by the judges' communication on *ANTM* is a type of communication that pushes the bounds of Bakhtin's concept of the carnival and carnivalesque. In traditional carnival and carnivalesque, there is an opportunity for people to be active participants in the event. Reality television, however, is different in that it extends the idea of the carnival and carnivalesque into a different realm. Unlike traditional carnival, reality television is imaged, because there is no real chance of participating during the carnival moments as it is a constrained televisual medium. Rather, the carnivalesque moments are imaged and passive. As viewers of reality television, we see consistent attempts made to challenge societal conventional norms through imaged avenues. In these carnivalesque moments that are supposed to appear spontaneous, the imaged-carnivalesque should be used to critique reality television moments like those shown in *ANTM*.

The imaged-carnivalesque can be used in other reality shows, not just *ANTM*, to understand televisual forms of societal transgression. Our concept of the imaged-carnivalesque also looks critically at reality television, understanding that this contemporary form of carnivalesque still reinforces issues of dominance through

racism, sexism, and power. Because a revisioning of Bakhtin's idea of the carnival and carnivalesque as the imaged-carnivalesque can be found most strongly in the communicative roles and actions of the judges, a study of the judges' role is critical and our study of reality television unique.

Review of Literature

America's Next Top Model *Meets the Carnival*

The judges' communication and behavior challenges and reinforces hegemony simultaneously and, thus, is the reason why we selected Bakhtin's concepts of the carnival and carnivalesque, as well as included what we see as an imaged-carnivalesque. The judges' behavior and outlandish statements like, "If conceited drag queens are 'in,' she's got a shot at being America's Next Top Model" (IMDB, n.d.-b) may reify the stereotypes that come with reality television, such as acting foolish, petty, or mean in an attempt to garner higher ratings. However, much of what *ANTM* and other reality shows offer the audience parallels' Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnival and carnivalesque. We chose to utilize Bahktin because of the uniqueness this theory brings addressing behavior that challenges and reinforces hegemony simultaneously. We believe this behavior is strongly evident in the judges on *ANTM*, as well as other reality shows.

The concept of the carnival gained popularity from Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin. With his acclaimed work, *Rabelais and his World* (1984), Bakhtin reconstructs a type of folk humor that challenges the hegemonic hierarchy through humor, laughter, masks, masquerades, and performance. According to Lindley, "Carnival, for Bakhtin, is an embodiment of the liberated communality of the people in perennially renewed rebellion against the social and spiritual restrictions of the official order" (1996, p. 17). This celebration is for a marked period of time "where the commonly held values of a given cultural milieu are reversed, where new 'heads of state' are elected to 'govern' the ungovernable, and where the generally accepted rules of polite behavior are overruled in favor of the temporarily reigning spirit of Carnival" (Danow, 1995, p. 3). During this temporary centering of the carnival, "players" such as the "fool, madman, or clown" may emerge to serve as "regent" and people become "participants and spectators, a spectacle (of theater, music, and dance), in which they may (un)ceremoniously partake" (Danow, 1995, p. 4) and where they mock traditional society; for example, people with power, history, and laws that prohibit an altering of the hegemonic hierarchy.

Carnival with its transgressive character taps into medieval folk humor that is "the social consciousness of all the people" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 92). Carnival is an opportunity for voice: having voice, sharing voice, and using voice often in a humorous way so as not to stir up controversy or condemnation. Further, reality television is particularly suited for carnival analysis. According to Bruner, "festive holidays sanctioned by the state and the Church allow the common people to 'let off a little social steam' while hopefully reinforcing the normal order of things" (2005, p. 140). Reality television operates similarly. Participants are allowed to behave in ways that would

not be accepted in everyday situations. Pitcher (2007) believes that often these situations function as a type of policing mechanism. On some reality shows, people are judged or eliminated for acting excessively or outside their prescribed roles. A Black individual may be labeled ''ghetto'' for loud or hypersexual behavior (Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008). Women participating in *Girls Gone Wild* might be considered without class (Pitcher, 2007). Once the viewing audience or other contestants observe this, it reinforces what their behavior should be and provides boundaries on what is acceptable within and outside this carnival environment. Thus, the judges' have the ability to both police and to provide voice to those who are often marginalized in society.

America's Next Top Model Meets the Carnivalesque

The carnivalesque is an interrelated concept of the carnival, however, distinguishable in its own right. The carnivalesque juxtapositions of traditional society transgress the boundaries and borders as it reveals an alternative world order. Whereas the carnival is what happens, the carnivalesque is authored. ''The carnivalesque functions as a trope for the parodic subversion of social identity, as a political, psychological, and religious phenomenon'' (Lindley, 1996, p. 23). Bakhtin divided the carnivalesque into three forms: ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, and various genres of billingsgate or abusive language (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 5). This is what is portrayed on *ANTM* every week and throughout every cycle with the verbal performance of the judges who mock and assail ''traditional'' society with their masks, parodies, speeches, and fashions. The carnivalesque nature of *ANTM* temporarily displaces the hegemonic hierarchy. However, Bakhtin lamented the transition of the carnival from the marketplace to private family homes:

> On one hand the state encroached upon festive life and turned it into a parade; on the other hand these festivities were brought into the home and became part of the family's private life. The privileges which were formerly allowed in the marketplace were more and more restricted. The carnival spirit, with its freedom, its utopian character oriented toward the future, was gradually transformed into a mere holiday mood. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 33)

However transitory, Bakhtin found that the carnivalesque, in private hands, no longer contained the essence of its societal transgressive meaning. Rather, ''with technological advance, industrialization, and the rise of consumer capitalism'' (Castle, 1986, p. 103), the traditional images and attitudes of the carnival became void, privatized, and marginalized. This to us is the essence of the imaged-carnivalesque. The influence of technology has changed the original transgressive nature of the carnival/carnivalesque because, in reality television, it is more a form of entertainment rather than to challenge societal hierarchies.

The carnivalesque moments in society are often sanctioned events allowed by the hegemonic hierarchy that ultimately reconfirms its role and power ''allowing subjects to enter a liminal realm of freedom and in so doing create a space for critique that

would otherwise not be possible in 'normal' society'' (Bruner, 2005, p. 140). As Bruner points out, often the carnivalesque protests are successful forms of communication. Those in power do not always know how to respond to carnivalesque absurdities. Bruner used an example of the ''turtle people'' who dressed as turtles for a demonstration protest of the 1999 World Trade Organization meetings. Unlike the other protesters, the turtle people remained peaceful and had support from bystanders and police. During the protest, the turtle people remained relatively safe while other protestors were getting hit with pepper spray and rubber bullets. In addition, they dominated the media coverage, successfully conveying their message. Our belief is that reality shows like *ANTM* have the potential to create a space for critique. We argue, with a caveat, that the judges' performances on *ANTM* is a return to some of the classic carnivalesque moments (e.g., masks, masquerades, and the violation of societal boundaries and borders), only through the televisual landscape. Despite *ANTM's* transgressive nature, we find that the subversive tactics violate ''traditional'' culture while simultaneously being contained by conservative media conglomerates, thus making any significant challenge to the hegemonic hierarchy temporary and contained within the constraints of a television show.

Many scholars have addressed the impact of reality television, raised questions on how ''real'' reality television is, brought forward issues of surveillance, examined issues of racism, sexism, classism, discussed the understanding and perception of the audience and even researched makeover reality shows such as *America's Next Top Model* (Andrejevic, 2003; Biressi & Nunn, 2004; Dubrofsky, 2006; Haisnoff, 2008; Heller, 2007; Ouellette & Hay, 2008). However, limited work focusing on reality show judges and fashion/beauty reality shows and the notion of Bakhtin's carnival and carnivalesque has been conducted. In fact, few scholars have analyzed the carnivalesque environment fashion/beauty reality shows promote. While carnival is not new to the study of media, there is still not a lot of work in this area. For example, Olbrys (2006) examined the issue of carnivalesque grotesque as it related to Chris Farley's appearances on *Saturday Night Live*. Kings (2009) article on the movie *Fight Club* also focuses on the grotesque body. Lucaties and McDaniel (2004) focus on carnival-hegemony in their work on media representations of U.S. and Japanese relations. Pitcher (2006) addresses excessive behaviors and agency in carnivalesque environments through her research on the reality show *Girls Gone Wild*. Our study adds to this research as we use the concept of the imaged-carnivalesque to analyze judges' behavior and communication on *America's Next Top Model*. We raise Bakhtin's three forms of the carnivalesque to examine how concepts of the carnival and carnivalesque are used by the judges in order to invert standard themes of society through the sanctuary of the fashion and modeling industries.

Method

In order to examine the instances of the carnival and the carnivalesque, we used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine episodes of the first eight cycles of *ANTM*. Because of the formulaic nature of the program, we used computer-generated

random sampling[2] to select 16 episodes, two each from Cycles 1–8. Horkheimer and Adorno state that culture industry (which they say encompasses radio, television, and film) ''consists of repetition'' (1972, p. 136). They argued that in media ''everything down to the last detail is shaped accordingly.. . . Every detail is so firmly stamped with sameness that nothing can appear which is not marked at birth, or does not meet with approval at first sight'' (1972, p. 128). Based on this scholarly argument, we can conclude that media creates ''types'' that permeate particular genres, so any show with multiple seasons (or in this case cycles) will have the same ''types'' even though the people are technically different. For example, episodes of *ANTM* have a fairly standardized format each week, but the diverse personalities of the judges and contestants, the unique challenges and photo shoots, and the various guest designers and photographers prevent the show from becoming stagnant.

Using CDA, we focused on the verbal and non-verbal communication actions of the judges. CDA was chosen because the communicative roles of the judges are strongly imbedded in the idea of imaged-carnivalesque. We were concerned with their communicative behavior and how it encouraged or dampened the transgressive effect of the carnivalesque. According to van Dijk, ''Critical discourse analysts want to know what structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events play a role in these modes of reproduction'' (1993, p. 250). We identified judges' communications that supported Bakhtin's three forms of the carnivalesque: ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, and various genres of billingsgate or abusive language.

Following the selection of the episodes, CDA was employed to examine how the actions, speech, or nonverbal communication from the judges (re)produced and challenged dominance. According to van Dijk, the reproduction process involves different ''modes'' of discourse, including ''power relations as the more or less direct or overt support, enactment, representation, legitimation, denial, mitigation or concealment of dominance'' (1993, p. 250).

Characters

See Table 1 for a list and descriptions of the principal players from *ANTM*.

Critical Analysis of *Americas Next Top Model*

Ritual Spectacles

It is the ritual spectacles that draw in and disturb and/or intrigue the viewers. For the purpose of this analysis, ritual spectacles are the events and activities that regularly occur throughout each cycle or episode. In the case of *ANTM*, carnival's amusement-type ritual spectacles can be observed during weekly photo sessions or competitions, Tyra Bank's speeches at the beginning and end of each elimination, particular personalities and antics of the judges, and, of course, the makeover episode.

Throughout the series, the ritual spectacles usually center around the judges whose race, gender, or sexual orientation represent marginalized individuals: Tyra, Miss J.,

Table 1 Judges and Other Recurring Main Characters

Principal Players	Descriptions
Tyra Banks	African American heterosexual woman, former supermodel, and host and creator of *ANTM*, judge
Miss J. Alexander Known as "Miss J"	African American transgender drag queen, former model, runway expert, runway coach since Season 1, judge in Cycles 5–present
Nigel Barker	Multiracial heterosexual male, former model, noted fashion photographer, judge in Cycles 2–present
Janice Dickinson	White American heterosexual female, considered the first supermodel, judge in Cycles 1–4, occasional guest appearances
Jay Manuel	Multiracial out gay male, creative director, well known as a top makeup artist, occasional guest judge
Nolé Marin	Latino American out gay male, fashion stylist, judge in Cycles 3-4
Eric Nicholson	White American out gay male, senior fashion editor of *Jane* magazine, judge in Cycle 2
Beau Quillian	White American male (sexual orientation unknown), fashion editor at *Marie Claire* magazine, judge in Cycle 1
Kimora Lee Simmons	Multiracial heterosexual female, former model, owner and creative director of Baby Phat fashions, judge in Cycle 1
Twiggy	White European heterosexual female, former supermodel, judge in Cycles 5–9

Manuel, Marin, and occasionally Dickinson. While the authors recognize that within the fashion industry these particular individuals are not marginalized, it is important to realize that their behavior is constantly watched. For instance, when their actions fit within their prescribed roles according to the White normative and heterosexist standard they are tolerated; however, they can be sharply criticized when demonstrating power that is outside of the stereotypical norm—specifically Tyra. The marginalized-as-judge is an important inversion within the imaged-carnivalistic realm. When looking at the makeup of many judging panels, most are made up of Whites and males. The biggest diversity in judging panels is often reflected in fashion reality shows. The individuals who are representative of more marginalized individuals (homosexuals, racially diverse, and women) are the ones most likely to take on the carnivalesque roles, that is, Bruno Tonioli, Mary Murphy, and even Paula Abdul. Like the traditional or "classic" carnival, the hegemonic inversion provides for and allows space for the "marginalized" who may otherwise never be centered, even if temporarily.

The judges on *ANTM* provide the viewer with a 60-minute imaged-carnivalesque as it provides the viewer with a festive televisual experience. Pitcher (2007) noted that the carnivalesque environment of *Girls Gone Wild* provided a form of mediated voyeurism. This is also true of *ANTM*, which provides peeks into an industry with flamboyant characters, beautiful women, and an abundance of creativity.

Unfortunately, we are seeing only the inviting and titillating, and the images those with the power want us to see.

In reviewing the selected episodes, we saw no ritual spectacles associated with either of the White, heterosexual judges, Nigel Barker[3] and Twiggy, even though they both appear in aspects of the show outside the judging panel. We find that it is not unusual for the White hegemonic judges to appear professional or reserved during the *ANTM* judging panel sessions, unless they are pulled into a situation. This performative behavior is typical of the carnivalesque moment, because it alters the hegemonic order by placing the dominant individual in the midst of a spectacle, often in an unflattering or comical way. It is those with perceived status and power who are usually displaced in a carnivalesque atmosphere in order to make room for the often marginalized players. As previously noted, the carnivalesque ultimately serves to re-center the power back to the dominant group:

> When the carnivalesque manifests on a body already categorized within a minority, it is somehow palatable because it does not pose a genuine threat; the eruptions of this carnival-grotesque are easy to ignore precisely because the eruptions end. Upon the heterosexual, white, male body, however, such eruptions represent a greater threat of contagion to the dominant because it is one of them. (Olbrys, 2006, p. 256)

The most significant performative example of a ritual spectacle related to the judges centers around Miss J. She constantly challenges the hegemonic order in her appearance and actions. As a transgendered individual, Miss J. frequently appears dressed in feminized clothing. For example, in Cycle 2-2 Miss J. is on a runway wearing a long white t-shirt with a woman's body on it and high heels (Banks & Mok, 2004b), in Cycle 3-4 she is dressed as a "school marm" (Banks & Mok, 2004c) and in Cycle 7-1 (Banks & Mok, 2006c), she meets contestants at an airport dressed as a female flight attendant. We also learn Miss J.'s motto, "Walk like it's for sale and the rent is due tonight!" (Banks & Mok, 2004b). According to Pullen (2007) the idea of the carnivalesque is very relevant as it relates to the appearance of gay individuals in reality television. The carnivalesque on *ANTM* allows gay and transgendered individuals central roles, where they can "involve themselves in the performance of 'self-representation'" (Pullen, 2007, p. 71). This is a clear example of Bruner's (2005) creating space for a critique that is not otherwise present.

In addition to Miss J., two other main characters are also involved in acts of ritual spectacle: Tyra and Manuel. Throughout the series, Tyra makes both predictable and surprise appearances. These appearances include one-on-one "advice" sessions with the young female contestants (Cycle 1-5; Banks & Mok, 2003b), as a "coach" to prepare the contestants for the camera or interviews (Cycle 3-11; Banks & Mok, 2004d), or even as the photographer (Cycle 8-10; Banks & Mok, 2007b). Her visits are usually a surprise to the contestants and often feature some type of spectacle. For example, in Cycle 4-9, the contestants are taken to an animal preserve and are told they are going to be posing with wild animals and a pride of lions rush out startling them (Banks &

Mok, 2005b). Suddenly Tyra appears and informs the contestants the shoot in the wild will be in South Africa, which leads Tyra and the contestants to jump around and scream. In Cycle 7-1, Tyra runs out of a building screaming and making demands of her photographers and handlers demonstrating the negative diva image to introduce them to the type of shoot in which they will be participating (Banks & Mok, 2006c).

Manuel also regularly creates spectacle. Between Cycles 1 and 2, Manuel turned his hair from brown to platinum blonde, which has now become his signature trademark (BuddyTV.com, 2007). Manuel wears makeup and silky patterned shirts that are often open to the chest with some gold jewelry. He is also known for his elaborate photo shoots and teaching the women how to apply makeup. He tends to establish a good rapport, which allows for various spectacles to occur when he directs the photo shoots. Both the examples of Tyra's and Manuel's behavior create a carnivalesque space for laughter and learning. These examples contribute to the imaged-carnivalesque atmosphere and the ritual spectacle. "The eroding of distinctions between performers and audience is a central premise, which allows us to consider that normal 'rules of engagement' are suspended, and all who participated in the carnival to some degree become part of the ritual, and consequently of its cultural meaning" (Pullen, 2007, p. 73).

Bakhtin's notion of ritual spectacles are to break up "the established order" and create a feeling of "immeasurable and exaggerated dimensions" (Danow quoting and expanding upon Bakhtin, 1995, p. 35). And with this idea of the imaged-carnival they do. Unlike other reality shows that let viewers, contestants, or some type of challenge decide who is eliminated, *ANTM* judges who are often marginalized outside this televisual realm have this power. In this instance, an inversion occurs; the "others" select models. This is where fashion/beauty reality shows often invert standard themes associated with carnival. The marginalized individuals are not only teaching a contestant how to walk, to dress, to design, and to apply makeup but they are also making the decisions of who stays and who goes. In this imaged-carnival environment, *ANTM* exposes the contestants and the audiences to a cast of characters that challenge our notions of how experts should look and act. This is illustrated during Cycle 3-4, with one of the contestants making the statement "Why doesn't anyone explain Miss J. to us? He wears heels and nobody says anything about it" (Banks & Mok, 2004c). This comment illustrates how many individuals have little exposure to or knowledge of diversity as it relates to gender and/or sexuality. This is an example of the liminal space for critique that Bruner (2005) discusses.

Further, the idea of imaged-carnivalesque is relevant to reality shows because of the exaggerated dimensions that are portrayed. Most reality shows are as far from reality as you can get. To get a dream job, most individuals have to have education, experience, knowledge, and/or luck. The interview does not require anyone to live in a house with 14 other people and get weeded out week by week. Most musicians were not discovered on a talent show and most chefs are not subject to extreme verbal abuse when trying to become a head chef or to start their own restaurant. While the carnival experience may only be lived by those directly involved, many audience

members may share in this experience by indirectly participating through voting, by discussing the show with others, or even by getting involved online through blogs and discussion boards. Yet, the ritual spectacles we see on *ANTM*, as well as other shows, are only accepted in its mediated, entertainment form, the imaged-carnivalesque. In other words, once the imaged-carnivalesque moment disappears after 60 minutes of commercial television, for most, the status quo returns. As anthropologists Geertz (2000) and Turner (1988) noted, while subverting the hegemonic hierarchy one also reinscribes said hierarchy. The carnivalesque celebrations call into question the social order and, in doing so, make known that there is a status quo, a "normal" to call into question in the first place. The actions of Manual, Miss J., and Tyra are tolerated or seen entertaining on television but become less so if the carnivalesque bridge is crossed into reality.

Comic Verbal Compositions

Comic verbal compositions appear throughout each episode of the *ANTM* series. According to Stallybrass and White (1999), comic verbal compositions include "(oral and written) such as parodies, travesties and vulgar farce" (p. 247). Unlike the ritual spectacles that can be witnessed regularly throughout each cycle, the verbal compositions on *ANTM* are the spontaneous activities and comments that happen throughout the episode. These compositions often take place to humor the judges, viewing audience, and the contestants or to illustrate a point in the absence of the contestants.

The most notable of the comic verbal compositions traditionally comes from the transgender and gay male judges and Dickinson. In Cycle 2-2, for example, Miss J. makes the comment about contestant Xiomara, "She needs to work on the possessed *Children of the Damned* look!" (Banks & Mok, 2004b). In Cycle 4-9, Miss J. comments on the posing of one of the contestants, "I love her there. She looks like a lawn jockey. I want to put a lantern in her hand!"[4] (Banks & Mok, 2005b) "Jim's [the photographer] got more grace than this, I'm telling you," states Manuel (Cycle 3-11; Banks & Mok, 2004d) while mocking contestant Norelle's inability to demonstrate grace. Marin states in Cycle 4-9, "She's getting a little too elephant for me, she's out!" (Banks & Mok, 2005b) regarding contestant Keenya's photo, where she was posing as an elephant.

The comic verbal compositions have a dual function. The first function provides humorous dialogue to keep the viewers (and judges) engaged and entertained. For example, Miss J.'s comment on the model looking like a lawn jockey serves no real purpose but to make the audience and the others involved laugh, which is an important aspect of the carnival. The second function has to do with controlling the power and maintaining authority. There is no real reason to refer to one of the models as an elephant or as possessed; however, it demonstrates the power (through humor) the judges have over the contestants throughout the series. The lawn jockey and elephant comments illustrate both the positive and negative challenges presented by the carnivalesque. Miss J.'s comment represents the idea of carnival laughter. As a key player of *ANTM*, he certainly has the power in this situation, but he uses it in a playful way,

ultimately complimenting the contestant. On the other hand, Marin, a short, chubby, balding, gay Latino male, uses his voice to exert power over a young Black female contestant with an eating disorder. Instead of using his power to liberate a marginalized individual from hierarchy, he uses the carnival moment to gain or maintain power. This behavior keeps the viewers focused on the judges, not just the models.

In addition to the comic verbal dialogue, the judges often engage in comic actions. In Cycle 4-9 during the evaluation panel, the contestants were asked to demonstrate several emotions. One of the contestants struggled with passion. ''Do you want to see passion?'' asks Dickinson. She unexpectedly plants a big kiss on Tyra's mouth. Tyra screams and they both fall down laughing. Next, Dickinson grabs Tyra and rolls her over wrapping her legs around her. At this time Barker stands up with a huge grin on his face and states, ''Now that's something I could get involved in!'' (Banks & Mok, 2005b). One critical tenant of CDA is the role of power and dominance (van Dijk, 1993). As Dickenson and Tyra are enacting a carnivalesque moment, Barker flips the script to reinscribe the White, male fantasy of heteronormative behavior.

While this is one extreme example of comic verbal dialogue there are many other examples found throughout the series. In Cycle 7-5, for example, in referencing a photo shoot of a bird woman, Miss J. begins making bird sounds and head movements. Tyra extends her hand like she is feeding her and Miss J. pretends to eat (Banks & Mok, 2006d). In Cycle 8-10, after Tyra has been getting wet taking photographs in the water she says in a child like voice, ''I made a pee pee, I made a pee pee mommy'' (Banks & Mok, 2007b) as she refers to her wet pants. One question that arises in Olbrys' research is ''what is accomplished as the humor surfaces'' (2006, p. 249). In the instance of Barker's comment, hegemony was reinscribed. As far as the ''minor'' comic interactions of Miss J. and Tyra, Olbrys makes us wonder if their marginality has been justified as opposed to questioned (2006, p. 251).

While the majority of the comedic judging interactions in the earlier season relate around Dickinson and Marin, beginning in Season Five, most of the comedic interactions are between Tyra and Miss J. Tyra has always been part of the carnival spectacle. However, as the judging panel has changed to become more conservative, her actions have changed to continue the verbal spectacle that had been previously maintained by Dickinson and Marin. Unlike Twiggy, Tyra is ''the other.'' Even though Tyra is the producer and main character on the show, she, not Twiggy, becomes the one to take on more carnivalesque behavior.

Throughout the series Barker occasionally demonstrates a sense of humor, but the participation of Twiggy during any type of comic interlude is usually no more than a smile or a laugh. This again represents their place in the hegemonic order and how the viewers ''expect'' them to act. Gay men, transgender men, and women of color can get away with making certain comments in this carnivalesque environment, whereas White heterosexual men and women monitor what they say so as not to threaten their place in the hegemonic order when the carnivalesque environment returns to ''normalcy.'' The ''othered'' members of the judging panel could be playing into the stereotypes of what the White, male, heterosexual hegemonic hierarchy expects out of them: the comic fool.

Billingsgate or Abusive Language

"My job is to be as brutally honest as possible and hey, let's face it, if the girls can't handle my critique they sure aren't going to be able to handle the fashion industry," says Janice Dickinson (Cycle 2-1; Banks & Mok, 2004a). Bakhtin referred to billingsgate as "curses, oaths, slang, humour, popular tricks and jokes, scatological forms, in fact all the 'low' and 'dirty' sorts of folk humour" (Stallybrass & White, 1999, p. 247). Unlike the comic verbal compositions, which were not necessarily directed to the contestants, billingsgate or abusive language are the comments or remarks made directly to the contestants to illustrate how poorly they are performing. While the actual comments would not necessarily be considered abusive, they can be considered brutally honest as Dickinson's comment states. This is why, for example, reality show stars like Simon Cowell on *American Idol* or Piers Morgan on *America's Got Talent* are often critiqued as abusive, hurtful, or jerks. However, this hurtful language, coming from White males, is both tolerated and is part of why viewers keep tuning in every week.

It is through the use of language that the judges can really gain and assert their power. Traditionally, White, heterosexual men have the most power. However, in the fashion industry, males, especially gay males, find even greater success than females. In an industry geared toward women, females are still struggling. In 2005, *The New York Times* featured an article in their fashion and style section highlighting how gay males seem to be making better headway in the industry than women. Although students enrolled in design schools are disproportionally female (over 80%), they are not rising proportionally to the top (Wilson, 2005). A 2009 article by *The Independent* states that while women dominate the fashion industry they hold only one third of the top jobs and make approximately 15% less than their male counterparts (Shields, 2009). So even within an industry geared toward women, women have limited power. A successful designer can adapt and change to be around for many years, whereas today most models have a short-term career, much of which is dependent on the designers.

While Tyra has managed to keep herself in the spotlight in a primarily positive way, Dickinson has managed to keep the spotlight in more negative ways. In fact, the harshest and more controversial comments during the series tend to come from Dickinson. To Kesse, a contestant on Cycle 1-5, Dickinson made the following comment about her photograph: "This looks like she escaped from the mental institution. This is the worst photograph I have ever seen, you look deranged, your arms look amputee [*sic*] and it looks like you have a penis, I'm sorry!" (Banks & Mok, 2003b). To Ann, a contestant in Cycle 3-4 on her runway walk, Dickinson stated, "You came out like an East German swimmer" (Banks & Mok, 2004c). Occasionally, Dickinson even hardens comments made by Tyra, as in this example: Regarding contestant Keenya's photograph in Cycle 4-9, Tyra stated bluntly, "This photograph is really beautiful Keenya, but I hate to say it, but they had to do a lot of body work on you in retouching." "Stop!" shouts Dickinson, "If you are sporting a gut, then you turn to the side and disguise it!" (Banks & Mok, 2005b).

Dickinson's replacement in Cycle 5, Twiggy's harshest comment in all episodes analyzed was to contestant Meg. "It looks like you're waiting to start your session of photography. It's not just your face and the beard [she was the bearded lady for a photo shoot], it's the whole body language" (Cycle 7-5; Banks & Mok, 2006d). Unlike Twiggy, Dickinson's speech has no boundaries. Her power is derived from her carnivalized speech and behavior.

Conversely, the comments by Marin, Miss. J., Manuel, and Nicholson critique the contestants using more quirky humor rather than biting commentary. "Oh, we gonna have fun. Miss Yoanna, your walk is really as useless as a flashlight without batteries in the dark," said Miss J., who then proceeded to demonstrate contestant Yoanna's horse-like walk in front of everyone (Cycle 2-2; Banks & Mok, 2004b). In Cycle 2-2, Nicholson said to contestant Heather, "I know you are going for a sexy sort of sultry expression, but it comes off a little bit like you are sitting on a toilet" (2004b). In Cycle 3-4, Miss J. stated to one of the contestants, "Tocarra, you know you are plus-sized, suck the gut baby. Anything hanging out looks nasty" (Banks & Mok, 2004c). The subversive comments by the judges illustrate the carnivalesque. It gives the "other" power and authority by subverting the normative rules; yet, when one listens to the comments, there is no real depth of meaning and the models are judged against some illusive image. While these comments impact the contestants, if they were made by the same people in a setting outside of the fashion world, they would probably be disregarded as silly or useless. Because the validity of these comments does not transcend the fashion or television world, it illustrates how little power the judges truly have. As Stamm (1982) points out, the inversion of power is often used against similarly marginalized individuals. In this case, it is often women and marginalized men demonizing young women, who have relatively little power.

Barker is the verbal antithesis of the carnivalesque moment. In fact, his comments look rather bland; the exact opposite of what carnival wants to promote. For example, to contestant Xiomara regarding her runway walk Miss J. said, "Girl you walk like you on crack, your eyes are bugged out of your head like something just scared the hell out of you." Barker commented, "Xiomara, you did look like you were possessed" (Cycle 2-2; Banks & Mok, 2004b). To Melrose, instead of saying "She does look a little bit long in the tooth" (which is how Miss J. refers to her later), Barker said, "What worries me in a shot like this is you photograph looking old, and that's with retouching" (Cycle 7-1; Banks & Mok, 2006c).

Of all the judges, Tyra is the least harsh when directly dealing with the contestants. While Tyra actively participates in ritual spectacle and comic verbal compositions, we suspect that her lack of abusive language is due to her desire to be seen as a mentor and confidante of the participants. In at least one episode of every cycle, Tyra has self-disclosive sessions with each woman regarding their experiences in the house and in modeling. Thus, she is seen as "safe" and as someone who wants each woman to succeed. Tyra's demeanor, when critiquing the contestants, comes across as constructive criticism, although sometimes mixed with slight humor or disappointment except during one moment during Cycle 4, when she exhibited a contradiction to the carnival, referred to as the "Tyra tirade."

In Cycle 4-7, during the final elimination, two contestants stood before Tyra, a White woman and a Black woman. Instead of Tyra pulling out the last photo, she pulled out a blank piece of paper indicating that both women were eliminated—the first and only time that has been done. While the White woman begins crying and hugging the remaining contestants, the Black woman laughs and jokes with them. Tyra called the two women back in front of her and told the White woman she admired her emotion, because it showed she really cared. She told the Black woman that she was extremely disappointed in her. Tyra verbally reprimanded the woman and at one point yelled, ''Be quiet Tiffany, be quiet! What is wrong with you? STOP IT! I have never in my life yelled at a girl like this!'' Based on how Tyra treated the contestants and the behavior of this individual, Tyra's outrage is very believable. However, it is the conversation prior to the elimination round that makes us question the actual reason for this outburst:

> Tyra: I feel the girls tonight have done horribly in general.
> Janice: I'm not seeing drive. I'm losing hunger in the eyes. It's like they have just plateaued.
> Nigel: There needs to be something that really gets the competition going again. They need a wakeup call. (Banks & Mok, 2005a)

Was this a wakeup call or was this a publicity stunt? Was this an imaged-carnival moment that failed? Was it a coincidence that the contestant who was reprimanded was the poor Black woman who Tyra had been empathic with from the beginning of the cycle? Here, the imaged-carnivalesque moment crossed back into White hegemonic reality; there can be no angry, negative critique of a White woman by a Black woman. Stallybrass and White (1986) also point out that carnival can manifest itself in ways that negatively impact minorities or powerless individuals. Although Tyra may be justified in her critique of the Black woman, her behavior reifies the White hegemonic order during this carnivalesque moment.

While this type of emotion is rarely seen on *ANTM*, ''It is worth noting that in many [reality television] shows it has become commonplace to show excessively emotional—usually angry—African American women providing what Grindstaff calls a 'hard-core' 'money shot'" (Dubrofsky, 2009, p. 356). Similar to the idea of the angry African American, in their research on *Road Rules,* Andrejevic and Colby (2006) discuss the idea of race and ghetto identity. In their example, one particular Black character becomes aggressive and confrontational; she is constructed as authentically ghetto and eliminated from the show. This episode presented an image of Tyra that viewers did not like. In fact, the episode was in a number of online spoofs and was even featured on the cartoon *Family Guy*, where instead of having an angry Tyra yell at the model, she turns into a lizard and eats her. This moment in the show, and the reaction of the audience, is significant in terms of imaged-carnival. The audience accepts the marginalized judges when they poke fun at themselves or the models. Performing buffoonery is what the White hegemonic hierarchy expects, as the marginalized individuals stay within the allowable boundaries of their roles. When Simon Cowell, Piers Morgan, or Chef Ramsey go off on a tirade it is an allowed, expected,

and even anticipated behavior. However, when Tyra demonstrates quite possibly genuine emotions and asserts her power as the expert, she becomes the one mocked and ridiculed by the audience. The imaged-carnival moment has suddenly ended, because her carnival mask was removed. Tyra becomes the object of ridicule for being ''excessively Black'' and outside the parameters of her hegemonically prescribed role. This type of language used by the judges in *ANTM* can dissolve borders and challenge the power structure in our society. However, it is important to note that often this is only temporary and may only be practical with the confines of media.

Tyra Mail: Time to Deliberate the Imaged-Carnivalesque

> Sara, your expression looks a little blow-up dollish. You're supposed to be Gretel, not blow-up Gretel. (Manuel, Cycle 6-3, comment said to contestant Sara; Banks & Mok, 2006a)

One of the most unique contributions reality television has made is the inclusion of the judging panel. Historically, most reality shows did not have an outside judging panel, and because of this, there is limited work on the role of reality show judges. Reminiscent of the *Gong Show* in the 1970s, today many reality television shows are featuring a cast of judges deciding or assisting in the decision to find the next big talent from cooking to modeling. In bringing Bahktin into the twenty-first century, we created the concept of the imaged-carnivalesque that allowed us to analyze the carnival in a televisual realm. As reality television continues to develop, the subgenre of reality competition shows are becoming more popular. Because of this new direction in reality shows, it is important to understand the roles and effects of the judges and their behaviors. We chose Bahktin's theory of carnival because the components of ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, and abusive language are routinely used and easily identifiable in almost every show featuring a judging panel, such as *Dancing with the Stars, American Idol, The Voice, Project Runway*, and *The Apprentice*.

Fashion reality shows take the carnivalesque to new levels. First, the fashion industry provides a wonderful diversity of individuals at all levels of the industry. Because of this, individuals who are normally othered (ethnic minorities; women; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender [GLBT]) in most industries are centered, key players. This diversity allows the audience televisual access to individuals of different races, genders, sexualities, and backgrounds. Outside of the fashion reality shows, we do not always see transgendered individuals, openly gay, or Black women serving as judges. Second, unlike other reality shows, the judges on *ANTM* routinely play several roles in the show, illustrating their particular skills and expertise. They participate by serving as coaches and teachers, photographers, art directors, makeup specialists, and mentors. Finally, the use of carnivalesque tactics has deliberately made the *ANTM* judges more of a focal point than the contestants. Although the purpose of the show is to find out who will be the next top model, much of the show's interest revolves around the actions and comments of the judges. This has been an ongoing

trend as reality competition shows are starting to employ judges to guide the contestants or to decide who stays and goes (e.g., *Project Runway, The Voice*).

The judges in *ANTM* are crucial to the ''packaged'' reality of this show. Without the judges, there would be few filmable carnival or carnivalesque moments. The judges, in centering themselves, provide the opportunity for the Bahktin's carnival and carnivalesque to take place, not only in their sometimes outlandish behavior but also in who they happen to be in terms of race, gender, and sexual orientation. The stereotype society has of models is that they are beautiful, flighty, unintelligent, and White. The majority of contestants on *ANTM* visually appear White and all are women. Generally, most individuals do not expect models to harbor any power let alone carry a reality show, and given that all of the models on *ANTM* are women, society expects it even less that they have power. These women are often no more than accessories for the clothes as they showcase the talents of the designers. In contrast, even as ''othered'' individuals it is the judges who, when juxtaposed against the models, have everything they do not—power, wit, and fame. If we ignore the power, fortune, and fame that these judges have and only concentrate on their status of being ethnic minorities, women, and GLBT people, they become the definition of the carnival and carnivalesque as visually they are seen as individuals who typically have less power in U.S. society. It is the minority judges who center themselves through their sometimes biting humor, comments, and observations that upend and challenge societal hierarchal norms; it is these norms that Bahktin references. It is the judges, not the models, who are given temporary control through the power of the television and the imaged-carnivalesque. Thus, this brings up important questions: Who are the marginalized really in *ANTM*? Why do we accept this behavior solely focused on young women?

Traditionally in U.S. society ethnic minorities, women, and GLBT people are those who are marginalized and often have the least power. *ANTM* highlights the various talents and abilities of individuals who are marginalized in traditional society, but not necessarily in their respective fields. The judges and guests are openly and recognizably marginalized individuals. There is no attempt to hide the sexuality of the gay and transgendered judges, the White heterosexual judges are in the minority and much of the uniqueness of the fashion industry is there for everyone to see. In other reality shows, we rarely see the judges do anything but judge.

The judges on *ANTM* are at the pinnacle of their career in terms of fame, money, and power. However, this article serves to demonstrate how those who are traditionally marginalized in U.S. society can use their differences and their unique voices to challenge the hegemonic order and also to reinforce it, as seen in this reality show through the imaged-carnivalesque. However, it is important to note that in these carnival and carnivalesque moments there has never been an *ANTM* that features male models. We posit that, if there were, the show would be drastically different as would the behavior of the judges. Our hypothesis here would be that if the show had male rather than female models, there would be fewer carnivalesque moments. Instead, the judges, who are largely ethnic minorities, women, and GLBT people, would not be successful in challenging the patriarchal normative standard. And, if the male models

mirrored the same racial makeup as the female models currently do, then the male models would also be predominantly White. Thus, the imaged-carnivalesque on *ANTM* is even more successful because the targets of their transgressions are on young, predominantly White women and not men of any race. The show uses models who are seen as disempowered: young women who are trying to break into the fashion industry. The show does not target people to whom power is automatically granted by U.S. society (White men). It is this imaged-carnivalesque difference that allows *ANTM* to transgress traditional society; however, the televisual medium that allows this transgressive behavior also confines it, hence the imaged-carnivalesque. While *ANTM* is "allowed" to highlight the marginalized individuals, there is no real depth to the characters. We laugh at the quirkiness of the judges but have no understanding of what it is like for them when they leave the sanctuary of the fashion world. In true carnival fashion, the judges speak to us through masks showing us the extremes of emotions. Essentially, the marginalized characters perform and entertain. The observation of performativity leads us to the question of how does the judges' behavior function in terms of the hegemonic order?

"At a time when being watched is an increasingly productive activity, we are present with the spectacle of how fun surveillance can be, how it can help us learn about ourselves and provide access to the reality ostensibly occluded by the advent of the forms of homogenization, abstraction, and media manipulation associated with the culture industry" (Andrejevic, 2003, p. 8). Carnival(esque) moments provide the reifications or challenges to society when it comes to what or who is acceptable in society, and what behaviors are or are not acceptable in society. Through this reality television surveillance, we find that the societal barriers separating the normalized from the marginalized are suspended; however, it is only for a limited time and location. The imaged-carnival that is *ANTM* is allowed for one hour a week and is confined to the media we view. The sometimes outrageous or even "normal" behavior regarding ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, and billingsgate language of the judges would rarely be tolerated outside of television. Because the viewer is only allowed to watch, not participate, some of this behavior may lead to more stereotypes of marginalized individuals. Even though *ANTM* does go the extra step to highlight the knowledge, talent, and dedication its judges have, the carnivalesque tactics used by the show present little challenge to the hegemonic hierarchy. The lack of awareness of marginalization of others, the lack of depth the show presents, and the overtly carnival atmosphere unfortunately fail to adequately confront issues of gender and diversity that are presented to us through *ANTM*. Because the carnival occurs in the "sanctioned" space of television where it can be witnessed but not experienced, the return to normalcy occurs at the end of each episode with the unfortunate result: *ANTM* turned off = carnival over.

Notes

[1] *Candid Camera* was originally a successful radio show, *Candid Microphone*, which was broadcast in 1947.

[2] After inputting all data into an MS Excel spreadsheet, episodes were randomly chosen with assistance from the data analysis and sampling tabs. Cycle 7 was resampled as one of the randomly chosen episodes was a recap program. The following is the list of cycles and episodes chosen: 1–3, 1–5, 2–1, 2–2, 3–4, 3–11, 4–7, 4–9, 5–6, 5–8, 6–3, 6–8, 7–1, 7–5, 8–6, and 8–10.

[3] Although Nigel is multiracial, he appears White and is afforded White male privileges based on his visual representation.

[4] The jockey's timeless design was borrowed from ancient Greece and reinvented in colonial America by such figures as George Washington and Harriet Tubman, and other escaping slaves to be used as examples of patriotism, endurance, and hope. In the 1860s, African American lawn jockey's took on the racist minstrel exaggerated features. Since no image of the lawn jockey was presented in conjunction with the model, the authors cannot/will not assume to which style of lawn jockey Miss. J. refers.

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