

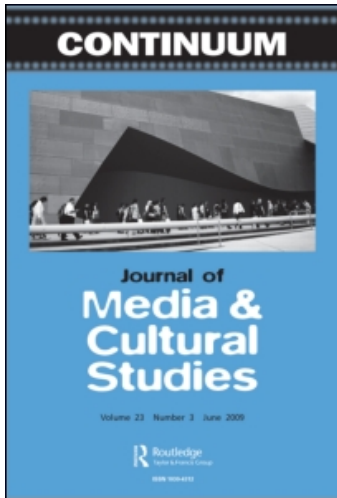
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### Makeover television, governmentality and the good citizen

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## Makeover television, governmentality and the good citizen

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In June 2006, ABC TV encouraged families to ‘get healthy’ in conjunction with its new reality series, *Shaq’s Big Challenge*. Each week, NBA champion Shaquille O’Neal worked with a ‘dream team’ of nutritionists, coaches, medical experts and physical trainers to improve the bodies – and the lives – of six overweight middle school children while the cameras rolled. As the kids endured the physical and emotional challenges of Shaq’s transformational ‘boot camp’, the basketball star consulted with local school districts and government officials to develop a suggested ‘wellness program’ for the State of Florida, where the series was filmed. Television viewers were encouraged to implement their own lifestyle makeovers in partnership with the *Big Challenge* website, where they could generate customized health report cards, replay material from the television broadcast and download resources for getting themselves and their children into shape. While *Shaq’s Big Challenge* was packaged as reality entertainment, it was also promoted as an effort to transform the way ‘we approach the health of a nation – one child, one community, one state at a time, until we truly are a happier, healthier, fitter America’. In this paper, we analyse the changing relationship between television and social welfare implied by this mission statement, and show how the impulse to remake television viewers into active and healthy citizens speaks to the ‘reinvention’ of government in neoliberal capitalist democracies such as the United States.

Practical instruction by experts in the care and improvement of the self, the family, and home – the basic elements of makeover television – is hardly new. In the early twentieth century, progressive social workers sought to disseminate the ‘science of right living’ to working-class and immigrant populations, believing that positive changes of habit and conduct would improve the quality of life for these groups, and stabilize society as a whole.<sup>1</sup> With the growth of the culture industries – movies, magazines, radio and eventually television – pedagogies of self and lifestyle transformation were situated within the cultural economy of serial entertainment and advertising.<sup>2</sup> What has changed is the ‘political rationality’ of the makeover as a resource for achieving the changing demands of citizenship: Today, we contend, the impetus to facilitate, improve and makeover people’s health, happiness and success through television programming is tied to distinctly ‘neoliberal’ reasoning about governance and social welfare.

The spirit of personal reinvention endemic to the current spate of makeover television has gained visibility and social currency as part of the reinvention of government as a decentralized network of entrepreneurial ventures on the one hand, and the diffusion of personal responsibility and self-enterprise as ethics of ‘good’ citizenship on the other.<sup>3</sup> ‘Reinventing government’ is a technical term used by policy analysts and advocates since the late 1980s to refer to the

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re-conception of the public sector as the primary administrator of social assistance (Osbourne and Gaebler 1992).<sup>4</sup> As the liberal capitalist state is reconfigured into a network of public–private partnerships, and social services from education to medical care are outsourced to commercial firms, citizens are also called upon to play an active role in caring for and governing themselves through a burgeoning culture of entrepreneurship.<sup>5</sup> Within this context, cultural technologies such as television, which have always played an important role in the formation of idealized citizen subjects, become instrumental as resources of self-achievement in different and politically significant ways.

Reality television, which has proliferated in the context of deregulation, welfare reform and other attempts to reinvent government, has become the quintessential technology of citizenship of our age. Our book *Better Living through Reality TV: Television and Post-welfare Citizenship* (2008) analyses this development in the United States, showing how reality-based entertainment enacts experiments in governance and ‘civic laboratories’ for testing, refining and sharpening people’s abilities to conduct themselves in accordance with the new demands being placed on them.<sup>6</sup> As Anna McCarthy demonstrates in her seminal study of *Candid Camera* (2004), television’s capacity to govern through entertaining ‘real-life’ human experiments was mobilized as early as the 1950s, but only now are social and political conditions ripe to position television as a resource for achieving ‘post-welfare’ citizenship. Not only does reality television provide an experimental training ground for the government of the enterprising self, it has also adopted an active and visible role in coordinating non-state resources (money, expertise, outreach) for achieving the ethic of self-sufficient citizenship promoted by neoliberal regimes. In this sense, reality television is being inserted into the reinvention of government in complex, everyday, constitutive ways.

Reality television governs less through the dissemination of ideology than through the enactment of participatory games and lifestyle tutorials that guide, test and supposedly enhance subjects’ capacity to play an active role in shaping uncertain outcomes – to govern themselves through freedom, not control, in the language of political philosophy. As an early adopter of what scholars now call convergence culture, much reality television extends the experimentalism and participatory flair of its programming to viewers at home, so that the ‘programme’ in the old sense of broadcast media becomes the entry point into a broader menu of customizable entertainment and self-fashioning opportunities and requirements. Contrary to the stereotypical equation of television watching with passivity, the contemporary viewer – like the contemporary citizen – is increasingly expected to purposefully navigate the array of multimedia resources that television coordinates.

Makeover television has achieved a visible role in the new circuitry of citizenship formation afforded by reality entertainment. Utilizing techniques from behavioural experiments and self-tests to lifestyle instruction and role modelling, programmes such as *Shaq’s Big Challenge* diffuse and amplify the government of everyday life, utilizing the cultural power of television (and its convergence with new media) to evaluate and guide the behaviours and routines of ordinary people, and, more importantly, to teach us how to perform these techniques on ourselves. Makeover programmes enact the promised freedoms as well as the apparent burdens of enterprising citizenship on screen, utilizing coaches, lifestyle experts and motivators to transform floundering individuals into successful self-managers. At the same time, makeover programmes challenge a wide range of citizens organized by lifestyle clusters to expand their capacities, work harder on themselves, and exploit the resources of self-care made available to them. We are all called upon by the governing logic of our times to play the makeover game, and television – through the regularity of its programming as well as its interactivity – has played a powerful role in inserting the imperative to make and remake ourselves as citizens into the fabric of everyday life.

### **Television and the 'state of welfare'**

Before elaborating on makeover television, a discussion of our terminology and theoretical orientation will be helpful. Our work applies critical theories of governmentality to media culture, particularly reality television. The term governmentality, as developed by philosopher Michel Foucault and his followers, refers to the processes through which individuals shape and guide their own conduct – and that of others – with certain aims and objectives in mind (Foucault 1991; Gordon 1991; Burchell 1996; Rose 1996; Cruikshank 1999; Dean 1999). Scholars of governmentality look beyond the formal institutions of official government to also emphasize the proliferation and diffusion of the everyday techniques through which individuals and populations are expected to reflect upon, work on and organize their lives and themselves as an implicit condition of their citizenship. These techniques do not emanate directly from the state, nor can they be traced to any singular power centre. Rather, techniques of governmentality are circulated in a highly dispersed fashion by social and cultural intermediaries and the institutions (schools, social work, the medical establishment) that authorize their expertise. Television, along with other popular media, are an important – if much less examined – part of this mix in that they too have operated as technologies called upon to assist and shape citizens 'who do not need to be governed by others, but will govern themselves, master themselves, care for themselves' (Rose 1996, 45).<sup>7</sup>

Because governmental practices and rationalities are never stable, attempts to map and analyse them must be contextual, geographic and historical. Our focus is on the neoliberal present, by which we mean the bipartisan effort to 'reinvent' government (particularly in the United States) and to remodel the welfare state through dispersed networks of privatization and self-responsibilization. While we are charting television's crucial contribution to this remodelling, we are not implying that welfare no longer exists, nor are we pitting neoliberal strategies of governing at a distance against a romanticized view of the state as public welfare administer. We use the term 'post-welfare' citizenship to indicate the re-privatized arrangements, political reasoning, and individualized responsibilities demanded by the reinvention of government in the United States, but we also understand welfare in a broader sense, as a mutating but nonetheless integral component of liberal rule. Reality television, for better or worse, has come to play an important role in the transformation of welfare by helping to reconstitute the way it is conceptualized and practised in the United States.

Foucault's chronicle of the birth of the liberal state showed how its ability to govern relied on nascent social and cultural technologies for cultivating the perceived health and wellness – i.e. the welfare – of the citizenry (Rabinow 1997; Faubion 2000). The dispersion of technologies of governance, as a matter of guiding and shaping habits and behaviours through expertise, provided the initial basis for state power as well as the origins of modern welfare as a dispersed strategy of governing populations outside state apparatuses through religious institutions, charities, clinics and asylums.<sup>8</sup> What Nikolas Rose (1996) calls a 'state of welfare' emerged in the twentieth century to provide publicly coordinated and administered public services, including education, health care, public assistance, social work and mental hygiene. Technologies of governing through welfare that had developed privately were brought more squarely under the control of state bureaucracies, partly as a means of 'civilizing' the industrial working classes, notes Rose. Yet this move also represented a progressive move towards social democracy to the extent that the autonomous individual of liberal rule was recast as a 'citizen with rights to social protection and social education in return for duties of social obligation and social responsibility' (Rose 1996, 49).

Since the 1980s, the social contract implied by the 'state of welfare' has been the target of vigorous attempts to reinvent the public sector – in part because state involvement in welfare is seen as a breach of liberalism's emphasis on governing at a distance. Particularly in the United States,

public-sector welfare programmes are claimed to have bred passive and dependent citizens who do not respond to market incentives.<sup>9</sup> The ‘reinvented’ state is still concerned to ensure the health and wellness of the population as the basis of its capacity to rule, however. As Wendy Brown (2003) points out, it now relies on a combination of overt and indirect strategies to produce citizens who are self-sufficient as well as self-governing.<sup>10</sup> Harsh penal policies (i.e. ‘Three Strikes You’re Out’) and welfare-to-work schemes exemplify the former; the Bush Administration’s ‘Compassion Agenda’ and Get Fit Campaign illustrate the latter. Today, however, the state relies primarily on the private sector rather than public bureaucracies to produce ‘good’ citizens. Acting more as a supporter and less as an ‘overseer’, the United States has offloaded much of the responsibility of governing onto public–private partnerships and depends more than ever before on cultural technologies such as television to translate what Rose calls the ‘goals of authorities’ into guidelines for enterprising living (Rose 1996, 58). Reality television’s experiments, tests, challenges, and instructions have flourished within this context.

Reality television does more than evaluate and advise the conduct of citizens: increasingly, it also plays a visible role in stitching public service into privatized networks of self-care. This is especially evident in the United States, where commercial television networks have partnered with private and non-governmental entities to provide charity and social services (*Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, *Three Wishes*) to cultivate volunteerism (*American Idol Gives Back*) and to coordinate an array of privatized self-help resources. Television is thus quite literally helping to produce a privatized system of welfare, one that is significantly more aligned with a market logic than was the case in the ‘state of welfare’ and the earlier stage of welfare that preceded it. Under neoliberalism, civic well-being is increasingly both commodified (produced for profit) and tied to entrepreneurial imperatives, while ‘lifestyle maximization’ (Rose 1996, 57–9) is joined to (and often supersedes) the nation and electoral politics as the domain through citizenship is tested and achieved. Within this context, expertise becomes authorized by corporate and business sectors, with coaches, motivational speakers, corporate sponsors, and celebrities taking over the dispersed governmental work once performed by social workers, educators and other professionals.

The reinvention of government also provides the necessary context for understanding television’s own changing ethic of public service. Whether operated as a public service or regulated in the public interest, this ethic has become increasingly controversial due to its affiliation with the old ‘state of welfare’. The state’s role in overseeing the provision and diversity of broadcasting in the name of public enlightenment and citizenship training was authorized by the discourse of ‘social rights and responsibilities’ discussed by Rose. The ideal citizen cultivated by broadcasting was expected to serve the goals of the nation (and earn her/his enfranchisement). In the United States, this approach to public service reached its zenith in the 1960s, when the Public Broadcasting System was created to operate as a technology of public education and citizenship (Ouellette 2002). Since the 1980s, deregulation and market competition have largely freed commercial broadcasters from the unprofitable, and (particularly in the United States) unrealized expectations of serving the ‘public good’ so defined; these same forces have forced public broadcasters in Europe to accommodate a wider range of consumer choices and lifestyles.

While these developments have not eliminated education as the basis of citizenship formation through television, they have reconfigured and repurposed institutions and technologies of education: Today, televised instruction is more apt to be articulated to lifestyle governance and everyday regimes of self-care facilitated through interactive reality entertainment. The skills, problem-solving techniques, step-by-step demonstrations, intimate feedback, motivational support mechanisms and suggestions for everyday application offered by the makeover genre, as one dimension of this shift, are more useful to current strategies of

governing than is the residual public service ethic. The new curriculum is also more profitable than earlier incarnations of citizenship education by television – not only because it renders learning more inclusive and pleasurable, but because in a climate that demands enterprising skills and dispositions of all citizens, the civic training it provides has become a desirable commodity.

Television has also linked public education to new models of social service provision. While the earlier public service ethic emphasized the transmission of ‘enlightenment’ and civility through well-conceived programmes, today’s reality entertainment is increasingly inserted into privatized social networks and resources of citizenship that transcend television viewing. Makeover television’s civic engagement lies in its ability to bind work on the self to the reinvention of government; its role as a facilitator for customizing programmes of self-care makes it an attractive partner for a policy agenda that seeks to deputize private administrators of welfare.

### The makeover as life intervention

The political rationalities we are describing can be glimpsed across makeover sub-genres, from style transformation programmes to home and gardening television. For example, Katherine Sender (2006) shows how the lifestyle and fashion training provided by *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* also encourages citizens to take personal responsibility for the unstable job market. However, they are particularly acute in the *life intervention*, the term we use to describe helping ventures that mobilize resources to help ordinary people overcome problems in relation to children (*Supernanny*), pets (*Dog Whisperer*), sexuality (*Sex Inspectors*), unemployment (*Starting Over*), addiction (*Intervention*), hygiene (*How Clean is Your House?*), health and fitness (*Honey We’re Killing the Kids*), safety (*It Takes a Thief*), and finance (*Suze Orman*). Life interventions address risks, problems and challenges, guiding and shaping citizens within television’s cultural economy. As commercial ventures, the governing capacities of reality television’s life interventions are realized (particularly within the United States) within a market logic that values entrepreneurialism, mass customization and profit accumulation. Similar to the reinvented state, the format relies on a range of partners (corporate sponsors, advertisers, clinics, professional associations and non-profit agencies) to enact its helping missions. As social service, life interventions operate within networks of support, offering serialized entertainment and popular instruction, often tailored to specific demographics and lifestyle clusters. While television as a social institution carries out its work independently of official government, the state plays a supportive role in this new strand of programming by activating the spirit of public–private cooperation in which the life intervention has thrived.

Because television in the United States is now a largely unregulated enterprise, life interventions pursue civic and public service goals within the logic of cultural commerce and its allegiance to ratings, advertising, product placement revenue, format licensing and merchandising tie-ins. In this sense, they are perfectly compatible with the logic of entrepreneurial government. The programmes deploy a continuum of governing strategies, from detainment in a private facility to self-help strategies that liken running one’s life to managing a business. Their aims run the gamut from instilling good behaviour in children to improving health and longevity to avoiding toxic relationships to achieving self-esteem as a path to professional growth. What unites the life intervention as a politically significant strand of makeover television is a concern to facilitate care of the self as a strategy of freedom and empowerment. No matter how controlling some of the techniques used can appear (i.e. hidden-camera surveillance, public humiliation, detainment), the impetus is not really to display cruelty and punishment as a means of deterring misbehaviour, as Foucault hypothesized of the pre-modern spectacle of torture in public. The political rationality of the life intervention is to

enact the reasoning that people who are floundering can and must be taught to develop and maximize their capacities for normalcy, happiness, material stability, and success rather than rely on a public 'safety net'.

Life interventions circulate techniques for a government of the self that complement the value now being placed on choice, personal accountability and self-empowerment as ethics of neoliberal citizenship. In an era when the state has offloaded much of the responsibility of facilitating the welfare of the citizenry to individuals and the private sector, reality television's efforts to help people improve their 'quality of life' plays another governing role as well. As Brown points out, the 'withdrawal of the state from certain domains, and privatization of certain state functions does not amount to a dismantling of government, but is a technique of governing – rational economic action suffused throughout society replaces express state rule or provision' (2003, n.p.). As neoliberal regimes shift the 'regulatory competence of the state onto responsible, rational individuals' with the aim of encouraging them to 'give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form', the scope and strategies of citizenship training change. The capacity to make enterprising lifestyle choices in matters of health, security, consumption, family and household takes on more urgency in a political climate where individuals are expected to maximize their interests as a condition of self-rule.

Central to the enterprising 'government of the self' enacted by television's life interventions is the convergence between television and the Web. Convergence allows television viewers to acquire, customize, and personalize the helping resources offered through the cultural economy of television, and to participate in the lifestyle clusters served by makeover programming and its websites. Interactivity provides a framework for enacting entrepreneurial citizenship in both senses. While the reinvention of the self is performed with the help of motivators and guides who administer the rules and techniques, it is performed on the self in the name of personal empowerment and can provide an entry point into group membership based on similar lifestyle challenges. While television provides the everyday framework for supervising the development of personal regimens, viewers are encouraged to take matters into their own hands, using the interactive resources available to them (or not).

### **Motivating healthy citizens**

Life interventions geared to changing people's diet, exercise regimens and nutrition habits have proliferated on cable channels such as Discovery, The Learning Channel and Fit TV, a network entirely devoted to teaching consumers how to develop a lifestyle based on home exercise, rational grocery shopping and healthy eating. The major commercial broadcast networks have also developed how-to health and fitness makeover programmes such as *The Biggest Loser* and *Shaq's Big Challenge* that insert television into a circuit of resources for caring for oneself and improving one's lifestyle. This development has occurred at a time when the US government is concerned about obesity and other costly health 'problems' allegedly caused by improper lifestyles, but is unwilling to intervene in ways that might compromise a deregulatory ethos and reliance on privatized networks of welfare administration. Unlike the Progressive Era, when social workers promoted national legislative reforms as well as education and individual compliance, today's helping culture is focused mainly on maximizing personal responsibility (doing it yourself) as a path to self-regulation and empowerment. When public interest organizations do push for policy action, they are cast as proponents of a nanny state that seeks to regulate freedom of choice. During the 2004 House Government Reform Committee's hearings on 'The Supersizing of America', for example, Marshall Manson of the conservative Center for Individual Freedom criticized the Center for Science in the Public Interest for pushing 'extreme' measures such as regulating the food sold in schools and 'mandated labeling of restaurants with

detailed nutrition information'. Linking such regulatory possibilities to the curtailing of market incentive and 'free choice', Manson told the committee:

Our democracy is founded on the idea that individuals have basic freedoms. Among these, certainly, is the right to choose what we put on our plates and in our goblets . . . anti-food extremists like CSPI would gladly take away that freedom and mandate our diet in order to save us from ourselves. It is time for these zealous advocates to understand that it is not the federal government's job to save us from ourselves by making our choices for us. (2004)

For Mason, the state's role is not to oversee but to support 'responsible decision-making' in consumers who are not only free to manage their own health but are also expected to do so. George W. Bush's Steps to a Healthier US, a programme designed to encourage 'simple improvements in physical activity, diet and behavior' as a means of controlling chronic disease, is an example of how the new approach reconstitutes welfare. Steps to a Healthier US is sponsored by the Presidential Program on Physical Fitness and Sport, which dates to the Kennedy administration but is now administered through more than 600 'partnerships' with corporations, non-profits and local governments. Similarly, the President's Fitness Challenge was created in 2002 as a network of corporate, non-profit and regional/municipal partners, including major sports and athletic businesses, food companies (Burger King, Coca-Cola, General Mills) and television networks (including ESPN and the Cartoon Network). These partnerships between government, corporations, and non-profits are how the state currently supports health as a dimension of welfare – not as a publicly administered 'entitlement' but as a personal responsibility to be achieved through individualized networks of support.<sup>11</sup>

Like other initiatives promoted by the Bush administration, including the Citizen Corp., the Faith-based and Community Initiative, and the short-lived campaign for privatizing Social Security, the Fitness Challenge is about reinventing government and enabling citizens to manage their personal welfare. The Steps to a Healthier US similarly seeks to makeover the mission of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW): instead of breeding passive and dependent citizens, HEW's new role is to mobilize private providers and supporters with a stake in personal fitness. Inserting HEW within the culture of entrepreneurialism, the Challenge's injunction to 'Get Fit' cast the network of corporate partners as coaches motivating their subjects to succeed by taking advantage of their resources. As a mantra for empowering citizens to take control of their own welfare, the expression 'You're It; Get Fit' cast the private sector and individual citizens as the primary line of defence against unhealthy behaviours that might lead to physical illness and a life of dependency. This programme and similar efforts to embed social welfare in privatized networks of personal responsibility have changed the economic and political value of the makeover as a technology of citizenship.

At a jogging event inaugurating his Fitness Challenge, Bush claimed that it is part of a larger initiative ' . . . to help Americans live longer, better, and healthier lives. And the good news is this: when it comes to your health, even little steps can make a big difference.' These steps may have referred to the joggers surrounding him at the event, but they also referred to the everyday measures through which each citizen is now expected to work on herself, and to the various non-state institutions – including corporate sponsors – who administer resources to them. The website for the President's Challenge differentiates between non-profit 'advocates' and corporate providers, including Dasani Water, Starbucks and a long list of brands (Pepsi, Coke, Burger King, Kellogg, and General Mills) whose association with the network rearticulates their social value away from unhealthy consumption and towards a new-and-improved regime of personal makeover. The website also distinguishes between different lifestyles – kids, teens, adults and seniors – and assigns to each a different set of fitness resources and techniques. Here, as with television's life interventions, the achievement of health through the marketing and



education of lifestyle clusters is a process open to consumer customization through television and Web resources.

Bush's recruitment of television networks to the Challenge is also significant in light of television's perceived association with passivity and a sedentary lifestyle. In recent years, a number of high-profile programmes have challenged that association by enlisting television as a resource in helping people get healthy and lose weight. In 2005, NBC broadcast *The Biggest Loser*, providing the services of nutritionists and personal trainers to people who agreed to slim down on television, and offering a cash prize to the person who shed the most body fat. Cameras documented the contestants as they carried out intense physical exercise regimes, learned about nutrition and developed balanced and 'disciplined' eating habits. Evoking Foucault's discussion of the care of the self in ancient Greece (1986) where the feast was one of many rituals for testing one's capacity for self-control, the cast was regularly tempted with vast displays of decadent foods to test their determination and willpower. At the end of each episode, the 'outcome' of these physical and mental activities was measured live on television in a dramatic weighing ceremony.

Television viewers were invited to stage their own lifestyle intervention by slimming down and 'getting healthy'. NBC constructed an interactive website complete with nutritional guides, dieting tips, sample recipes and menus, customizable exercise regimes and weight loss tools, including a body mass index calculator. Tie-in merchandise – including workbooks and the *Biggest Loser* exercise DVD – was available for purchase, and participants were urged to join the *Biggest Loser* email club and sign up for informative podcasts. Finally, for people on the go there was also the much-promoted *Biggest Loser* wireless service. For only \$2.99 per month, anyone with a mobile phone could sign up to receive a daily health tip, an exercise pointer or inspirational message. In extending these body and health management resources and techniques to individuals, the network fused popular entertainment (weight loss as competitive game) and self-shaping activities with current dynamics of governing and the demand for citizens to make use of privatized networks of support and accept accountability for the consequences of their lifestyle choices.

On *Honey We're Killing the Kids*, which originated on the BBC and was shown in the United States on The Learning Channel, a nutritionist shows how 'everyday choices can have long-term impacts on children, and offers both the motivation and the know-how to help turn families lives around'. Armed with scientific research and a team of advisors, she aims to change the 'bad habits' of a family in a period of just three weeks. The parents, who are often scolded for smoking and overeating, are shocked into a lifestyle regime change by the accusation they're 'killing their kids' by letting them eat too much junk food and watch video games and watch television instead of exercising. Digitally aged images of the children at 40 show the ill effects of their current habits, and the parents are told their children are 'at risk' of developing obesity and other health problems. In teaching care of the self, the programme objectifies the child-subject, turning him/her into an undesirable stranger. Not surprisingly, the parents usually agree to cooperate with the new 'rules, guidelines and techniques' for improving their children's health and lifestyle.

The programme follows the generic template of many television life interventions. The diagnostician arrives at the home, observes the family, diagnoses their nutritional problems and introduces a new lifestyle regimen. Cameras capture some initial resistance as well as the eventual mastering of the healthy lifestyle that the subjects come to desire as their own. At the end of each episode, the objective 'outcome' of the regimen is demonstrated by new digitalized photographs that show the children ageing in a healthier manner and the parents promise to enforce the new diet and exercise programme once the diagnostician has moved on to assist other needy families.<sup>12</sup>

Repetition and redundancy do not diminish the importance of *Honey We're Killing the Kids* as a form of citizenship training. In fact, repetition is crucial to the creation of a personal 'programme' as a technical everyday regimen of self-care. This programme teaches personal responsibility, risk-avoidance and choice by diagnosing and rehabilitating cases of 'ignorance' and self-neglect, and allowing the television viewer at home to identify as normal in comparison. At the same time, the programme coordinates resources for the health-conscious: television viewers are invited to seek out and master the skills required to create a healthy lifestyle on the programme's website, which includes interactive resources, games and merchandising tie-ins.

*Honey We're Killing the Kids* operates as a technology of citizenship, helping to solve the crisis of obesity by issuing a 'critical wake-up call for parents'. Reformers like Manson have no problem with television programmes adopting this role, because their authority to administer new forms of welfare is sanctioned not by the state but by the commercial logic of supply and demand and its ability to capitalize on welfare as outreach and instruction. The programme exemplifies television's contemporary utility for ensuring the health outcomes of the population, illustrating Rose's argument that while healthy bodies are still a 'public value and political objective' of the state, we no longer need public bureaucracies to 'enjoin healthy habits of eating ... with compulsory inspection, subsidized incentives to eat or drink correctly and so forth'. In the new context of public-private cooperation and personally regulated consumption, 'individuals will want to be healthy, experts will instruct them on how to be so, and entrepreneurs will exploit and enhance this market for health. Health will be ensured through a combination of the market, expertise, and a regulated autonomy' (Rose 1998, 162).

Like many television interventions, *Honey We're Killing the Kids* puts the impetus to succeed in health and in life on individuals, offering a regimen for personal change but overlooking inequalities related to the price of healthy food, lack of low-cost health care, and a sharpening class system that makes fast food an attractive option for many people. *Shaq's Big Challenge* also emphasizes the transformation of extreme behaviours to teach healthy living to a wide range of citizens. More explicitly than *Honey We're Killing the Kids*, this programme also stitches welfare into private-public partnerships of support that include not only television but also local school districts and professional sports. *Shaq's* intervention is, in this sense, more specifically tied to the reinvention of government in the United States. However, it allows a broader range of governmental tactics and outcomes (such as private citizens and celebrities calling on public schools to remove fast food) than does Manson's free-market approach to personal responsibility, thus demonstrating the contingency – and the stakes of political engagement – within neoliberalism as a governing rationality.

The first episode reintroduces the audience to one of the National Basketball Association's most recognizable and beloved players. Shaquille O'Neal has agreed to help seven children overcome obesity, a 'big problem' he ascribes to a combination of poor diet, inactivity, and lack of motivation. Some of the children are also depicted as immersed in unregulated television-watching, video game playing and Web surfing, and these activities are also targeted as 'causes' of an unhealthy lifestyle. Shaq's role as motivator and welfare facilitator is to break the children's presumed dependency on unhealthy food as well as entertainment regimens, moving the kids out of their sedentary lifestyles and onto the playing field valorized by professional sports. Over the course of the first season, he emerges as a paragon of tough love who combines gentleness and discipline to help children whose futures appear bleak if they fail to learn how to take steps towards fitness and self-care.

Shaq has relied on his own entrepreneurial instincts to locate and assemble a 'dream team' of professional coaches, motivators, doctors and lifestyle specialists to assist with the boot camp. Like other television diagnosticians (Dr. Phil, finance advisor, Suze Orman, *Queer Eye's* Carson Kressley, or Cesar Milan, the 'dog whisperer'), these experts facilitate and monitor the children's

gradual progress out of obesity; they also operate as agents of surveillance on Shaq's behalf, recording slip-ups such as a 'lack of discipline' during workouts. While much of the action hinges on the ultra-disciplinary boot camp, the team also educates the parents to become 'coaches' at home and works with local school officials and neighbours to create an extended 'support network' for the children.

While *Shaq's Big Challenge* is not formally affiliated with the White House, the programme repeatedly invokes the President's Physical Fitness Test as the standard against which to measure the children's progress. The programme combines the conventions of the contest and the civic laboratory to verify who is an active, motivated and entrepreneurial citizen and to affirm the current rationality of 'challenging' citizens to help themselves through television. The interactivity afforded by the Web is crucial to this affirmation, not only in the sense of extending the logic of the boot camp to the customizable menu made available through the Web but also in guiding television viewers towards presumably 'healthy' forms of media engagement.<sup>13</sup> Not unlike Shaq's regimen for moving sedentary kids into physical activity, the life intervention is about moving passive television viewers into the role of resourceful, enterprising and active citizens.

ABC's role in enacting an alternative to the 'state of welfare' was stressed throughout the series. In the first episode, Shaq discusses the problem of childhood obesity with Jeb Bush, the governor of Florida. In this climate of outsourcing welfare and emphasizing personal responsibility, O'Neal must justify to the governor the rationality of a venture (the Fitness Challenge) already sponsored by the President, the governor's brother. This provides the basis for differentiating television's helping ventures from stigmatized state regulations and welfare programmes. To combat the extent to which many public schools – including those in Florida – have cut mandatory physical education and allowed fast food companies to set up shop in cafeterias, the basketball star and his team also consult with school officials to create a 'suggested' wellness regimen, exemplifying the spirit of public–private partnership. This spirit is also extended through media convergence, in that ABC positions *Shaq's Biggest Challenge* as both entertainment and community outreach on its website, while the site created by the programme's producers links the programme to the website for Bush's fitness initiatives. Both sites operate as self-described 'download centers' that facilitate the regulation of obesity and other health risks through the management of individual choice, providing, for example, scorecards of 'daily drills', membership information, personal pledge cards, and tips for combating everyday 'snack attacks' (a play on sportscasters' idiom for stopping a 'Shaq attack' on the basketball court). In this way, they make membership in Shaq's programme tantamount to a form of healthy citizenship in a nation where a citizenship test is a President's Challenge.

## Conclusion

Reality television, as we have shown, has instrumentalized the personal makeover as a technology of citizenship in new ways. No longer outside the logic of public service, these popular non-scripted entertainment formats have become the domains through which television contributes to the reinvention of government, the reconstitution of welfare and the production of a self-sufficient citizenry. Critical questions remain: how do we evaluate television's efforts to insert itself into diffuse, privatized networks of self-fashioning and care? How do the generic conventions of makeover television intersect with new ways of delivering and administering social welfare? How might citizens hold television accountable as a form of social service? What does it mean when celebrities, television executives and casting agents take over the role of public officials or social workers? And, how might critical media and cultural studies intervene in this process?

Because our analysis considers television as operating within changing programmes and networks of government, rather than merely as an 'ideological apparatus', we want to emphasize that television does not represent or distort welfare as much as it produces new formations of welfare by providing citizens with the resources that currently valorize their freedom and empowerment. In this context, we might reasonably ask from television the practical questions asked of other 'customer-oriented' social service providers: how are the subjects treated? Is the application process reasonable and fair? What are the outcomes of the interventions? This approach can only get us so far, however. We are still left with the contradictions and potentially devastating consequences of relegating public service, including social welfare, to private networks of support. Who provides for people who don't have access to privatized welfare networks, including the technologies of instruction, customization and self-fashioning facilitated through television and convergence culture? If television aims to make citizens/consumers more productive of their own welfare, how has this process also contributed to the growing class of people who, lacking access to resources, eventually are deemed unproductive or 'disabled' and thus a new problem for a healthy economy?

Michael Moore's documentary *Sicko* (2007) foregrounds this latter contradiction, documenting widespread instances when privatized health care in the United States has been unwilling to provide for citizens who lack the financial resources to participate in that system. The film's title refers ironically to the regime of truth that has 'rationalized' the current governmental arrangement between the state, the insurance industry, and private health care providers, and to an increasing population whose health is put at risk by this arrangement. Moore chronicles the disparity between the US health care system (whose emphasis on financial profit has left citizens without medical care) and socialist democratic strategies of health care provision in Canada and Western Europe. In some respects, the premise of the television makeover – particularly the life interventions we are examining – are simply other instances of the tendency in the United States that Moore's film represents. Yet reality television's impetus to help produce 'healthy' citizens also complicates Moore's approach to activism in several ways.

One is that the countries valorized by *Sicko* have also increasingly reinvented television (as public service) around makeovers and interventions similar to those shown in the United States. Some of these formats originated in European countries with national health care systems, indicating an impetus to create healthy citizens in new ways across the different cultural economies of national broadcasting systems. While the transnationalism of makeover television may indicate the global turn towards neoliberal strategies of governing at a distance, socialized medicine and public health care are, as Moore points out, still operational outside the United States – at least for now. Public services and a governing rationality that values self-enterprise and personal responsibility co-exist outside the United States, complicating any causal understanding of market privatization as a causal factor in the transformation of welfare and demonstrating the geographic complexities of the dynamics charted here.

While Moore's film draws attention to a growing portion of US citizens who lack health care, his political economic critique neglects the productive valence of the new system of welfare implemented in the United States since the 1990s. Television's life interventions promote health and wellness through privatized and entrepreneurialized networks of support, calling on each individual to achieve citizenship as an obligation to him/herself. This system has lethal effects, as Moore documents, but it also allows politicians to claim that 'something is being done' – and conversely to blame unmotivated citizens when the system fails. It comes as no surprise that the US Congress, while downscaling and outsourcing virtually every other welfare programme, has authorized the public subsidy of digital converters so that television remains technically available to all (Labaton 2005). Television has become one of the cultural instruments through

which healthy citizenship – for better or worse – is accomplished. Likewise, the object of political intervention for those seeking an *alternative* to neoliberalism can include both the political economic failures of the current rationality of government (as Moore documents) and the cultural technologies such as television through which ‘resources’ of self-empowerment and care are made available to citizens. We have taken the latter approach by documenting how reality television’s interventionist forms of civic and personal instruction simultaneously speak to the broader reinvention of government and complicate any conclusion that there is *no* welfare in the United States. By taking these ventures seriously, and attending to their nuances and specificities, we might better understand the remodelling of welfare and the remaking of citizens.

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### Notes

1. For the history of social work in the United States see Ehrenreich (1985); for a study of professional expertise as a related technology of governing see Ehrenreich and English (1978).
2. For the role of magazines in demonstrating self and lifestyle pedagogies within the cultural economy of consumerism see Ohmann (1998) and Lears (1983). For early US television’s engagement in self and lifestyle instruction see Leibman (1995), Watts (2006) and Cassidy (2005).
3. See Osbourne and Gaebler’s influential *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector* (1992) for the changing rationalities of governing that we are describing here. President Bill Clinton endorsed the book, claiming it ‘should be read by every elected official in America. Those of us who want to revitalize government . . . have to reinvent it. This book gives us a blueprint.’
4. We elaborate in more detail how this term is useful for thinking about contemporary television in *Better Living through Reality TV* (2008).
5. For a useful summary of the move to make social services (as a dimension of the public sector) accountable to an entrepreneurial ethic see Rom (1999). Several critics have also observed reality television’s parallel encouragement of a self-governing culture of entrepreneurialism. Gareth Palmer (2004), for example, has noted similarities between makeover television and the ‘personal development movement’, showing how both resonate with notions of entrepreneurial citizenship.
6. Our use of the term ‘civic laboratories’ is indebted to Tony Bennett’s (2005) use of the term to describe the civic training provided by museum culture.
7. Rose (1998, 1999) has traced the dispersion of technologies of governance in a number of important studies. For an influential discussion of the role of culture in governing see also Bennett (1998).
8. Foucault discusses the relation between ‘welfare states’, governmentality, and the biopolitical in ‘Security, Territory, Population’ (1997b, 67–71). He discusses the relation between liberalism and neoliberalism in ‘The Birth of Biopolitics’ (1997a, 72–9). Foucault analyses early programmes for ‘social health’ in ‘The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century’ (2000b, 90–105). He discusses the state’s role in administering ‘social medicine’ in ‘The Birth of Social Medicine’ (2000a, 134–56). The ‘right to health’ in contemporary France is discussed in ‘The Risks of Security’ (2000c, 365–81).
9. The ‘genealogy’ of welfare dependency as a regime of truth, and the gendering of the dependent welfare citizen, is charted in Fraser and Gordon (1997). The racialization of the female welfare subject is charted in Gilens (2000).
10. For an excellent analysis of the changing ‘state of welfare’ see also Clarke (2004).
11. We draw from material found on the ‘Healthy US’ website, the remarks of George Bush at his Fitness Challenge, the President’s Challenge website ‘You’re It, Get Fit’, and the website for the President’s Council on Physical Fitness, with links to the Department of Health and Human Services.
12. Our discussion of *Honey We’re Killing the Kids* is elaborated in *Better Living through Reality TV*.
13. For more on interactivity as viewer labour see Andrejevic (2004).

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