

Running head: A HOME IMPROVEMENT REALITY

A HOME IMPROVEMENT REALITY:
EXPOSING THE MYTHS AND IDEOLOGIES
IN BUDGET 'HOME AND
GARDEN' PROGRAMS

By

JESSICA AGER

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

Royal Roads University
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Supervisor: Juana Du
August 2017



JESSICA AGER, 2017

COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The members of Jessica Ager's Thesis Committee certify that they have read the thesis titled: "A Home Improvement Reality: Exposing the Myths and Ideologies in Budget 'Home and Garden' Programs" and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Professional Communication.

Juana Du [signature on file]

Virginia McKendry [signature on file]

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon submission of the final copy of the thesis to Royal Roads University. The thesis supervisor confirms to have read this thesis and recommends that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements: Juana Du [signature on file].

Creative Commons Statement



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Canada License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca/>.

Some material in this work is not being made available under the terms of this licence:

- Third-Party material that is being used under fair dealing or with permission.
- Any photographs where individuals are easily identifiable.

Abstract

There is a culture industry deeply invested in alerting consumers to what is “trending” in virtually every element of our lives today, especially with regards to the home and how it is meant to look. This study focuses on how budget ‘home and garden’ programs are promoting and naturalizing neoliberal cultural myths about the “North American dream.” By conducting an audience analysis of 25 Southern Alberta Institute and Technology students and staff who regularly watch home improvement shows. This study found that viewers’ image of the good life is aligned with the encoded messages of consumerism and unlimited accumulation, and other assumptions connected to capitalist notions of economic prosperity. Audiences have given over control to home improvement shows to define and determine the standard of home aesthetics.

Keywords: myths, neoliberalism, budget home improvement shows, building shows, television, thematic analysis

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Literature Review	9
Reality Improvement	9
Home improvement as Productive of Cultural Myth	12
A Myth is Made	14
Dominant Myths of Home Improvement Shows	15
Commercialization of Programming	18
Audiences and Media Ideologies	19
Summary	23
Method	24
Data Gathering and Collection	25
Program Sampling	25
Gathering the Data	28
Data Analysis	31
Ethics	34
Findings	35
The Cost Imbalance of Design	36
Myth Construction	36
Participant Interpretation	38
Speed and Quality are One in the Same	40
Myth Construction	40
Participant Interpretation	40
It Needs to Be Trendy or Eccentric Design	42
Myth Construction	42
Participant Interpretation	43
The Constant Consumer	45
Myth Construction	46
Participant Interpretation	47
Discussions	49
Conclusion	53
Limitations and Exclusions	55
Reference	56
Appendix	64
Appendix A—Initial Email	64
Appendix B—Follow-up Email	65
Appendix C—Confirmation Email	66
Appendix D—Consent Letter	67
Appendix E—Questions	68
Appendix F—Post-Questions	69
Appendix G—Episode Thematic Analysis	70
Appendix H—Myth: Cost Imbalance	71
Appendix I—Myth: Speed and Quality are One in the Same	72
Appendix J—Myth: It Needs to Be Trendy or Eccentric Design	73
Appendix K—Myth: Constant Consumer	74

Introduction

Home improvement reality TV programs introduce the element of viewing real people working on real projects, and in order to capitalize the popularity of this trend HGTV (Home and Garden Television) was created and first broadcasted on Canadian televisions in 1996. The nature of the programming as described by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications (CRTC) (1996) was dedicated to five areas of interest: “building and remodeling, decorating and interior design, gardening and landscaping, crafts and hobbies and special interest groups” (CRTC, 1996). Everett (2004) observed three factors that explain the rise of HGTV: (1) the ease of accessibility on the network (2) the attitude change in “baby boomers”, and (3) governmental community funding programs. Through its’ programming, HGTV has consistently shown viewers how to interpret and respond to macro-economic trends within a home renovation context. More specifically, HGTV’s response to the realities of the 2008 recession, ironically linked directly to the bubble in home ownership related to the sub-prime mortgage scandal, has been to establish trendy programs such as *Love It or List It*, in which, an interior designer and a real estate agent, help a family through renovating the home or selling it, on the premise that remodeling could simultaneously be more cost-effective than buying new, or that renovations provide the mechanism for using one’s home as an investment property. At the end of the show the family must decide if they are going to stay in their newly renovated home or list it and move. Another show on HGTV is *Rehab Addict*, which looks at the realities of recession and its relevance to homeowners through a show about a heritage-loving woman who goes into old homes that are set to be demolished and revamps the home back to life.

This study is concerned with how the seemingly innocent informational and entertainment value of these shows also result in indoctrinating viewers with a set of cultural myths about class realities and images of the good life in Western countries like Canada, and the USA. For one thing, the imbedding of advertisers into the program offers the viewer an opportunity to purchase the same products used on the shows, promoting the idea that anyone has the ability to own a home, and that individual prosperity can be achieved regardless of the overall state of the economy. Although HGTV programs have been the subject of some earlier scholarship (Rogers, 2002; Hay, 2010), to date there are only a few recent studies on programs that purport to acknowledge the economic pressures on today's home renovator (Bruce & Druick, 2017; McElroy, 2017) and how HGTV programming communicates the meaning of recession to its viewers (Bruce, 2017; White, 2017). The way in which cultural myths about the good life mask the reality of what is involved in home renovation combined with the need for society to strive towards maintaining a particular home-style, is what drives this study to answer the question: What cultural myths and social identities are being produced and circulated by the introduction of 'home and garden' programs, that use an agreed upon budget for the project on HGTV, during an era of an extended North American economic recession? By revealing these ideological standpoints, this study will expose one recent example of how popular culture circulates hegemonic neoliberal ideologies that work against the interests of individual viewers considering home ownership in an overheated housing market. This research aims to identify how popular media texts work symbolically to convince audiences that they can buy their way out of the economic mess that North American's are currently challenged by.

Working within the critical paradigm, this research takes the form of a qualitative study that uses an audience analysis approach to identify viewer's consumption and identification with ideological standpoints that are present in two budget 'home and garden' programs, *Leave it to Bryan* (2016) and *Tiny Home, Big Living* (2017). The first phase involves conducting a thematic analysis to identify myth production in two shows, *Leave it to Bryan* and *Tiny Home, Big Living*, determining the set of codes that will be used in the next phase of the research. In the second phase, five sets of focus groups were conducted with individuals who have both viewed the programs and conducted their own home renovations to gauge their level of awareness of the ideological stance of the programs and the level to which they agree with or oppose their ideological messages. Theoretically, the analysis was guided generally by Roland Barthes (1972) work on the semiotics of cultural myths, Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" (1980) model for assessing audience agency in meaning production. The objective of seeking out and listening to audience perspectives on their HGTV home renovation program viewing was to demonstrate how the audience decodes the messages encoded in the program narratives in order to discover what messages they notice being communicated, and whether they accept, oppose, or negotiate those ideological assumptions.

The analysis found that viewers generally accept the latent neoliberal ideology informing the narrative arc of each program. While they have a clear understanding of the realities behind budget 'home and garden' programs and therefore an oppositional decoding of the myths of "cost imbalance", "speed equals quality" and "trendy or eccentric design." Viewers are eager to accept and align with the neoliberal ideologies encoded within the shows that promote never-ending consumption and continuous striving for more. The goal of this research is to reveal and

discuss the tendency of budget ‘home and garden’ programs to address their viewers as consumers, a home as a commodity, and society as a marketplace, all the while promoting an image of the world that is oblivious to the likelihood that fewer people will ever achieve the dream of home ownership. Awakening the viewer to the ideologies being circulated by budget ‘home and garden’ programs that could allow them to become aware of their own degree of identification with or opposition to those ideologies instead of blindly falling in line to what they are being told to believe.

Literature Review

This study seeks to understand how budget ‘home and garden’ programs, specifically those on HGTV, are circulating class ideologies that are being accepted by society but may not be in the best interest of citizens or the vision of a just society. To create the conceptual framework for this study, this literature review focuses specifically on scholarship related to the reality TV genre. It then synthesizes relevant studies about HGTV that explore the myths produced by its programming, followed by a review of the more general literature on the commercialization of social identities displayed by home improvement shows and the debates on ideologies, media and audience effects. This review aims to frame my study with a critique of how seemingly apolitical budget ‘home and garden’ programs promote and normalize a standard of living without signaling its corporate interests; without viewers really noticing that underlying ideology for what its class commitments and lack of interest in social wellbeing.

Reality Improvement

In 2000, a new genre of television programming was introduced and being aired during prime-time spots. By 2003 the success of the reality TV genre had proven to be of lasting power,

with networks such as ABC allowing for one-seventh of its' programing to be reserved specifically for more reality type shows and a cut back on scripted dramas (Murray & Ouellette, 2004). Aslama and Pantti (2006) address the increase in popularity of reality TV, positing that its draw is the free expression of "true" and real emotions. Rose and Wood (2005) discuss how the programs create the ability for the audience to see similarities and differences to their own lives through the various issues and situations enacted in the script. However, Hill (2005) suggests that audiences tend to judge the truthfulness and authenticity of the show by how people are represented in front of the cameras: "The more ordinary people are perceived to perform for the cameras, the less real the program appears to be to viewers" (Hill, 2005, p. 57).

Yet, the continued success of reality shows demonstrates that audiences allow reality TV to set the standard for how an individual is to deal with emotional or behavioral experiences (Bonsu, Darmody & Parmentier, 2010). For example, a study conducted by Domoff, Hinman, Koball, Storfer-Isser, Carhart, Baik, and Carels (2012) found that viewers of *Biggest Loser* resulted in having a negative perception of overweight individuals who believed that weight is controllable (Domoff et al., 2012). Similarly, Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2006) discuss the increase in acceptance towards cosmetic surgery with the growing popularity of makeover reality shows. Both studies point to the social impact these reality "improvement" shows can have. As reality shows continue to monopolize the cable networks, there is every indication that audiences will begin to use it as a tool to develop their social norms around what they are being shown through reality TV programs. Heller (2006) states that "what American makeover shows often tell us is that self-realization and conformity to cultural ideals are twin virtues founded on one's unrealized desire for belonging" (p. 1). Springett (2010) mentioned how reality shows

display individuals in various circumstances that want to “improve” their situation by conforming them to “meet certain ideals” (p. 6). In a study by Allon (2008), she equated home improvement shows as a demonstration of creating social significance, with enhancing the home value it adjusted their existence within society.

Two very common trends within the reality TV genre are home improvement and makeover shows (Springett, 2010). With the creation of HGTV (Home and Garden TV) a marathon of home improvement shows are broadcasted 24 hours a day. Rogers (2002) stated that HGTV “is to home and garden what ESPN is to sports” (p. 1). Lewis (2008b) looks at how the subtext of makeover shows promotes the idea that there is a need to make improvements to one’s current life, finding that, while audiences were critical of various aspects of these shows, they still accepted the main concept of the show as “social and moral transformation” (p. 445). In another study, Lewis (2008a) argues that makeover shows have become a sub-genre under the reality TV umbrella, merging together various other genres such as lifestyle advice, talk show, and soap opera programming to create an exciting show for audiences. In McElroy’s (2008) study, she argues that that Property TV, in “making the domestic national, sutures the making of home to the making of the nation and more broadly to the making and negotiation of national belonging” (p. 45). With the constant ability to tune in to these programs, viewers consistently consume and identify with the what repetitive media representations have deemed as an acceptable home appearance, such that the generic home improvement show has built a set of standards through which viewers can measure themselves against.

The programs of HGTV have been discussed frequently from various perspectives, but usually with a critical theoretical focus on the corporate values and neoliberal ideology

underlying the entire purpose of the network. For example, White's (2012) study focused on *American House Hunters* and how it communicates to audiences the appeal of owning a home because it creates the sense of fulfilling the values of success and security, while in turn undermining the true reality of homeownership but instead as a way to promote the networks other lifestyle programs. Hay (2010) looked at how HGTV stated that the real purpose behind their real estate programs is to produce entrepreneurs that are self-managed and have the ability to replicate a similar lifestyle. Ryan (2015) argued that neoliberal citizenship and lifestyle are woven together by television programming taking the stance of creating a self-managed viewer. She states that lifestyle television programs are a way to "instruct, entreats, appeals to and molds individuals into ideal citizens" (p. 2). Her study concluded by acknowledging the neoliberal messaging was accepted when it appealed to a cultural moment. Ryan (2015) noted that the success of Martha Stewart "articulated a compelling fantasy of abundance, plenty, and richness—of food, of aesthetics, and social life—that formed a core appeal during a cultural moment in which those elements were lacking" (p.17). Taking a critical stance similar to that of Ryan (2015), who sees the intent of reality TV in creating a homogenous world of home-owning shoppers, this research study will be specifically focusing on *how* budget 'home and garden' programs semiotically create a set of standards that society deems acceptable with regards to the overall look and style of a home, and whether audiences receive those messages in the same spirit intended by the network.

Home Improvement as Productive of Cultural Myth

With the introduction of home improvement reality shows, people seeking inspiration for how to renovate their home are now presented with a relentless variety of visual options

reflecting the evolving trends that drive the home improvement industry as a whole. Zborowski (2012) argued that the visual details and materialistic nature of lifestyle shows support and cultivate the notion that people should think of their home as a representation of themselves, and that it is normal to portray themselves and their homes as items on display, always needing to represent the best with little time and effort. Without being obvious to the audience, cultural myths of what is normal and natural are being represented as if it were within the viewers' personal capacity to achieve home ownership and "on-trend" architectural detail and furnishings, should they choose to take the advice.

Barthes' (1972) semiotic concept of *mythology* describes how ideology enters into signification. He explains how *myth*, a type of sign, begins with seemingly apolitical signs, such that a myth analysis must begin with first understanding the semiotic operations of denotation and connotation. Denotation is similarly defined as "literal", "commonsense" or "obvious" when interpreting the meaning of a sign. Where connotation is the personal associations of the interpreter based on the viewers' class, age, gender or ethnicity. Barthes (1972) noted that denotation and connotation can be described in different orders of signification: the *first order of signification*, denotation in which a sign is comprised of a signifier and a signified that appears to be purely descriptive, such as the name or literal meaning of something. *The second order of signification* is the level of connotation, when the denotative sign is used as the signifier and additional signified meanings are attached through referencing existing cultural codes that pre-exist the moment of semiosis. For example, in a discussion of how signification works in wardrobe makeover shows, Thomas (2010) illustrated how, the appearance of outdated clothing

would be the denotative sign and the connotative interpretation for some viewers may be the need for intervention, while others see it as a personal expression of style.

Although Barthes (1972) later stated that it has become very difficult to separate the ideological (signifier) from the literal (signified), the formulation still allows understanding of the idea that “what is a signifier or a signified depends entirely on the level at which the analysis operates: a signified on one level can become a signifier on another level” (Willemsen, 1994 p. 105).

A myth is made. Semiotically, it is out of the interpretation and creation of connotation that myths are created. Barthes (1972) argued that the orders of signification—the denotation and connotation—have the ability to produce ideology when combined. Scholars such as Fiske and Hartley (1978) and O’Sullivan (1994) have described this concept of ideology as being the third order of signification. A myth is not a lie; it does not hide details nor does it make information obvious, it just distorts, such that a main “principle of a myth is the transformation of history into nature” (Barthes, 1972, p. 127). According to Barthes (1972), myths are produced through the interpretation of the signifier (the signified), leading to a particular slant on the truth and, in turn, the “myth serves the ideological function of naturalization” (Chandler, 2014, para. 11), where the reader is invited to perceive the phenomenon as something that exists outside of human cultivation and politics. To illustrate the semiotic dimensions of myth, Barthes (1972) uses the example of a magazine cover with the image of a young black boy saluting in a French uniform with his eyes uplifted. At the level of myth, the image signifies that the French Empire is great, faithfully served by all (including colonial subjects recruited from conquered North Africa) without colour discrimination. As Barthes so eloquently notes, there is “no better answer to the

detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this young black boy in serving his so-called oppressors” (p. 115). For the first order of signification is the denotative element of the image on the magazine cover of a young black boy. The second order of signification is the meaning of the sign where cultural meanings are based on societies views. It is not stemming from the sign itself but rather the application of connotative meanings. In the case of the magazine cover, the second order of significance would depend on the attitudes, emotions, and values of the reader. In the third order of signification is the constructing of a myth; it is the cultural meanings transforming the denotative images to conform to the ideology of reality. Barthes (1972) explains that looking at the otherwise un-notable signifier as an integral piece of the meaning and form constitutes a myth, for example the saluting black boy is the essence of French imperialism.

As Barthes (1972) famously stated, the myth is a “political proposition” (p. 128), and it is for this reason that myth is a useful concept for this study. Its purpose of exposing the political propositions circulated in the process of HGTV’s budget-conscious home-improvement shows. The normalizing impact of myth and the intended acceptance of the ideologies is worthy of scrutiny, and this study is particularly interested in the degree to which audiences are “myth literate” or whether they are uncritically consuming the neoliberal ideologies HGTV is contributing to the culture. Discussed next are particular myths that construct the home improvement programs’ narrative arc.

Dominant myths of home improvement shows. Dominant myths within home improvement shows are based around the idea that a renovation’s effectiveness to advance an individual’s social identity. Winslow (2010) noted that viewers of home improvement or

makeover shows are more open to believing the concepts of the myths and ideologies produced in these shows, the dominant myths and status quo values in the programs are being used as a way of bringing meaning to their world. He argues that the relationship between ideology and myth is of great importance in this era of neoliberalism, where “vulnerable persons are unworthy of concern” (p. 270); it is myth that situates ever-increasing levels of social inequality as being the norm and capitalism as a panacea for individual ills. Similarly, a study conducted by Hay (2010) posited that, in the mid-2000’s, there was a blurred line between the makeover and property venture shows, and as a result this blurring became normalized. It is at this moment that home improvement shows reinvented reality TV as a new form of transactional reality where the viewers are addressed as entrepreneurs who are set to learn the proper techniques of capitalizing on the housing market, instead of citizens concerned with the health of their community.

Currently there is a small but rich literature focused on identifying home improvement mythologies. Martin (2004) conducted a study looking specifically at interior based design programs and how after studying these shows, he was able to identify six myths that are frequently associated with them: the element of surprise, speed equals quality, anyone can do it, design is good if it is trendy or eccentric, the cost imbalance of design, and lastly, that all designers are quirky. A major myth of budget ‘home and garden’ programs is the idea that it is quick, easy, cheap and that a renovation has the possibility to create a big return on the renovators investment. Reality show viewers were discursively influenced to handle the risk and rewards of ownership as a way of seizing “one’s financial future” (Hay, 2010, p. 389). In a study of the gentrification of a neighborhood, Goodsell (2008) argues that the media’s portrayal of remodeling tends to frustrate viewers due to its false sense of simplicity. The overall

representation and lack of information helps reinforce the myth that this is a quick and easy solution to achieving the “American Dream” of improving one’s circumstances and that any couple with a can-do attitude can accomplish it.

The myth of the American Dream has been defined in many different ways, but essentially it relates to the dream of economic freedom and home ownership and is a frequent motif in U.S. television programming. Winslow (2010) states that the American dream resonates so strongly due to the trend of the present economy with the movement of society from a “liberal biopolitical... to a neoliberal society” (p. 269), a movement from government responsibility in the care of the citizens to a focus on “market fundamentalism” (p. 269) minimizing the responsibilities of the government. This action has created a social and economic environment of individuals facing their own struggles, and always striving for more material wealth to ensure survival and portray success. Jacobson (2008) suggests that home makeover shows glorify the notion of the American Dream, yet overlook the financial difficulties that come with home ownership. He explains that home improvement shows are quick to take on projects to renovate a room or, in the case of *Makeover Home Edition*, help out a desperate family. Yet it fails to show audiences the reality behind the renovation such as money, time, and effort. The reality is, home improvement shows are only focused on what can help guarantee them good ratings. The American Dream and its underlying neoliberal ideology have also gone global. Allon (2008) looked at Australia’s home obsession and how it relates to how they view themselves in the world. Her research found that, in the height of the economic surge, homes have taken on the idea as being “the meaning of life” (p. 207), immersing aspirational owners in a continual process of trying to achieve bigger and better housing.

Regardless of which national audiences they are addressing, Miller (2008) has shown that home makeover shows have a moral function, in that they put the responsibility on individuals to “master their drives and harness their energies to get better jobs, homes, looks and families” (p. 586). The audience is meant to align their own desires and self-concept with a neoliberal ideology that equates a “nice” home with a good life. The idea that life will become easier by renovating a room is a myth that budget ‘home and garden’ programs tend to rely on, in order to reinforce an individual’s self worth. Miller (2008) notes that the fascination we have with makeovers is that it satisfies the consumer’s desire of “self-invention via commodities” (p. 586). Having the financial capital to complete a renovation creates competition among individuals, ultimately creating a division between those who can and those who cannot afford renovation projects. In other words, budget ‘home and garden’ programs successfully cultivate class envy among viewers, by producing a standard of where individuals can fit in and in doing so viewers now have a standard in which they feel they can judge others against. Bourdieu (1984) explains how “taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (p. 6). These shows are fabricating a solution for individuals to accomplish their desires in order to be complete and at the same time hosts of the shows and brands are capitalizing on the public achieving these desires.

Commercialization of Programming

Home improvement programs have taken the concept of the American Dream and have made it into a commercialized product, that promotes the associated myth or ideological standard that individuals will feel better by purchasing high quality products. Bonsu, et al. (2010) recognizes that the new trend for commercial television within reality TV is producer/advertiser co-creation in which products are being used and advertised within the show. It is a blurring

between the production and consumption, to enhance interaction between performers (whether “real” or professional actors) and the audience. Futentes and Hagberg (2012) also commented on the idea of co-creation, positing the notion that the consumer is also an active participant of the experience. Television shows are continually referring to sponsored brands and products being used for their renovations, the reinforcement of the virtues of consumption through imagery and information ingrains the suggestion that audience members can fulfill their desires through the purchase of these products. For example, Hatton-Jones and Teah (2015) showed that in 2013 \$580 billion was spent in Australia for home improvement and DIY industry markets. As a result, there is a continual need to reinforce the idea that the grass is always greener on the other side and in return keep the viewers on a never-ending path of achieving the American Dream.

The literature shows that, not only does the commercialization of culture on HGTV encompass running commercials between programs, it has also blurred the lines by sponsoring the hosts and getting their commercials blended within the context of the show. A study conducted by Rasure (2015) looked at the influence of reality TV on home ownership aspirations among friends. The results concluded that the interviewees noticed a direct relation to their friend’s purchase habits and the reality shows that they watched. Large renovation companies are built on the idea that anyone can do it themselves and they take advantage of the naivety of the viewer going through hard economic times and believing the program message that 25 minutes of information is all they need to improve their home. This study is concerned with the degree to which North American viewers are buying these products and ideas that they are selling.

Audiences and Media Ideologies

The phrase “ideology” has many debated definitions (Eagleton, 1991). One of the meanings first stems from Marx’s definition that “the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas ... The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production” (Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 64). One of the early critical cultural studies thinkers, Antonio Gramsci famously revised Marx’s notion of class ideologies by conceiving the notion of *hegemony*, which theorizes that capitalism is reproduced through how popular culture circulates dominant class interests that become accepted as common sense. Hegemonic ideas allow for class power to be enacted without the need to force or manipulate, such that consumers will just unconsciously agree without a second thought (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). As Eagleton (1991) explains its operations, hegemony is the means by which “a dominant power legitimates itself by promoting beliefs and values congenial to it; naturalizing and universalizing such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 5.). Eagleton’s understanding of ideology is very similar to Barthes’ notion of how mythic signs portray meanings in such a way that they are perceived as “natural,” when they are, in reality, reflective to the interests of the corporation, the state, or the wealthy classes. Naturalization of neoliberal ideology at the level of representation is implicated in how budget ‘home and garden’ programs are setting the trends and standards for how a home is to be viewed. The show’s messaging encodes its signs with cultural codes associated with neoliberalist perspectives that situate viewers as consumers, a home as a commodity, and society as a marketplace, all the while promoting an image of the world that is oblivious to the likelihood that fewer people will ever achieve the dream of home ownership.

Whether the audience consumes the ideology along with the desire to renovate is a related, but separate question, one that is of significant concern to this study. In his famous “Encoding/Decoding” essay, Hall (1980) explained:

[Before] this message can have an effect, satisfy a need, or be put to use, it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings, which have an effect, influence, entertain, instruct or persuade with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioral consequences. (p. 165)

In other words, regardless of the producer’s intentions, the ultimate meaning of the ‘home and garden’ program rests with the audience. Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding framework looked specifically at how messaging is translated between television content and the audience. Hall (1980) referred to particular moments as part of a continual circuit of communication – production, circulation, distribution/consumption and reproduction (p. 128). This process of encoded/decoded messages is not a symmetrical exchange and can be understood/misunderstood depending on the producer and receiver being from different socio-economic, gender or ethnic social positions. There are three positions that a viewer can take in their interpretation of the message: dominant/hegemonic, oppositional, and negotiated. The dominant/ hegemonic position is when the viewer decodes the encoded messaging exactly the way it was intended to be, sharing the same cultural biases and constructing the same meaning as that intended by the producer of the message (denotation). The oppositional position is when the viewer acknowledges but does not agree with the denotation, rejecting the dominant meaning in favour of an alternative meaning (connotation). Last is the negotiated position, where the viewer accepts

and rejects aspects of the dominant messaging. The viewer understands the dominant messaging; accepting the denotation that appeals to them, but at the same time rejecting elements that they don't agree with, altering the final meaning to best reflect their own interests. How audience members decode budget home renovation and building programs is a key question posed by this research. As Thomas (2010) has commented, how "the placements of codes, the naturalization of those codes, and the use of signs will all have an impact on the decoding process and the reading of the program by the audience" (p. 3). Audiences have looked to budget 'home and garden' programs as a tool to help enlighten and broaden their imagination for what they can do in their home. However, in doing so they may or may not be aware or be accepting of the imbedded neoliberal ideology that hails them as constant consumers in order to accommodate the standards of acceptable home tastes set out by these home improvement programs.

Some scholars have noticed the effects that the budget home improvement and building shows are having on society. Rosenberg's (2011) research looks at the idea of taste anxiety, specifically in regards to paint colours for a project and how others may interpret the meaning of the colour. His findings concluded that participants tended to find an ease from taste anxiety by getting expert advice to guide design decisions, especially that of colour choice. Bourdieu (1984) states how "nothing is more distinctive more distinguished than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are common" (p.6). Budget 'home and garden' programs are becoming a place where viewers can tune in and see what these "experts" are saying about design decision, distinguishing themselves by providing a classification of taste. From a critical cultural studies perspective, these experts may be seen as setting standards of what individuals should recreate for their own homes in order to be accepted by others. In this vein, Redden

(2008) examined how makeover shows have become a socially acceptable way of evaluating the worth of individuals by setting a standard of what a home is meant to look like. As more audiences begin to agree with what is being communicated to them through budget 'home and garden' programs, neoliberal ideologies about the middle-class dream become linked with the consumption of real estate and home renovation services and goods. Hall (1980) explained this relationship of representation, consumption, and cultural change in this way: In a determinate moment the message, via its decodings, issues into the structure of social practices (128). This study is interested in if taste anxiety is apparent in the data being looked at, as well as what an informed viewer (someone who is familiar with home improvement from a gained knowledge angle) would make of the ideological messages inherent in the shows. It is not enough to predict that audiences will buy into the myths, as they may interpret them differently than a strict Marxist reading would allow. In other words, this research sought to find out if people who should know better are being deluded and what level of ideology they are aware of (if they are simply noticing masking of renovation realities, or seeing the neoliberal values of individualism and consumption as well).

Summary

Since the introduction of reality television in the late 1990's there has been academic research interested in the effects of reality television and the audience understanding of the social acceptance of self-beautification and pursuit of self-improvement as an impact of the makeover shows. Within the body of scholarly research done within the sphere of makeover reality shows, there is a sparse amount of audience research regarding budget 'home and garden' programs, especially looking at if and how they are encoded using neoliberal perspectives, and whether

those cultural myths are being naturalized and accepted by audiences. Drawing on Barthes semiotic theory and Hall's encoding/decoding theory, this study has aimed to fill that gap by joining the conversation and exposing how a particular sub-genre of budget-conscious 'home and garden' programs has navigated the tension between neoliberal ideology and an economy in recession and how renovation-savvy audiences interpret and internalize the myths that constitute the narrative content.

Method

Situated in the critical paradigm, this qualitative study undertakes to reveal the cultural myths and social ideologies that are produced and circulated by budget based 'home and garden' programs on HGTV and then to understand how audiences interpret those encoded messages portrayed in each show's text. Punch (2016) defines qualitative analysis as a collection of data not comprised of numerical information but also as "a way of thinking" (p. 5), it is a way to help define the process of decision-making. Merrigan, Huston & Johnston (2012) state how most critical studies have a shared stance on the need to identify and change oppressive hegemonic ideologies toward the goal of a social world that supports equal rights for all of its members.

This research began with a thematic analysis technique that provided the ability to conduct a myth analysis of two HGTV programs, with the objective of exposing the economic myths that constitute each program and whether they support ideals of equality at the level of social class or promote neoliberal ideologies. Then conducting focus groups with 25 participants with some gained knowledge of home renovation, all of whom were recruited from Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. In a study by Skeggs, Thumim and Wood (2008) in which they concentrated their focus group data on the discourse that arose based on the class of the

participants around the idea of social mobility in relation to reality TV, they made the commented on how focus group research allows for a higher validity of the findings based on the influenced interaction within the group (p.18). Bradford, Myers and Kane (1999) have explained that an advantage to focus group data is the ability for the participant's attitudes, ideas and opinions be the focus instead of that of the researcher. They also added that focus groups could provide a brainstorming atmosphere in which participants feel comfortable sharing more information (p. 104), and it was the researches purpose here to gain an understanding of the audience perspective and gauge their level of awareness of the ideological stance of the programs, using Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding framework to conduct a deductive thematic analysis of the audience data.

Data Gathering and Collection

The data for the myth analysis portion of the study was gathered from two television shows on the HGTV network and then audience response data was gathered from focus group sessions. HGTV was specifically chosen based on a number of reasons: First, it is one of the biggest home improvement based networks currently on television. Second, it is a channel that is provided to Shaw customers without the need of an extra subscription. Last there is strong literature growing around this channel and this study can build on that foundation.

Program Sampling. Some of the 2016-2017 broadcasted budget-conscious programs that air on the channel are: *Leave it to Bryan; Flip or Flop; Love It or List It; Tiny House Big Living; Fixer Upper; and Vintage Flip*. Each show demonstrates an area that needs to be changed or updated within a home to meet the trends of today's style, in order to add value. The two 22-minute television programs I will be focusing on are, *Tiny House, Big Living* (2017) and

Leave it to Bryan (2016). The reason for choosing these two shows is because both worked within a budget determined by the participating individuals and also the main intent for both programs is to portray a different perspective on economical home renovation and modern living.

Tiny House, Big Living promotes the ideals of living a worry-free lifestyle by “downsizing” and building a small home that facilitates living within your means. *Leave it to Bryan* explains how renovations add value and appreciation to the home within a similar context of being budget-focused. Both shows demonstrate a post-recession shift in how the North American dream is being narrated and thus naturalized, regardless of the fact of widespread housing shortages and housing prices that are simply out of reach for many citizens. These two shows differ from one another based on the solution to the problem each show demonstrates. *Tiny House, Big Living* promotes messaging of reducing consumption and getting back to surviving on the necessities, where *Leave it to Bryan* promotes that consuming more can make life easier and happier. An article in the *Ottawa Citizen* by McCooey (2012) discussed how the original intention of *Leave it to Bryan* is to influence the attitudes of people about the need to maintain a home over the long term. The show’s host Bryan Baeumler is quoted as stating (about the public), “they romanticize homeownership...they are turning a blind eye to the serious issues within the home. And they are certainly not prioritizing them by putting their money toward those problems” (McCooey, 2012, para. 9). *Leave it to Bryan* (2016) is a Canadian program about getting homeowners to understand the difference between want and need. Couples choose three rooms that they would like renovated and at the beginning of the show they explain to Bryan their choices. Before the decision is made the couple tell Bryan the budget that they have to work with. He then makes a final verdict as to which room gets the renovation. The overall

decision is usually based on the room that “needs” it most and in the end increase value and curb appeal for the homeowners. I have chosen two episodes from the 2016-broadcasting season—“Buzz Kill” and “Wet Wipe”. All the episodes within the season have a similar narrative arc, these specific episodes were selected based on the demographic of the individuals in the show being easily relatable to the target demographic being recruited.

Tiny House, Big Living (2017) was chosen for how its premise problematizes the myth of the middle-class American Dream, offering that the large home and expensive lifestyle is not the best way to live, and that a tiny home provides a pathway to virtue and freedom by reducing the owners’ carbon foot print and allowing them to pursue a worry-free lifestyle. The show features couples or single individuals as they downsize to living in much smaller units. The show follows the couple through the process of designing and building their tiny home. The premise of the show is that participants have the ability to create a worry-free lifestyle for themselves by downsizing. It is creating a myth by distorting the whole truth, of what exactly would be involved in taking on this ‘downsize’, glamorizing this new lifestyle as an attainable and smart choice for everyone. Although there are several episodes that would fit the profile of identifying persistent neoliberal myths about housing and homeownership, I am going to focus only on two. These two episodes “Tiny Bachelor Bus” and “Tiny Shepherder’s Wagon” were chosen also on the demographic of the individuals being within a similar demographic of the target recruits. In the context of my research, these shows best demonstrates how popular culture media is there to soothe social anxieties by convincing its audiences, that we each individually can buy or sell our way out of the economic crisis that is systemic in nature.

Gathering the data. I conducted a series of five different focus group sessions with students and staff from Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). Founded in 1916, SAIT prides itself on being a leader in applied education, ensuring that students get practical, hands-on training that can be experienced in the workplace. Being primarily a trade-based college, the students and staff have experience with the concepts of construction and a direct understanding of hands-on home renovation or building work.

Similar to how Hall (2006) structured her focus group session looking at gaining audience perspective by addressing three key issues, this study is going to look at audience perspective to identify the various aspects of how participants decode the myths and ideologies of the budget 'home and garden' programs. It is a series of open-ended focus group sessions, each 1.5 hours in length, and a post session question form was given to the participants to be filled out after the session had ended. Each focus group had a third-party facilitator to ask the questions eliminating any personal biases. The facilitator was selected based on their ability and experience with public speaking. They were given a summary of the research three days prior to the sessions, as well as a set of the questions. They were instructed to ask the first two questions at the start of the meeting then they could ask any of the remaining questions depending on how the discussion was flowing. The information and instruction was very brief in order to eliminate any bias or steering of the focus group participants. The sessions were audio recorded and then transcribed to allow for all information to be captured. Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007) stated that an effective number for focus groups is between 6 and 12 participants, as it allows the session to be contained, but free to have group open discussion. Following the advice of Stewart et, al. (2007) my aim was to fill the focus groups with 6 to 12 people, I was able to successfully

fill two sessions with seven participants, but due to scheduling conflicts three of my sessions consisted of only four participants. However, participants still freely provided information and were able to generate ideas and opinions, no one was fazed by the lack of individuals, on the contrary it allowed for all individuals to share and contribute more.

Student participants were gathered based on convenience sampling, due to my affiliation with SAIT, student participants were selected within alphabetical order to unsure there was no conflict of interest. The email addresses for students were gathered from an internal database, which resulted in me sending out emails to the first 100 students with the last name starting with A and repeated to Z. Staff member email addresses were sent out to an entire department that must remain anonymous. Purposive convenience sampling was used for this part of participant recruitment, due to the intention of using this department because of their experience in various construction and building industries. For both recruitment letters, a statement was also included allowing them to invite other coworkers or fellow students to participate in the study, applying a snowball-sampling model in order to help raise recruitment numbers. The initial letter may be found in Appendix A, and the statement can be to found in Appendix A.

A total of 2500 students and 150 staff members were sent out an initial email inviting them to participate in my research. Out of the initial email, I received replies from seven students and 30 staff interested in participating. The interested individuals were then sent a second email with a list of dates and times for the focus group sessions, as well a brief idea of what the session involved for the participants. It explained how the study would require participants to voice their opinions out loud and the session would be audio recorded—the follow-up letter is attached in Appendix B. Six students and 20 staff members replied to the second email, noting the time and

date of which session worked for them. The final email sent to the 26 interested participants was providing them confirmation on the date and time; it also informed them of the room number, and the links to the four HGTV programs to watch in preparation for the session—the confirmation letter is attached in Appendix C. Two of the six students cancelled due to unexpected circumstances. A total of 25 participants attended one of the focus group sessions, four students and 21 staff members. Participants were asked a few background questions, such as program of study or department they worked for, just to insure they were part of the SAIT community—the post question letter is attached in Appendix F. However, those who did attend all participated and openly shared their views and opinions about the four HGTV programs, providing a rich data set.

Questionnaires filled out at the time of data collection indicated that 52% of the participants were male and 48% were female. The average age of the respondents was 41.72, with the youngest being 24 and the oldest 62. The majority of the participants were in their thirties (24%), forties (32%), and fifties (24%), due to the higher response from staff members. Sixteen percent of the participants were students and 84% were staff members. In terms of home improvement television watched by participants, 60% stated they watch it on a weekly basis, and 12% watched it only once to twice a month. Sixteen percent of respondents watched once in three months and 12% admitted to not watching at all. The purpose for choosing students and staff was to gain a diverse profile of participants that ranged in age and experience with home ownership, renovations and financing. The variety of participant's circumstances with regards to age and life experience, exposed the various perspectives of individuals, as well as provided enlightening discussion between participants.

The use of focus groups was an appropriate choice since it provided the opportunity to gain insight to participants perspectives on budget 'home and garden' programs, as well as allowed participants to express themselves encouraging deeper conversation. Kitzinger (1995) comments how focus groups allow views, knowledge and experience to be accessed more effectively since participants are able to communicate in a natural state. The five focus group sessions went for about 1.5 hours, using open-ended questions to help stimulate conversation among participants. The focus group procedure used semi-structured interviews, posing questions to help guide and refocus the session; this style also allowed for flexibility with further questions exploring participants' ideas and participants were also able to discuss freely with one another (Bold, 2012). Questions such as "what elements of the show disappointed you?" allowed participants to explain their frustrations with the lack of discussion of cost or time. Other questions such as "how likely are you to renovate in a year?" and "how often do you feel you need to update your home?" demonstrate the latent neoliberal messaging interpreted by viewers continually striving and working on improving their home would lead to an acceptance of the messaging. The interview questionnaire guide can be found in Appendix E.

Transcripts of the focus group sessions were created to further analyze the perspectives of what viewers thought and interpreted about the programs. The responses were repeatedly read to create a common understanding of the data and to identify if any of the responses fit into the mythical or ideological themes predetermined in the first phase of analysis that involved myth identification in the shows themselves.

Data Analysis

The analysis began with a myth analysis as the premise for the coding strategy, which was derived by deductively coding the show transcripts and visual signs against the set of neoliberal myths Martin (2004) identified within his study of the design myths seen in interior design programs. He identifies six myths: the reveal, speed and quality are one in the same, anyone can do it, design is good if it is trendy or eccentric, the cost imbalance of design, and lastly, that all designers are quirky. Using a thematic analysis to help separate dialog and discussion on the programs into a set of themed tables to identify the dominant mythological messaging being communicated by the shows—the episodes thematic analysis is attached in Appendix G. On *Leave it to Bryan*, three of Martin's (2004) myths were identified; speed and quality are one in the same, design is good if it is trendy or eccentric and cost imbalance of design. On *Tiny House, Big Living*, two of Martin's (2004) predetermined myths were identified; design is good if it is trendy or eccentric and cost imbalance of design. These three myths were then used as the deductive themes while analyzing participant responses gathered from the focus groups. The analysis followed analytical procedures that were similar to the structure of Rohlfing and Sonnenberg's (2016) thematic analysis of YouTube comments around one hate video, where they sought to establish themes based on the comments' relevance to the research question and the trend of response. For this study, it is the myths latent in the budget 'home and garden' programs that served as themes relevant to the overall research question and which, served as themes for organizing the response from the participants to better understand the perspective of how audiences are interpreting the messages.

This research then moved into the second phase related to audience response, using the theoretical framework of encoding/ decoding to identify and gain insight on how the participants

are decoding the messages of the dominant mythological messages and if they noticed the latent ideological standards that were being cultivated within the show. Using Hall's (1980) theory of encoding/ decoding and its three kinds of readings—accepting of the dominant meaning, opposed, or negotiating—to gain insight of the participants perception of the myth. The findings from this initial round of coding were then divided into subthemes based on their understanding and interpretation of the message. The first step was to identify instances when participants discussed or mentioned the topic of myth as related to the politicization of reality (Barthes, 1972) and to sort them according to the corresponding themes (the myths)—the participant response thematic analysis is attached in Appendix H to K. Responses from participants that promoted ideological narratives represented in the shows were flagged and categorized based on the participants' decoding of the message. These statements were then extracted from the transcription and moved to separate files for further analysis. The comments were coded based on whether the participant addressed themes—the imbalance of cost (MC—Appendix H), speed and quality are one in the same (MSQ—Appendix I), or the idea that renovation needs to be trendy (MT—Appendix J), —and moved into the associating tables. A fourth theme emerged from participant comments, the myth of the constant consumer (CC). Participants made comments about the constant changes or updating they needed to do, identifying the cultural myth of neoliberalism, striving to consume more. The participants' responses that commented on bettering oneself or one's circumstance were then classified as evidence of their consumption of and identification with neoliberal ideology encoded in the programs (Thomas, 2010).

Within each of the generated themes the responses were analyzed to determine how the participant decoded the messages whether they accepted it (+), opposed it (-) or were negotiating

it (/). Kucuk (2015) constructed his semiotic analysis on anti-branding by defining three dimensions of how individuals interpreted the messaging, and I used a similar process for interpreting participant responses to the decoding of the messaging within the budget 'home and garden' programs. Responses that used language of both understanding and resisting the dominant myth were coded with a slash for negotiating the message. If the comment used language such as "useful", "good", "support", "approval", or "agree", it signaled that the participant was agreeing with the messaging and was flagged with a plus. Responses that used language such as; unwanted, disapproval, dislike, refusal, denial meant the participant opposed the message and it was flagged with a minus. All the statements were classified into the corresponding tables; myth based on cost, myth based on time, myth based on products and neoliberal ideologies. These tables were then separated into accepting, opposing and negotiation based on the responses for each category.

Ethics

The ethical review committee at Royal Roads as well as the ethical review board at SAIT approved this research. An emailed letter of introduction informed prospective participants on the purpose of my research and provided a link to where they could view the selected programs online. I provided an incentive of a \$5.00 Tim Horton's card as a thank you for their time in participating in the focus group and my email address where interested individuals could reach me. In each focus group, participants remained anonymous and were given pseudo names tags based on the group they were in. All correspondence and conversation maintained anonymity with participants being referred to by the given pseudo name throughout the entire process, including within emails and post group questions. The recruited staff being from the same

department did know each other, but were respectful of maintaining anonymity throughout the session. Each message between me and participants included the disclaimer that their email address was obtained under the approval of the SAIT ethics office, so they understood this was not spam or otherwise fraudulent research, and informed them of their right to leave the study at any time.

Findings

A thematic analysis of the focus group responses found that three of the six myths Martin (2004) identified were continually discussed among participants in the sessions. Another cultural myth emerged inductively and became the fourth theme in the study. The primary themes that were identified based on the responses were: 1) The Cost Imbalance of Design, 2) Speed and Quality are One in The Same, 3) It Needs to Be Trendy, and the inductively emergent myth of 4) The Constant Consumer.

Each of the sections presented below explains the semiotic construction of the myth demonstrated by the shows and how they were interpreted and decoded by the participants. The oppositional position was based on the comments defined by how the participant expressed their response towards the myths of the budget 'home and garden' programs, which were terms such as "disingenuous" (Aspen; Aaron, February 28, 2017), "unrealistic" (Aspen, February 28, 2017; Camden, March 2, 2017), and skepticism around the idea of how much of the show is for entertainment and how much is real information (Addison, February 28, 2017; Dallas, March 3, 2017). This was especially apparent in the conversations among groups surrounding the element of "cost imbalance", the name of a myth coined by Martin (2004) and the unrealistic representation of it, which left viewers disappointed and cynical about the entire home

improvement show (Aspen, Aaron, February 28, 2017; Bentley, March 1, 2017; Casey, March 2, 2017; Dakota, March 3, 2017). Yet there were a few oppositional remarks in regards to the idea that these shows provoked continuous change and created a sense of discontentment with the home, based around the idea of needing to upgrade or renovate. Instead, participants seemed to feel more accepting towards this neoliberal messaging in the show, expressing terms such as “inspiration” (August, February 28, 2017; Bo, March 1, 2017), “hope” (Darcy, Dallas, March 3, 2017) and a guide to use for seeing what is needed to stay relevant (Canan, Carter, Camden, March 2, 2017). By audiences continually aligning with the cultural myths foundational to budget ‘home and garden’ programs as well as the neoliberal ideology latent therein, there is, ironically, less freedom in self-expression normally involved with decorating a home. Offering only the illusion of choice, budget ‘home and garden’ programs replace self-expression with a set of guidelines for creating a house according to measures that raise both the value of the home as well as the owner’s social value—in effect, viewers are accepting of an ideology that locates everything within a framework of trade, markets, consumption, and commodification.

The Cost Imbalance of Design

The discussion of building and renovation cost was a heated discussion among the participants, based on the unrealistic representation of how much a renovation project truly costs in terms of time and money. In both shows, there was a conversation among the actors of the cost of the project, but never a realistic breakdown of the entire cost of the project.

Myth construction. In *Leave it to Bryan*, the discussion of cost or budget is mentioned very briefly. The first time, money is discussed is in the beginning of the show. Once Bryan Baessler has chosen the room he thought should be renovated he asked the couple what their

budget was. Within both episodes, the couples budgeted amount was \$50,000, “firm”. The second-time cost was brought up is Baeumler asks if the couple wanted anything added that was not in the original budgeted plan. At the end of each show, there was no breakdown of cost or understanding on where the money went—simply the couple walking around the finished fully furnished space. Viewers are left to make assumptions based on personal experience as to where and what was covered within the \$50,000 budget. For viewers with experience in the industry, an understanding that the budgeted amount would strictly go towards the cost of material and the manpower for the renovation. For viewers with less experience of renovations, they may surmise that the budgeted amount would not only go towards material and manpower, but also the furnishing and stylizing of the home, the cost of which is rarely discussed. The show leaves out the full detailed cost breakdown to assumption of the viewer’s interpretation.

In *Tiny Houses, Big Living*, the idea of money is not the driving factor for the renovation. The purpose of this show is to demonstrate how people can downsize and live worry-free lives in a housing market that has indebted hundreds of thousands of North American households. In the episode “Tiny Shepherd’s Wagon”, the couple has a budget of \$18,000 to build their 84 square foot wagon home. The home is constructed with the help of family and the wagon will be parked at the wife’s parent’s farmland. In “Tiny Bachelor Bus”, an overall estimated budget of \$10,000 to take a school bus and convert it into a living quarters. The individual and a family member will do the work, using found or refurbished items collected from the beach or garage. Once complete, the bus will be parked at a lot owned by the individual up in the mountains. While on the face of it this show refutes some of the basic premises of neoliberalist concepts of consumerism and class consciousness, it is important to note that the idea of cost discussed in

Tiny House, Big Living is only mentioned with regard to the construction of the living space, not to the extras such as the land and permits that would be required. Viewers are given a basic idea of the overall cost of construction for the project, allowing for clarity in understanding of how downsizing and building a tiny home can provide you with a lifestyle that emulates the basic home ownership goals of the American Dream, with a significantly lower investment and with no discussion of the infrastructure needed to house the tiny homes proliferating around the nation.

Participant interpretation. Analysis of data collected from the focus groups revealed that different members of the audience had very different responses to the myth of cost being represented within the budget ‘home and garden’ programs.

Fully complying with the messaging. Very few participants agreed with the messaging about cost within these shows. Three participants accepted the interpretation that the budget was an accurate representation of the overall cost of the project. Due to a level of experience with home renovations, one participant mentioned that they appreciated that some of the budgets did have an element of reality to them, based on the project. For example, they explained that a \$50,000 dollar budget for a kitchen renovation is a fair amount (Carter, March 2, 2017). Their knowledge in having done home renovations allowed them to have an understanding of a realistic breakdown of cost, which allowed them to accept the messages of budget encoded within the shows.

Skeptical of the where the budget was spent. A majority of participants strongly felt that the messaging around cost within the shows were misrepresentations of the reality for these types of projects. One of the participants was adamant about the unrealistic aspect of the shows’

concept of cost, they stated, “they lie about the cost of materials, take whatever they say and double it” (Aspen, February 28, 2017). Another participant from a different group commented about the misrepresentation of cost based on the difference in geographical location, they explained what “they buy for a hundred thousand dollars wouldn’t fly here” (Camden, March 2, 2017). Some concerns about the lack of information on the distribution of budget was raised by two participants (Camden, March 2017; August, Aaron, February 28, 2017). The idea of explicitly stating where the money is being spent would give all viewers a common understanding and level of knowledge, and then viewers would be able to decode the message of cost, as it is primarily intended.

Reconstructing the meaning. Three participants understood the main dominant message of the show and the need to work within a renovation budget, yet they did not fully accept the message the way it was intended and pointed to the more latent assumptions they were also being asked to accept. The first participant commented on “a lot of the things in budget ‘home and garden’ programs, like *Leave it to Bryan* for my generation are not likely attainable” (Addison, February 28, 2017). They continued by explaining how the extravagant homes and the thousands of dollars spent on renovations is appealing, but not something that is a priority for them at this point in life. This participant acknowledged and understood the encoded meanings prevalent in the shows, but negotiated those meanings to best suit their own condition and their own relationship to the narrative of home ownership. One participant noted that it seems that the only demographic these shows are trying to target are those that want the massive homes, or wanting to downsize, completely skipping over the majority of the population that watch these shows (Camden, March 2, 2017).

Speed and Quality are One in the Same

With the help of television editing an illusion of time passing quickly is a very common aspect especially for budget 'home and garden' programs that start with nothing but end with a completely updated room or fully built house. The idea that a full renovation can be completed in 22 minutes is absurd, and no one comes right out to make that claim, yet the show's encoded meanings produce a myth that a renovation can be done at the highest quality standard in a short amount of time.

Myth construction. *Leave it to Bryan* is a 22-minute show where Bryan Baeumler transforms an entire room with minimal mention to timelines other than video transitions that give the assumption of time passing. At the end of the show, the homeowners are given a beautiful renovated space with the newest and finest products, in a process of total transformation that seems to have taken less than a half hour.

In *Tiny Houses, Big Living*, a time frame is given at the beginning as an estimated time and then the actual time it took to complete is shown at the end. A fast-forwarding effect is used to show a number of the steps in the building process without monopolizing the entire show. An example of this is how, in the "Tiny Shepherd's Wagon" episode, the construction and assembly of the wagon shows the sped-up process in order to demonstrate the time needed to complete the build. However, no clear defined explanation on timeframes of renovation or new construction projects is given by either episode.

Participant interpretation. Participant reaction and comments seemed to focus differently based on the show and their own experiences and lifestyle. The timeframes and quality demonstrated in *Leave it to Bryan* were not as well received as it was for *Tiny House, Big*

living. The \$50,000 renovations in *Leave it to Bryan* never specifically mentioned time; there was minimal understanding among participants of how long those renovations would have actually taken. One participant commented how it may have taken them one to thirty days to complete the project; the viewer would have no real idea (Everest, March 4, 2017). As opposed to *Tiny House, Big Living* that explained the estimated and completed timeframe of the project, it provided understanding for the participants of the type of timeline to expect based on the type of project.

Fully complying with the message. One comment made was “I assume because it’s a TV show, its done quick and well because they can afford it” (Camden, March 2, 2017). Three participants had a common understanding that it was a television program, regardless of the actual amount of ‘real time’ it took to complete the project they would have a professional completed renovation by the end of the show (Everest, March 4, 2017).

Skeptical of how time and quality are portrayed. Comments used to describe the depiction of timelines used to complete the type of quality projects demonstrated on *Leave it to Bryan* where “disingenuous” (Aspen, February 28, 2017) and “unrealistic” (Carmen, March 2, 2017). One participant pointed out that regardless of the show “if you understood how much time and work is involved you may think, yeah it’s not for me.” (Dallas, March 3, 2017). The participants all understood that these budget ‘home and garden’ programs are situated in the reality TV genre they have to appease the audience’s appetite for entertainment. As described by one of the participants, a common narrative arc is used within the show to follow the same pattern for each episode (Dallas, March 3, 2017), one that inevitably ends with a successful renovation or build and a happy homeowner.

Reconstructing the meaning. Five of the participants understood that the dominant intent of the messaging of time and quality demonstrated on the show, but based on their experience resisted in agreeing fully with the message. These participants acknowledged the fact that the reason projects seem to get done so quickly was because “it was probably more than just the host working on projects” (Aaron, February 28, 2017). One participant commented that likely a whole crew of people would be trying to tackle the home renovation over the course of a few days (August, February 28, 2017). The encoded myth of speed and quality was both noted and negotiated based on the participants’ own renovation experiences and understanding of what is involved in completing a home renovation.

It Needs to Be Trendy (or Owners Must be Eccentric)

Home improvement and new construction shows have broadcast the message that the purpose of renovations is to update to the latest trends in order to increase the value and appreciation of the home. Even though *Tiny House, Big Living* with its focus on mobility and practicality appears to reject this notion that a home’s value is a matter of what the market wants, what the messaging is now trying to advance is small house design and differentiating tiny home owners as leaders of a new kind of American Dream.

Myth construction. In *Leave it to Bryan*, host Bryan Baeumler picks an old outdated room and transforms it with the newest in construction materials and style trends to increase the value of the home. In the “Buzz Kill” episode, he redesigns the kitchen, which undertakes a transformation of the room from one featuring old maple cabinets, white appliances, dark painted walls, and tile floors to a new space replete white high gloss cabinets, stainless steel appliances, white painted walls, and hardwood floors. In the episode “Wet Wipe”, the renovation of the

basement was designed from an undeveloped space to include hardwood floors, light painted walls, a bar, and bathroom with white cabinets and counters, demonstrating how narrow the palette of design choices are for a home to be “on trend”. A number of times, Baeumler comments on how the renovation has completely changed the home for the better, which reinforces messages of how the purpose of a renovation is to update the home to the common trend in the market place.

In *Tiny House, Big Living* the focus is not so much on design trends in decor but more about construction design innovation and the individualism of builders/owner’s tastes. In the “Tiny Bachelor Bus” episode, the “do it yourself” narrative hangs on the realization of a design concept customized to the preferences of the single male that was going to live in the bus. Antique fire hydrants as sinks and urinals, driftwood nailed to the wall for a backsplash, and refurbished acid battery containers used as window tiles between designated rooms. Although the show arguably encodes meanings related to the individualism associated with neoliberal ideology, the specific style and concepts of this show did challenge the notion that home designs need to follow the trends.

Participant interpretation. The participants were more accepting to the dominant messaging encoded within *Leave it to Bryan* than *Tiny House, Big Leaving*. Participants were able to relate to design and trend decisions made by Bryan Baeumler, because they are popular trends participants have seen in a variety of places, commercials, and stores (physical and online). The eccentric style of both the builders and homeowners in *Tiny House, Big Living* was less relatable to participants because these designs were customized and specific to that particular individual in the show. There was more of a drive to start a major renovation than to

downsize and live a “worry-free” lifestyle with no roots and in which the home is not a financial investment.

Fully complying with the message. Over half of the participants agreed that renovating their homes to the newest trend in the market place was a matter of common sense. One participant noted they had pursued a renovation project within the year precisely to stay “on-trend”: “our interior was really out of date so we just painted...going more trendy to keep up with the times. Now that we have gone neutral, it’s much more trendy” (Canan, March 2, 2017). Seven participants commented that a reason for watching shows like *Leave it to Bryan* was to gain ideas and inspiration: “It gives you an idea of what is out there” (August, February 28, 2017) and “It’s fantastic to see what you can do with your own living space” (Bo, March 1, 2017). Participants agreed that these shows carry a sense of authority when it comes to establishing the trends, “seems to me these shows have brought in a different mindset that you don’t have to sell your home to get what you’re looking for, you can accomplish it yourself” (Ember, March 4, 2017). The idea of stepping out of the bounds and having a home customized to personal style had participants convinced on the fact that in order for your home to maintain resale value, you cannot do anything out of the ordinary (Dallas, March 3, 2017). Only one participant accepted the messaging of trendy design demonstrated within *Tiny House, Big Living*. The participant appreciated the ideas that were presented in *Tiny House, Big Living* because it gave them an idea of what can be done to utilize space of a small area (Addison, February 28, 2017).

Skeptical of maintaining the trends. Three of the participants opposed the idea of continually being told to update based on the latest trend, with one insightfully noting that these

programs are “not realistic for the general economy, they are more stimulating the economy for renovations and partnerships with a marketing plan” (Darcy, March 3, 2017). According to the other participant who brought an oppositional decoding of the *Leave it to Bryan* episodes, home improvement shows were getting this message across by convincing the audience that “they don’t have what they need” (Bo, March 1, 2017), creating a sense of discontent with their current home. With regards to *Tiny House, Big Living*, one participant commented on the transient type of lifestyle that this show is trying to promote, glorifying the idea of minimalism being the new, “on-trend” way of life (Ember, March 4, 2017).

Reconstructing the meaning. Other than these two participants just noted, participants generally agreed with the encoded assumptions in the both shows’ messaging, yet there were a couple participants that agreed but in their terms. One participant committed on how the paint colour of their house was neutral, except for one wall in the office was painted sunshine yellow just because they loved the colour and it brought them joy (Caden, March 2, 2017). This participant had a naturalized understanding of the current trend of the home interior colour as being neutral, but they also rebelled against the natural trend by incorporating the yellow wall, demonstrating they understood the messaging of these shows but wanted to deploy it in their own way. One participant made the comment about the philosophy of *Tiny House, Big Living*, to the effect that it promotes a nice idea of simplifying life and lowering the carbon foot print, but that view contrasts with mainstream views, thereby making it difficult maintain that type of lifestyle (Dallas, March 3, 2017).

The Constant Consumer

Within budget ‘home and garden’ programs there is a message of neoliberalism and it positions people as consumers whose consumption work is never done. It is a driver for viewers to take on endless home projects to increase the value for resale, in hopes of making a profit.

Myth construction. In *Leave it to Bryan*, the couples are asked to show Bryan three rooms that they would like to have renovated, for each room they describe what they would like done and how that will improve their life. Bryan’s job is to choose one of the rooms to renovate, usually justifying his choice based on how this change will increase the value of the home. At the end of the episodes the couples are elated with the renovated room and express how much they feel it will add to their everyday life. This life-altering event with the change of one room demonstrates the encoded messaging of neoliberalism driving people to take on renovation projects by pushing the idea that an investment in a renewed home is an investment in a renewed self. Yet underneath it all, it becomes a cycle of always needing to change or update a room, positioning people as consumers whose consumption work is never done.

In *Tiny House, Big Living*, each episode followed individuals who had made the decision to downsize their lifestyle, by building and moving into a “tiny” house. Each home is different: for one episode it was the construction of a school bus, and for the other couple, it was building an old style sheepherder wagon. Within the episodes, the individuals would express how they were tired of the large payments and wanted to downsize so they could live a worry-free life. In this sense, the encoded message within the show appears to oppose the neoliberal ideology of consuming more. In the “Bachelor Bus” episode the individual has decided to downsize their lifestyle to move into a 240 square foot bus with less bills, no mortgage payments and the hope of retiring early. The bus is customized with everything they need and the style they want,

eliminating the need of following trends, increasing value or constant renovations. It demonstrates a way of life that contradicts what society would view as normal, downsizing, payment free, minimal luxury's only necessities; while it still manages to incorporate home ownership as a sign of sovereignty that is at the heart of the American Dream, its eschewal of constant consumerism and trend-awareness is in opposition to other elements of neoliberal ideology.

Participant interpretation. Participants had an easier time relating to *Leave it to Bryan* than *Tiny House, Big Living*. The messaging of renovating a room to increase space and value made more sense to participants than selling it all and moving into a smaller space and living debt free. That said, participants did not resonate with how, in *Leave it to Bryan*, only one of the rooms in need of updating is being renovated, meaning eventually more work would need to be done in order to once again increase the value of the home. They were aware of the message in this show that home ownership is an on-going, circular problem that leads to constantly consuming more.

Fully complying with the message. Nine participants decoded the *Leave it to Bryan* episodes in ways completely aligned with the myths and ideologies encoded in the format. For example, one participant reflected on how the show gave them a pathway toward a better future, one that relies on their willingness to view consumption of home building materials and services as a form of investment: "I think it gives you hope and motivation that you could do major renovations in a weekend for five hundred dollars. Personally, I felt motivated to think about what I was going to do with my space" (Dallas, March 3, 2017). Another participant commented how it has introduced a new way of living by providing new ideas to try (Ember, March 4,

2017). One participant explained how their ideas and design planning changed, “we have become more adventurous, and I don’t think we would have done that if we hadn’t seen it on TV” (Carter, March 2, 2017). Camden commented that “I agree, I had an idea board and I showed the contractors and it’s a starting point and the show helps to identify your own likes and dislikes” (March 2, 2017).

Unlike *Leave it to Bryan*, participants were not as accepting toward the dominant meanings encoded within *Tiny House*, *Big Living* episodes. Only two participants seemed to accept the meaning of the messaging, while the remainder of the participants did not seem to align with the messaging of radically reducing consumption. One participant commented on how they appreciated *Tiny House*, *Big Living* because it was a lifestyle that was attainable for their generation (Addison, February 28, 2017). Another participant commented on how the lifestyle of being mortgage and payment free was appealing, offering the ability to achieve early retirement (Elliot, March 4, 2017).

Skeptical of maintaining the endless projects. There were very few opposing comments to the neoliberal ideology manifested in the many references to the virtues of constant consumption encoded in the *Leave it to Bryan* episodes. One participant did argue that what particularly bothered them about this show was that it was nothing more than a half an hour commercial for renovations (Aspen, February 28, 2017). Participants were more oppositional in their decoding of *Tiny House*, *Big Living*. A participant commented on the unreality of the show, insofar as “it never talks about how they acquired the land or they the fact that they are moving to family land, like that’s normal for everyone” (Aspen, February 28, 2017). One participant related the ideas of the show as a solution to keep children from moving back home (Dakota,

March 3, 2017). Another participant commented that regardless of the tiny house it would be impossible to resell it due to its lack of popularity (Everest, March 4, 2017).

Reconstructing the meaning. One participant allowed their circumstance to dictate how they decoded the messaging of the show. This participant understood the dominant message of taking on projects to continually improve but were unable to do so because of they were renting their home, so instead they used decor to demonstrate updating and continual change (Addison, February 28, 2017). They agreed with the messaging but needed to reconstruct it to fit within their lifestyle. Three participants thought the premises of *Tiny House, Big Living* was interesting, but offered an unrealistic option for people with a family or our climate (Danny, March 3, 2017); (Dakota, March 3, 2017). The participants' experience and lifestyle could not comprehend this message in their own circumstances. So the idea of it became nothing more than a fairytale, a "myth", while the more fundamental cultural myths associated with neoliberalism went unquestioned.

Discussion

The findings from the analysis demonstrated that participants had more oppositional interpretations around cultural myths related to cost and time, and were skeptical of how budget 'home and garden' programs demonstrated these ideas within the shows. Participants thought the budgets for the projects were unrealistic, and would need to be doubled if they wanted to be honest or market comparable. The shows did not communicate a lot of budget information such as a project completion breakdown giving viewers an idea of where and how the set budget was spent. Nor did they communicate the timeline of the project very well, which left participants skeptical of the truthfulness of the project. The shows have underestimated the experiences of

viewers like these participants and their knowledge gained over time that has allowed them to decode the messaging of the shows in terms of their factual credibility. This lack of explanation of realistic cost and timelines of the projects aside, these construction-literate participants still bought into neoliberal cultural myths related to the virtue of ceaseless renovation and consumption.

Participants were overwhelmingly accepting of the messages encoded in all episodes and scenes related to the connected notions of needing to be “on-trend” and constantly needing to consume more to “keep up” in the race that is the housing market and to “keep up” status-wise. The participants’ acceptance of the neoliberal myths constitutive of *Leave it to Bryan* episodes, versus their more negotiated reaction to the messaging in *Tiny House, Big Living*, demonstrates the naturalization of a late-capitalist ideology that hails viewers as owners (never renters) and as consumers whose consumption work is never done. Some scholars have looked at the acceptance of neoliberal ideology and the every-changing consumption standards it sets out as a way for individuals to define where their place is in society (Heller, 2006; White, 2012; Lewis, 2008; Winslow, 2010), providing a sense of clarity of how to strive to better oneself by attaining bigger and better homes (Allon, 2008; Miller, 2008; Jacobson, 2008; Zborowski, 2012).

This study also was able to fill a small gap within scholarly research by conducting qualitative audience research to gain insight and perspective of viewers interpretations around the ideological messages of budget ‘home and garden’ programs as they relate to discourses of design and construction trends, and how “trend” serves as an engine of continuing consumption in an era of shrinking national and household budgets. This study has exposed this gap by using Eagleton’s (1991) definition of ideology to demonstrates how the budget ‘home and garden’

programs have used their platform as an opportunity to promote neoliberal “truths”, resulting in the naturalization and acceptance of these values and beliefs by their audiences. The budget ‘home and garden’ programs are being seen as the innovator for setting the ideological standards of what a home is to look like, in doing so they have created a cultural myth of trend setting, urging viewers to follow them rendering their instruction as being gospel. In doing so, the practical elements of home ownership become overshadowed by the programs’ relentless promotion of consumerism and associated pleasures of commodity as a core cultural value.

Indeed, participants continually made reference for the need to update their own homes in order to fit trends, which indicates a tendency to decode budget ‘home and garden’ programs in ways that reinforce neoliberal ideology and cloak it in common sense. These messages are encouraging putting off family, time, and money to complete a renovation to make the home more suitable for today’s market. The encoding of messages within the shows such as “this will add a ton of value to the house...you have already some good cash, you can make a lot more...” (McConnachie-Howarth, 2016) help to reinforce the notions of achieving a better lifestyle but comments such as “hardwood floors will totally transform the space” (McConnachie-Howarth, 2016) evokes the myth that these shows know precisely what a viewer would need to do to attain that lifestyle, and that these options exist at the local dealership, bank, or hardware store sponsoring the show. This myth of “trend conformity as a pathway to happiness” is not being forced onto the audience; rather, it is using the notion of style as a kind of Trojan horse for naturalizing a connection between constant (home) improvement and self-worth and setting standards (Barthes, 1972) for forging that sense of having “arrived” at the portal of the American Dream. As one participant explained, there is no longer a need for individuals to use their

imagination for decorating a home, that is the purpose of budget 'home and garden' programs to show audiences how (Baily, March 1, 2017). As these shows become more popular, these ideologically motivated messages come to be perceived as common sense rather than opinion motivated by capitalist logic, such that viewers will willingly relinquish their imagination to the professionals and conform to these trends in ways that are good for keeping ratings high and advertisers smiling.

Similar to Eagleton's (1991) ideas of how the interests of economic elites become naturalized through circulation of discourse, viewers following these shows are invited to recreate their homes through appeals to how renovations will allow them to increase personal wealth and social capital, even during an extended period of overheated housing markets and falling wages. The overall acceptance expressed by participants towards the logic of home renovations and the need to be continually updating was discussed as if it was a natural part of life. Participants mentioned changing the paint colours of their walls to a neutral colour in order to maintain with the current trend or to continually be making changes to their home in hopes of making it more modern to fit in with the current trend (Carter, Camden, March 2, 2017). A general consensus among the participants that a style would only last five years and they would need to renovate again in order to maintain relevance agreed upon like it was a natural or common sense action. Clearly, while this might make the home more attractive to future buyers, it reduces the meaning of the home to that of a commodity and investment, and may even be financially risky for an owner already carrying debt on the property. Most of all, it perpetuates the myth that the market will not fail the consumer, as long as the consumer keeps spending in order to stay on-trend.

At the level of representation and signification, the shows analyzed for this study share a similar process of encoding boundaries around what is acceptable regarding home aesthetics. Creating a sense of taste anxiety similar to what Rosenberg's (2011) mentioned in his study, these shows produce a sense of anxiety by giving the perception of what was original to the house is now defined as "outdated", implant the idea into the viewer that in order to stay relevant they need to update. Both shows also share the idea of partial improvement; always leaving something else that will need updating. In *Leave it to Bryan*, there are always two more rooms that will need to be renovated or updated. For *Tiny House, Big Living*, the likelihood is that the tiny house is not a forever house. The cultural myth of trends provided by budget 'home and garden' programs have created a trigger for maintaining viewers, but for the audience this is a continual process of striving towards the American Dream, insuring they are adhering to the most important thing, which is home ownership. No matter how poor someone is relative to where they live and work, the achievement of homeownership remains the defining marker of accomplishment and successfully living the American Dream.

Conclusion

The analysis found that participants generally accepted the latent neoliberal ideology motivating each of the programs. While they have a clear understanding on the realities behind budget 'home and garden' programs and therefore an oppositional decoding of the myths of "cost imbalance", "speed equals quality" and "trendy or eccentric design", they accept (some with a sense of regret) neoliberal ideologies encoded within the shows that promote never-ending consumption and continuous striving for more. For many, the value of these two distinct budget 'home and garden' programs lies precisely in how they guide consumption based on shifting

trends and taste markers. Many of the participants were oblivious to the impact that the budget ‘home and garden’ programs were having on their decisions and reasons for renovating, accrediting the continual projects to maintaining cultural relevance. Unaware that budget ‘home and garden’ programs are establishing and defining the cultural relevance based on the trends they deem as acceptable at the time, then using their shows as a way of demonstrating it to audiences, convincing viewers for the need of updating and renovating in order to meet these cultural trends. The passive delivery of these messages has naturalized the meaning allowing for a subconscious acceptance by the viewer.

The purpose of this study is to bring further awareness to the body of scholarship that deals with the question of how neoliberal ideologies are circulated and reinforced in home improvement programs. This research can help socially-responsible media content producers that are not beholden to advertising dollars provided by mortgage lenders and renovation retailers to understand the social standards it is setting with its messaging and to be weary of the effects it has on the audience. For the general public, understanding and awareness of the subconscious influence that we have allowed budget ‘home and garden’ programs to have over our decisions of home trends. Joining the scholarly conversation regarding home improvement shows using ideological messaging as a way of bettering ones self, by exposing the use of trends as a cultural myth it uncovers and reveals an area in which further research can explore.

This study is limited in several respects. For one thing, the method selection does raise questions around validity insofar as it is not possible to duplicate the data collection, since it invites input from different perspectives. The goal is not to produce generalizable findings; I am making vast claims about all programs. The study focused specifically on Canadian broadcasted

programs in order to relate to participants, but in doing so other networks and programs offered throughout the world were not addressed. The participants recruited were from a fairly small sample, and a majority of them consisted of Albertans who may be more or less attuned to neoliberalism than people from other provinces. The participants are all currently living in Canada, where the culture is somewhat more open to socialist ideology. The research specifically looked at staff and students from SAIT, excluding other educational institutions and companies. In future research, the educational and cultural backgrounds could be taken into account, as those areas might impact the interpretations of TV programs of the participants. Other budget 'home and garden' programs could be analyzed to provide a certain new perspective to answer the question of how budget 'home and garden' programs are promoting and naturalizing neoliberal cultural myths about the "North American dream".

References

- Allon, F. (2008). *Renovation nation: Our obsession with home*. Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=F8F96SQiWX0C&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Renovation+Nation:+Our+Obsession+with+Home&ots=RGk-noaPFE&sig=vrNGmpOtplE5YcYKeLoq490KY5w&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Renovation%20Nation%3A%20Our%20Obsession%20with%20Home&f=false
- Aslama, M., & Pantti, M. (2006). Talking alone: Reality TV, emotions and authenticity. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(2), 167-184. doi: 10.1177/1367549406063162
- Banet-Weiser, S., & Portwood-Stacer, L. (2006). 'I just want to be me again!' Beauty pageants, reality television and post-feminism. *Feminist Theory*, 7(2), 255-272. doi: 10.1177/1464700106064423
- Bradford, L., Meyers, R. A., & Kane, K. A. (1999). Latino Expectations of communicative competence: A focus group interview study. *Communication Quarterly*, 47(1), 98-117. doi: 10.1080/01463379909370126
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies* [1957], trans. Jonathan Cape. New York: Noonday. Retrieved from <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2012/12/citing-translated-works-in-apa-style.html>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Bruce, J. M. (2017). A screwball property: Love It or List It as postfeminist realty TV. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1(17). doi: [10.1177/1367549417701761](https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549417701761)
- Bruce, J., & Druick, Z. (2017). Haunted houses: Gender and property television after the financial crisis. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1(7). doi: [10.1177/1367549417701762](https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549417701762)

- Bold, C. (2012). Collecting narrative data. *Sage Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications. 93-119. doi: 10.4135/9781446288160
- Bonsu, S. K., Darmody, A., & Parmentier, M. A. (2010). Arrested emotions in reality television. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 13(1), 91-107. doi: 10.1080/10253860903346781
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard university press. Retrieved from https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/36960054/Distinction_A_Social_Critique_Of_The_Judgement_Of_Taste_By_Pierre_Bourdieu.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1502232081&Signature=QtP%2B7TEBzEM9LrDp9jnhusAZeYA%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DDistinction_A_Social_Critique_Of_The_Judg.pdf
- Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. (1996). Archived Decision CRTC 96-607 [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/1996/DB96-607.htm>
- Chandler, D. (2014). *Semiotics for beginners*. Retrieved from <http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem06.html>
- Domoff, S. E., Hinman, N. G., Koball, A. M., Storfer-Isser, A., Carhart, V. L., Baik, K. D., & Carels, R. A. (2012). The effects of reality television on weight bias: An examination of The Biggest Loser. *Obesity*, 20(5), 993–998. doi:10.1038/oby.2011.378
- Durham, M. G., & Kellner, D. M. (Eds.). (2009). *Media and cultural studies: Keywords*. John Wiley & Sons. Retrieved from <https://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=I8dPhB88Sx4C&oi=fnd&pg=PR8&dq=Media>

+and+cultural+studies+&ots=CD4AkyADhS&sig=gfbtZuThSaKwNuCH9gxFn_J5eCg&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Media%20and%20cultural%20studies&f=false

Eagleton, T. (1991). *Ideology: An introduction*. London: Verso.

Everett, A. (2004). Trading private and public spaces@ HGTV and TLC: On new genre formations in transformation TV. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 3(2), 157-181. doi: 10.1177/1470412904044798

Fuentes, C., & Hagberg, J. (2013). Socio-cultural retailing: what can retail marketing learn from this interdisciplinary field? *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, 5(3), 290-308. doi: 10.1108/IJQSS-10-2012-0018

Goodsell, T. L. (2008). Diluting the cesspool: Families, home improvement, and social change. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(4), 539-565. doi: 10.1177/0192513X07310320

Hall, A. (2006). Viewers' perceptions of reality programs. *Communication Quarterly*, 54(2), 191-211. doi: 10.1080/01463370600650902

Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, and P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 128-138). London: Hutchinson. Retrieved from: http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~jdslack/readings/CSReadings/Hall_Encoding-n-Decoding.pdf

Hatton-Jones, S., & Teah, M. (2015). Case analysis of the do-it-yourself industry. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 27(5), 826-838. doi: 10.1108/APJML-09-2015-0135

Hay, J. (2010). Too good to fail: Managing financial crisis through the moral economy of realty TV. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 34(4), 382-402. doi: 10.1177/0196859910390028

Heller, D. (Ed.). (2006). *The great American makeover: Television, history, nation*. Springer. Retrieved from

<https://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=DFKEDAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=T>

he+great+American+makeover:+Television,+history,+nation&ots=kSGf8ZfXl&sig=PTBx2
 YBQVrj6_j08EWB_DSL-
 zow&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=The%20great%20American%20makeover%3A%20Televi
 sion%2C%20history%2C%20nation&f=false

Hill, A. (2005). *Reality TV: Audiences and popular factual television*. Psychology Press.

Retrieved from

[https://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=z0Dj0C9a9q8C&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=Realit
 y+TV:+Audiences+and+popular+Factual+Television&ots=DVW4tKsrus&sig=ZQTVhRbdw
 K_txjgak_e62SPvYJo&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Reality%20TV%3A%20Audiences%20
 and%20popular%20Factual%20Television&f=false](https://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=z0Dj0C9a9q8C&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=Realit

 y+TV:+Audiences+and+popular+Factual+Television&ots=DVW4tKsrus&sig=ZQTVhRbdw

 K_txjgak_e62SPvYJo&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Reality%20TV%3A%20Audiences%20

 and%20popular%20Factual%20Television&f=false)

Jacobson, K. J. (2008). Renovating the American woman's home: American domesticity in Extreme
 Makeover: Home Edition. *Legacy*, 25(1), 105-127. doi: 10.1353/leg.0.0017

Kitzinger, J. (1995). Qualitative research. Introducing focus groups. *BMJ: British Medical
 Journal*, 311(7000), 299. Retrieved from

<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/stable/29728251>

Koehler, D (Writer) & Santomarco, T (Writer). (2017) Tiny Bachelor Bus [Television series
 episode]. In J. Jensen (Executive Producer), Tiny House, Big Living. Ontario, Canada:
 HGTV

Koehler, D (Writer) & Santomarco, T (Writer). (2017) Tiny Sheepherder's Wagon [Television series
 episode]. In J. Jensen (Executive Producer), Tiny House, Big Living. Ontario, Canada:
 HGTV

Kucuk, S. U. (2015). A semiotic analysis of consumer-generated antibranding. *Marketing
 Theory*, 15(2), 243-264. doi:10.1177/1470593114540677

- Lewis, T. (2008a). Changing rooms, biggest losers and backyard blitzes: A history of makeover television in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 22(4), 447-458. doi: 10.1080/10304310802189949
- Lewis, T. (2008b). Revealing the makeover show: Introduction. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 22(4), 441-446. doi: 10.1080/10304310802190053
- Littlejohn, S., & Foss, K. (Eds.). (2009). *Encyclopedia of communication theory* (Gale virtual reference library). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzQ5NTU5MV9fQU41?sid=f536ca04-6c1b-4382-9d8d-7f1338b2ab34@sessionmgr102&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>
- Martin, C. S., (2004). TV design myths. *Midwest Home and Garden* 14(6), 159-163. Retrieved from http://design.umn.edu/prospective_students/programs/documents/TVDesignMyths-1.pdf
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1970), *The German ideology* (Vol. 1), International Publishers Co.
Retrieved from https://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=DujYWG8TPMMC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=The+German+Ideology&ots=jZYcRjsxS4&sig=mkaKA5pN_LueDALM4WFBLYKKwVU&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=The%20German%20Ideology&f=false
- McConnachie-Howarth, A. (Writer) & Iglezos, P. (Director). (2016) Wet Wipe [Television series episode]. In F. Halbert (Executive Producer), *Leave it to Bryan*. Ontario, Canada: HGTV
- McConnachie-Howarth, A. (Writer) & Iglezos, P. (Director). (2016) Buzz Kill [Television series episode]. In F. Halbert (Executive Producer), *Leave it to Bryan*. Ontario, Canada: HGTV
- McCooley, P. (2012, January 9). Wants versus needs in Baeumler's new show. *The Ottawa Citizen*. Retrieved from

- <http://www.ottawacitizen.com/homes/Wants+versus+needs+Baeumler+show/5967865/story.html>
- McElroy, R. (2008). Property TV: The (re) making of home on national screens. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11(1), 43-61. doi: 10.1177/1367549407084963
- McElroy, R. (2017) 'Mediating Home in an Age of Austerity: the values of property television', special issue, 'Post-crisis, gender and property television' ed. Bruce, J. and Druick, Z., *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(5): 1-18. doi:10.1177/1367549417701758
- Merrigan, G., Huston, C. L., & Johnston, R. (2012). *Communication research methods* (Canadian ed.). Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, T. (2008). The new world makeover: Afterword. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 22(4), 585-590. doi: 10.1080/10304310802190061
- Moran, A. (2009). Global franchising, local customizing: The cultural economy of TV program formats. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 23(2), 115-125. doi: 10.1080/10304310802706932
- Morgan, S. E., Harrison, T. R., Chewing, L., Davis, L., & DiCorcia, M. (2007). Entertainment (mis) education: The framing of organ donation in entertainment television. *Health Communication*, 22(2), 143-151. doi:10.1080/10410230701454114
- Murray, S., & Ouellette, L. (Eds.). (2004). *Reality TV: Remaking television culture*. NYU Press.
- Retrieved from https://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=4_W19oHGzZQC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=murray+2008+reality+TV&ots=3kILiaH3vz&sig=ntCGg1dRBZKvghMDxvJ11Y5LJSs&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false
- Punch, K. (2016). *Developing effective research proposals* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Rasure, E. M. (2015). Exploring the influence of reality television on financial behavior (Doctoral dissertation, Kansas State University). Retrieved from <http://krex.k-state.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2097/18927/ErikaRasure2015.pdf?sequence=1>
- Redden, G. (2008). Economy and reflexivity in makeover television. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 22(4), 485-494. doi: 10.1080/10304310802189964
- Rogers, P. D. (2002, December 5). Channeling home shows. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/home-garden//2002/12/05/channeling-home-shows/3f31051a-1e7a-4298-b7da-30ac07b366ae/>
- Rohlfing, S., & Sonnenberg, S. (2016). "Who is really British anyway?": A thematic analysis of responses to online hate materials. *Cyberpsychology*, 10(4), article 2. doi:10.5817/CP2016-4-2
- Rose, R. L., & Wood, S. L. (2005). Paradox and the consumption of authenticity through reality television. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(2), 284-296. doi: 10.1086/432238
- Rosenberg, B. C. (2011). Home improvement: Domestic taste, DIY, and the property market. *Home Cultures*, 8(1), 5-23. doi: 10.2752/175174211X12863597046578
- Ryan, M. (2015). Entertaining fantasies: Lifestyle and social life in 1980s America. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 39(1), 82-101. doi: 10.1177/0196859914552705
- Skeggs, B., Thumim, N., & Wood, H. (2008). 'Oh goodness, I am watching reality TV' How methods make class in audience research. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11(1), 5-24. doi: 10.1177/1367549407084961
- Springett H. (2010, July 11) Why Is Makeover Television So Popular?, *Issu*. Retrieved from http://issuu.com/hannahspringett/docs/hannahspringett_dissertation

- Stewart, D. W., Shamdasani, P. N. & Rook, D. W. (2007). *Applied social research methods: Focus groups*. SAGE Publications Ltd. doi: 10.4135/9781412991841
- Strand, M. (2014). Social democracy and multiculturalism. (Unpublished masters dissertation). Aalborg University, Denmark.
- Thomas, S. (2010). Makeover Television: Instruction and Re-Invention through the Mythology of Cinderella. *College Quarterly*, 13(4), n4. Retrieved from <http://collegequarterly.ca/2010-vol13-num04-fall/thomas.html>
- White, M. (2017). 'A house divided'. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1(17). doi: 10.1177/1367549417701756
- Willemsen, Paul (1994): *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*. London: BFI/Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press
- Winslow, L. (2010). Comforting the comfortable: Extreme Makeover Home Edition's ideological conquest. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 27(3), 267-290. doi: 10.1080/15295030903583549
- Zborowski, J. (2012). Can you see yourself living here?: Structures of desire in recent British lifestyle television. *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies*, 1(2), 55-76. doi:10.5117/NECSUS2012.2.ZBOR

Appendix A
Initial Recruitment Email

A Home Improvement Reality
Jessica Ager
Culture and Communication
Royal Road University

Subject Line: Looking for participants—Get a \$5 Tim’s Card!

Hi my name is Jessica Ager and I am looking for participants for my research study.

You are receiving this email because you are a student at SAIT and I would like to get your perspective about home improvement reality TV shows.

It is not a requirement that you watch home improvement reality shows to participant in this study. I will be providing a link to a home improvement reality show in a follow-up email that we will discuss.

If you take part in this study, it would be a small focus group discussion for about 1.5 hour. **In appreciation of your time commitment, you will receive a \$5 Tim’s gift card.**

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please email. Also feel free to extend this invitation to your friends that are also students at SAIT.

Thank you
Jessica Ager

*Your email address was obtained under the approval of the SAIT Ethics Tri Council.

Appendix B
Follow-Up Recruitment Email

A Home Improvement Reality
Jessica Ager
 Culture and Communication
 Royal Road University

Subject Line: Looking for participants– Focus Group Session Selection

Thank you for your interest in helping with my research.

The following time slots available to participate in this study are:

<i>February 28 at 11:30am</i>
<i>March 1 at 12:00pm</i>
<i>March 2 at 11:30am</i>
<i>March 3 at 12:00pm</i>
<i>March 4 at 1:00pm</i>

**NOTE: All discussions will be held on SAIT Campus and coffee, tea and snacks will be provided.*

Please send me the date from the list above that works best for you.

Once you notify me of the date that works for you, I will then send a confirmation email indicating the room the session will be held in and a link to a home improvement reality show to watch in preparation for the discussion. **Feel free to extend this invitation to your friends that are also students at SAIT.** If you have to cancel your appointment, please email me.

Participation in this study involves meeting on any of the dates above to discuss various aspects of the home improvement reality shows provided in the confirmation email. The other tasks involved are: filling out a questionnaire about some personal information, home improvement reality TV preferences, and your program of study at SAIT. Also you will need to state your opinions and perspectives out loud (which will be recorded and written down with your permission). Participation in this study would take **approximately 1.5 hour** of your time. In appreciation of your time commitment, you will receive a \$5 Tim's gift card. I would like to assure you that the study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through both Royal Roads University and SAIT Research Ethics Committees.

Thank you,

Jessica Ager

I am a Professional Communication Master's student at Royal Roads University. I am contacting you because you recently responded to an email that was sent to you, indicating you would be interested in being contacted about joining a focus group. The purpose of my study is to get some ideas of how and what people perceive about home improvement reality TV shows.

Appendix C
Confirmation Email
A Home Improvement Reality
Jessica Ager
Culture and Communication
Royal Road University

Subject Line: Looking for participants– Confirmation Email

Great, thank you!

The discussion will be in room XX at XX am XX.

Here is the links to the home improvement show to watch in preparation for the discussion:

Leave It To Bryan Video - Buzz Kill | Season 6 Episode 13 - HGTV.ca <http://www.hgtv.ca/shows/leave-it-to-bryan/videos/buzz-kill-629242435893/>

Leave It To Bryan Video - Wet Wipe | Season 6 Episode 9 - HGTV.ca
<http://www.hgtv.ca/shows/leave-it-to-bryan/videos/wet-wipe-609923139643>

Tiny House, Big Living Video - Tiny Bachelor Bus | Season 4 Episode 10 - HGTV.ca
<http://www.hgtv.ca/shows/tiny-house-big-living/videos/tiny-bachelor-bus-873587267771/>

Tiny House, Big Living Video - Tiny Shepherder's Wagon | Season 4 Episode 4 - HGTV.ca <http://www.hgtv.ca/shows/tiny-house-big-living/videos/tiny-shepherders-wagon-853377091587/>

The other tasks that will be involved are: filling out a questionnaire about some personal information, home improvement reality TV preferences, and your program of study at SAIT. Also you will need to state your opinions and perspectives out loud (which will be recorded and written down with your permission).

Participation in this study would take **approximately 1.5 hour** of your time. In appreciation of your time commitment, you will receive a \$5 Tim's gift card. I would like to assure you that the study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through both Royal Roads University and SAIT Research Ethics Committees.

If you have to cancel your appointment, please email me.

Thank you,

Jessica Ager

Appendix D Consent Form: Focus Groups

A Home Improvement Reality

Jessica Ager

Culture and Communication

Royal Road University

I am a master’s student in the Department of Culture and Communications at Royal Roads University. As part of my masters thesis I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Juana Du, I am inviting you to participate in my study. The purpose of the study is to examine the ideological and myths created by a few of the home improvement shows that audiences understand and believe to be truth.

This study involves a set of four focus groups comprised of 6-8 participants in each. The facilitator will be asking opened ended questions to allow for participants to express their thoughts and feelings around their interpretation of the home improvement show. Also allowing for participants to interact and comment to each other’s response. The focus group session will last about an hour and a half. The focus groups will be audio recorded and I will be taking notes during the session for further data to be analyzed. Once the focus group is complete I will conduct an audience analysis to identify themes or patterns within the responses of participants. I will be looking for common perceptions or ideas of how the participants relate with the home improvement shows. After analysis is complete I will document findings and results of the purposed question and submit for approval from the University. In the future there is a possibility for this research to be published.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study prior to the focus group session. However if you arrive to the session and give feedback you will be unable to withdraw any feedback given up to that point.

Your attendance of the focus group as well as the information provided will remain confidential. This means that I will not tell other people that you participated, and I will not tell other people what your responses were, except to those who are part of my research team. I will however be reporting the results of my research findings through presentations, and possibly publications.

All participants are asked not to disclose anything said within the context of the discussion. By agreeing to participate, you agree to not disclose to others outside this event anything said within the context of the discussion. All identifying information will be removed from the collected materials, and all materials will stored on a secured personal computer. The information will be destroyed by, shredding of paper notes and permanently deleting digital files once the thesis has been approved and the course is completed.

By signing this consent wavier you also give permission to have the focus group session audio taped and notes can be taken of your ideas and perspectives for further analysis. It is my intention to NOT use any names and to NOT refer to individuals directly; to solve this a pseudonym nametag will be given to you at the beginning to the session. This will allow for you to remain anonymous on audio recordings and information gathered.

Permission to Quote:

I may wish to quote your words directly in reports and publications resulting from this. With regards to being quoted, please check yes or no for each of the following statements:

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me under the following conditions:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	I agree to be quoted directly with Pseudo Name.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	I agree to be quoted directly but wish to remain completely anonymous if published.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	I do not want to be quoted directly at all.

Participant's signature _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Jessica Ager or Dr. Juana Du. This research has been reviewed and approved by Royal Roads University and Southern Alberta Institute of Technology Research Ethics Board.

Appendix E
Questions: Focus Groups
A Home Improvement Reality
Jessica Ager
Culture and Communication
Royal Road University

1. What did you think about the program?
2. When you think about home improvements shows what is the first thing that comes to mind? (Example they are cheesy, what they can do with a room or house is beautiful, etc.)
3. Why do you think you feel this way? (What is it about the show that makes you think that is the case?)
4. Can you tell me more about that?
5. That's really interesting, has any one else noticed that?
6. Is there anything else?
7. What specific element of the show impresses you? (Example How easy they make renovations look.)
8. What element of the show disappoints you? (Example there isn't a really cost break down.)
9. How likely are you to do a home renovation in a year?
10. If yes what type of renovation would you try to tackle? If no, why is that?
11. At some point if you were to renovate what do you think you would do?
12. Where do you buy your products?
13. Do you feel like any of the shows really promote a specific brand?
14. What is your preference for style home? (Traditional or Modern)
15. What colours would you paint inside your house?
what colour is your house currently? What color was it before?
16. Is there any paint colours you would avoid or find tacky?
17. After watching the home improvement episode, how did you feel? (Example you wanted to create the feeling of new, De-clutter the house.)
18. Do you ever feel like these shows make you feel inadequate because of renting a home? Or not having a new home?
19. What is the reason you would watch these types of shows? (ie. get ideas, information, etc.)

Appendix F
Post Questions: Focus Groups

A Home Improvement Reality
Jessica Ager
Culture and Communication
Royal Road University

Post Focus Group Questions

Pseudo Name:

Date:

Time:

Personal Information

Gender:

Age:

Program or Occupation at SAIT:

Reality TV Programs

Have you ever watched shows on HGTV or another network?

If yes, how often do you watch?

Of the shows provided, which did you prefer, and why?

(If you prefer a different Home Improvement show please list it).

Of the shows provided, which did you dislike the most, and why?

(If you dislike a different Home Improvement show please list it).

Do you think that home improvement reality shows create a good sense of society? Example, they understand the economic environment and use that in their shows. Please explain your thought and reason.

Do you think home improvement shows that focused on the budgets; total costs and a more realistic timeframe would influence how audiences feel about the reality of home improvement shows? Please explain.

How interested would you be in watching such a show?

Appendix G

Leave it to Bryan					
Cost	Speed & Quality	Trendy	Reveal	Quirky	DIY
-Budget established at beginning of show -\$50,000 firm budget for basement. -adding a full bathroom to the basement -removed sink from wet bar to save cost -\$50,000 firm budget for Kitchen -want French doors, increased budget -wanted a built-in espresso machine, increased budget	-no reference of official time, just assumption of passing days -In the begin before Bryan chooses the room he says "Let me sleep on it".	Similar design palette between both renovations. -new hardwood floors -light walls -a bar -white cabinets & counters Words used such as: -old appliances. -Out dated	Both projects are revealed to the couples at the end. Both happy with the outcome.	Brian Baeumler acts like a regular guy there to help the couple with their renovation.	In both episodes the couples help out but definitely don't make it look easy. They almost make it look harder then it really is. Offering some bit of realism.

Tiny House, Big Living					
Cost	Speed & Quality	Trendy	Reveal	Quirky	DIY
-A estimated and completed project budget and cost is given. -questions still circle around the extra cost of the land, moving costs and utility costs.	-an estimated time frame and completed time frame is given.	The style of the house is very specific to the individual creating the home.	The house is shown to family and friends at the end.	The individuals building the homes seem a little eccentric.	They make it look very easy to build, since the home owner is building this on their own or with family. -It is mentioned that the family or individual has some type of building or construction background.

Appendix H

Myth: Cost imbalance		
+	-	/
<p>August: It gives you an idea of cost Carter: I appreciate that the shows we watched and are talking about that there Canadian so when they talk about the dollar its relevant Carter: one of them talked about fifty thousand dollars for a kitchen. Its a fair amount of money Everest: I am always fascinated at the price they buy everything at compared to their initial budget. Echo: They get there supplies for the contractor price and then you don't know what they get for the mark up</p>	<p>Aspen: I think they lie about the cost of materials. he was using like antique fire extinguishers to make a urinal. But ah, and all these like antique acid batteries, he's just finding them for free on the beach somewhere. Like they are not free, this stuff costs money and he was given it by the program and creators or something. Aaron: It's like awe that just doubled or tripled what it's going to cost. So I think it's disingenuous is a good word. Putting cabinets in, you know like it's going to cost you a lot more then what their saying and you talk to a contractor and every time you lift a finger it costs you money for time when it costs them money. Camden: when they buy for a hundred thousand and that wouldn't fly here Carter: but um there was another one that was twenty five thousand dollars to do wiring and upgrading different things and I don't know where you are? But that's unrealistic. Dakota: and the cost of materials cause people don't often realize that the cost of materials is really high. Yeah and you have to factor that in to cost.... like a cost of time and people involved and they don't talk about skill. Like how long does it take to get those skills Elliott: if you watch the American shows compared to the Canadian shows the budgets are ridiculous... As a Canadian it makes you feel it would never be possible Ember: I agree and budget to me means thats the ceiling and almost constantly they need to go over budget.</p>	<p>Addison: a lot of the things in home improvement shows, like <i>Leave it to Bryan</i> for my generation are not likely attainable. Spending thousands od dollars on a house and decorations isn't where I currently want to spend my money. I like just packing up the few things I have a traveling. Addison: The tiny homes one I kind of feel targeted a younger audience because that's what a lot of the people are having to do in larger cities is down size. And in a way they glorify having less money. Camden: and maybe that's what it is the demographic of what they had was people who only had massive homes and so they were missing a market Cameron: Good point some of them are US Dakota: also that they have a whole crew behind the scenes and normally for your money you only get one contractor</p>

Appendix I

Myth: Speed and quality are one in the same		
+	-	/
<p>Camden: I think they completed it in three days.</p> <p>Camden: I assume because it's a tv show its done quick and they can afford that.</p> <p>Canan: Going on there point I watch this and I go this is easy</p> <p>Carmen: I agree all the time my wife watch's these shows she goes, you could do that!</p> <p>Everest: no matter how much little time they have its always done</p>	<p>Aspen: disingenuous again, they show like one screw going in and they are like yup now theirs our wall done. wait a minute that's a week's worth of work, from when you get home form work until you cry yourself to sleep at night.</p> <p>Aspen: Ya you would assume, that looked really easy, is what you are suppose to take away from it.</p> <p>Carmen: unrealistic</p> <p>Carter: When I look at these shows now I know having done it that there is a whole lot of work then the twenty-two minute show.</p> <p>Dallas: yeah I think if you understood how much work and time and money is involved you may think yeah thats not for me.</p> <p>Dallas: If your working it takes up all your time. Most of these shows people are doing this full time and thats great if you take the time off but its a serious commitment of time</p> <p>Dallas: Yeah, thats my point there is a common narrative ark in them weather its a comedy or reality shows that they follow the same pattern</p> <p>Echo: I agree cause they don't show a time line or how long it takes</p> <p>Echo: and in reality if your paying someone they would need a week or more and so you either have quality speed or cost</p>	<p>Aaron: it was probably more than just the host working on projects</p> <p>August: The assumption is that there's a crew of people doing this. So it's not out of the realm of possibility.</p> <p>Bo: the likelihood is there is a crew working on the project.</p> <p>Carter: when we started doing reno's we were completely unrealistic about time frames and what it would take</p> <p>Camden: I always wonder about workmanship then they have a ton of work to do fast</p>

Appendix J

Myth: It needs to be trendy or eccentric design		
+	-	/
<p>August: they give you an idea of what's out there.</p> <p>BO: Its fantastic to see what you can do with your own living space</p> <p>Addison: Ya, I mean it more so gives you ideas of what to do with the space.</p> <p>BILLY:yeah I makes me feel like I should re design or move something</p> <p>Baily: I think people imitate what we see. we don't have the imagination on our own cause thats what they do cause thats there job.</p> <p>Canan: But now that we've gone neutral its much more trendy</p> <p>Dallas: yeah and if you do outrageous colour schemes then re-sale is hard to do.</p> <p>Dylan: I like to learn new techniques and how it costs and the design aspect.</p> <p>Everest: trends spark a idea of your house like if you have shag carpet and then thats not the trend you think should I re-do that</p> <p>Ember: I think trends are wall colors and things that can be changed. Seems to me these shows have brought in a different mind set that you don't have to sell your home to get what your looking for you can accomplish that yourself.</p>	<p>Darcy: Its not a realistic position for the general economy its more stimulating the economy for renovations and partnerships with a marketing plan.</p> <p>BO: This show just convinces people they don't have what they need.</p> <p>Ember: but its a transient type of living cause things like water or heating, minimalist ways of life show, appeal to that lifestyle. I would love to hear these people in ten years</p>	<p>Addison: Although I think the idea is cool in the tiny homes show, design tips isn't likely something I would directly take from it. Its just not my style.</p> <p>Caden: my house is all white or tope except for a yellow office that lets in all the light</p> <p>Dallas: yeah that philosophy about simplifying your life and lowering your carbon foot print and proving sustainability and only living on what you need but that's direct contrast to a society that says you always need more. Its defiantly trying to change peoples thinking about how they consume.</p>

Appendix K

Myth: The constant consumer		
+	-	/
<p>Addison: I like the tiny homes ones a lot cause it's far more attainable for my lifestyle.</p> <p>Carter: after watching these shows we have become adventures. And I don't think we would have done that if we hadn't seen it on the shows</p> <p>Camden: I agree I had an idea board and I showed the contractors and its a starting point and the show helps to identify your own likes and dislikes.</p> <p>Dallas: I think those shows give you hope and motivation that you could do major renovations in a weekend for five hundred dollars</p> <p>Dallas: personally I felt motivated to think about what I'm going to do with my space.</p> <p>Ember: a way of living, these shows have introduced me to a plethora to ideas, but what I can have my family live in</p> <p>Elliot: Its a very appealing concept to everyone cause you can't really achieve early retirement now.</p>	<p>Aspen: It's the whole commercialization of the renovation.</p> <p>Aspen: it never talks about how they acquired the land or they the fact that they are moving to family land, like that's normal for everyone.</p> <p>Dakota: Yeah where you don't end up in your parents basement</p> <p>Everest: it would be really hard to re-sell.</p>	<p>Addison: we use paintings and art from places we have traveled to decorate the house instead of painting or changing things out.</p> <p>Dakota: with the Tiny House, Big Living house stuff I like that it gets me thinking like okay how far down do I need to go right.whats my limit. Realistically cause I have lived in a four hundred square foot limit and I think it would be hard to go even less than that.</p> <p>Danny: When I was in residence university, I was in fifteen hundred square feet the two of us and so I know I can go small, I just never want to.</p>