

Docile and Disciplined: What it Takes to Become *America's Next*

Top Model

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Reality TV show *America's Next Top Model* was created by former super-model Tyra Banks and first aired on UPN in 2003. The show moved to the CW network at the start of the seventh cycle and remains one of its highest rated shows. Twenty cycles later, the show has become a global franchise, playing in over 170 countries.¹ Each cycle shadows a dozen or so aspiring models as they tackle various high-stakes modelling challenges and photo-shoots. Every week contestants face a dramatic judging ceremony, presided over by Tyra Banks, upon which one or more contestants are eliminated. This article will explore *America's Next Top Model* through the lens of Foucault. Discourses of discipline and transformative labour will provide a framework for analysis, with attention to how authoritative power dynamics impact on contestants' personal narratives on the show. The notion of self as commodity will be explored in terms of labour and the series of challenges that contestants must undergo to "prove" they have what it takes to win and become a professional model. A thorough case study of episode 7 from cycle 12 will examine the specific ways in which mentors and judges attempt to "discipline" contestant Thalia, which she persistently resists. The limitations of Foucault's thesis will be examined in terms of feminist critique as well as post-feminist readings of Reality TV (RTV). Textual analysis of *America's Next Top Model* (henceforth *ANTM*) will assess how this trans-

formative labour reinvigorates Foucault's notions of discipline and self, by working to incite "cultivation of the self"² while simultaneously and paradoxically imposing an incessant "normalising gaze."³

***America's Next Top Model* Format: Ritualised Structure**

The *ANTM* website proudly asserts that it "exposes the transformation of everyday young women into potentially fierce supermodels."⁴ Every cycle a dozen or so girls aged 18–27 are selected to participate under 24/7 surveillance with little to no privacy. They live in a glamorous house which comes with a pool, a catwalk, and is adorned with photos from past contestants on the walls. Every cycle and episode has a standardised layout, a format that has been appropriated by countries across the world. Each cycle debuts with castings, quickly assessing the modelling potential of applicants before naming housemates in a dramatic elimination ceremony, complete with tears, hugs and shrieks of joy. There are essential fixtures to every cycle such as makeovers, video commercials, go sees,⁵ runway challenges and posing challenges. There are recurring types of photo-shoots; nude/semi-nude photo-shoots, beauty shoots, a photo-shoot/challenge where they have to "stand out," a high fashion shoot and a photo-shoot with Tyra as photographer. Once whittled down to the final two or three, the girls shoot a magazine cover. The winner's version will go to print. Finalists participate in an impressive high fashion runway show in front of a large audience. Finally, the panel assesses their performances, wherein the judges animatedly compare and contrast the contestants before announcing a winner. The last one standing wins a coveted fashion spread, makeup campaign, and representation by a reputable modelling agency. Prizes and beauty contracts vary from cycle to cycle. Most recently, the winner became the face of "Dream Come True," the official perfume of *ANTM*.

Each episode of *ANTM* employs transformative rituals such as modelling lessons, critiques, challenges, photo-shoots and eliminations. Generally speaking, there are three sections to each episode. Firstly, there is a coaching session with an industry mentor, where the potential models are imparted with an important modelling skill. After critique is delivered to the girls, they complete a challenge relevant to the skill and a winner earns a prize. Secondly, the girls participate in a photo-shoot, styled and directed according to the brief for the week. Finally, the photographic results are judged and critiqued by a panel of "experts" in the fashion industry, led by Tyra. The rest of the judging panel rotates from cycle to cycle. Previous judges have included former models Twiggy, Janice Dickinson and Paulina Porizkova, photographer Nigel Barker, runway coach J Alexander (affec-

tionately known as “Miss J,”) and Vogue editor Andre Leon Talley. Jay Manual has featured for many seasons as the creative director on photo-shoots. More recently, cutthroat Kelly Cutrone, a “PR Maven,” according to Tyra, has been appointed to guide the girls with branding. For some cycles, there is a guest judge that is relevant to that week’s challenge or photo-shoot. Once the panel assesses contestants’ photos, the girls are ranked from “strongest” to “weakest.” Each girl remaining is given their photo to add to their archive of documentation. The last two girls are called up to stand before the judges. Both are critiqued before one is eliminated. A brief photomontage is shown of the eliminated model, from casting images to their final photo. Before credits roll, the eliminated model “disappears,” by fading away in a group shot, leaving only the models that will continue to battle it out.

Case Study: America’s Next Top Model Cycle 12, Episode 7, “Acting Like a Model”

This case study will identify the ways in which this episode of *ANTM*⁶ exemplifies discourses of normalisation and docile bodies intertwined with the Foucaultian notion of “cultivation of self.” Through disciplining the body, the “self” emerges, hence the body becomes a site for exploring identity. In episode 7, the eight contestants were given lessons on acting skills, and then assessed on their abilities by acting out a “diva” scene with Clay Aiken. A CoverGirl commercial was their next task. In two groups of four, each girl had to “outshine” the rest while staying true to the brand image. Simultaneously, a self-narrative focuses on contestant Thalia, a burns survivor. Thalia’s narrative revolves around her inability to commit to the labour of the competition. This case study will look closer at discourses of homogenisation and selfhood within this episode.

The lesson for this episode merges ideologies of self-as-commodity with bodily discipline. Former model and judge Paulina Porizkova mentors the girls on acting at Harlem Stage Theatre. Paulina tells them that a “stage actor needs to engage his [sic] audience,” and as with modelling, “every day is an audition.” The girls will need to adapt the principles of stage acting to modelling. Two at a time they are given a sentence and need to express it through a given emotion. Allison and Thalia, who Paulina terms “the mild mannered girls,” read the line “you need to get out of here.” Thalia is asked to express it with arrogance. Paulina is unimpressed with Thalia’s effort and pushes her to be ecstatic. She instructs Thalia to “jump up and down,” to which Thalia jumps once. Paulina imitates her and pushes Thalia again to jump up and down, to scream to loosen up, saying: “No I’m seri-

ous, come on, you're not listening to me." After Thalia's unwillingness to participate, Paulina gripes: "It's like trying to jog in mud with you." This spurs a revelation for Thalia, told to a confessional camera: "I know that she wants more out of me and I know that I can give it to her and yet I'm not." Thalia's unwillingness to be docile is uncovered through this disciplinary exercise and is construed as a personal issue. Paulina concludes the task by reiterating this, saying that Thalia had the biggest issue with the lesson, and needs to "stop being just a pretty girl."

After the acting lesson the challenge continues to build upon the intertwining narratives of self and of discipline. The girls act out a scene with Clay Aiken, U.S. recording artist from *American Idol* and theatre actor. The over-the-top scene establishes Clay as a top designer and contestants as "diva" models on a go-see. Afterwards, Clay and Paulina give feedback to camera about the girls' performances. As Thalia acts out her scene, a close-up of Paulina cringing is shown. To camera, Clay says: "It's laziness and it's, um, insecurity." Thalia's perceived unwillingness to participate hinders her progress and prevents her from achieving a convincing performance.

The brief for the commercial demonstrates how contestants need to negotiate normalisation while maintaining individuality. The girls film a CoverGirl commercial for a foundation product, with the assistance of a script and a teleprompter. They aren't alone though; three fellow models become extras that deliver a line each. Each girl is given the same lines and the same actions to perform in the commercial, but they must inject their own "personality" into the role. According to Banks, as a branded commodity: "Your product just happens to be your physical self and a little bit of your personality..."⁷ The challenge is for them to stand out and outshine each other, but also work cohesively as a group. Their task of what to say and do is normalised, but how they act it is up to their own interpretation, unique to the individual. This commercial epitomises a paradoxical task constantly asked of participants – that they be unique, but only enough so that they fit within the brief.

The feedback from Creative Director Jay Manual makes it clear that Thalia is not expressing herself as a viable self-commodity. Jay asserts that Thalia lacks the "spirit" that the other girls bring to the set, withholding the enthusiasm associated with the CoverGirl brand. Afterwards, Jay cautions Thalia that: "This is nothing compared to really being out there and working, and it's hard until the day you decide that you no longer want to be a part of it." Thalia needs to prove that she can make it in the high-stress, high-stakes modelling industry. Afterwards, Thalia explains to the confession camera: "I know that I can do better, the confidence is there, it's just hid-

den.” Thalia lacks the self-discipline to do well in the competition. With Thalia failing to embody the brand of CoverGirl, her ability to be a self-governing commodity is diminished.

When the critiques of the performances were given at the panel event, all contestants were considered to have performed weakly at making themselves a branded commodity. The commercials play on a screen before all to be objectified and examined by the normalising gaze of the judges. Many girls were told they were overshadowed by their extras. They did not stand out enough, instead becoming a part of a homogenous mass. Thus their imperative to be a self-commodity was not achieved. At this point stakes are high as the winner receives a contract with CoverGirl and will become the face of their brand. Tyra talks about “the client,” as having “youth” and “brightness.” Thalia is told that she was outshone and that she “forgot the client.” Thalia was perceived to have looked older, mean and angry—the complete opposite of CoverGirl’s perceived image. Tyra claims that Thalia has the physical look of a CoverGirl model, but personality let her down. Also on the panel, Paulina and Clay reiterate that Thalia has to “open up” to succeed. This reinforces the ideology that to be authentic on *ANTM*, a girl must “open up” or they will be eliminated.⁸ The authority of the judges is evident as they deliver harsh criticism while Thalia must stand obediently. The CoverGirl commercial is the ultimate test of contestants’ ability to be a viable branded commodity, which Thalia failed through lack of self-discipline, and didn’t meet the clients’ expectation.

On *ANTM* the ideal contestant is one who masters their own body and can self-regulate, as Foucault discusses in relation to soldiers. During deliberation the judges declare Thalia has potential—“the camera loves her,” but her lack of drive prevents her success. Clay notes Thalia’s self-esteem issues: “she will not come out of that shell.” She has the right elements of a model, but is not docile enough to be able to be manipulated into a one. If we return to Tyra’s notion of accomplishing dreams through hard work, talent and passion, we see that Thalia violates these principles. She does not put in the effort to earn credibility. Thalia fails to “act” like a model; seen as lacking the capacity to work hard and have an enthusiasm for the world of modelling. With that, Thalia is the lowest ranked and thus, eliminated.

After elimination, Tyra tells Thalia “the camera loves you, but you don’t love the camera.” Thalia’s leaving speech acknowledges: “My biggest challenge is myself, is getting over myself—my being timid. I held back in this competition and I think that’s what killed me in the end but at the same time it’s who I am.” As a burns survivor and having what could be termed a “diverse” body, Thalia expresses that: “I was shocked to even come this far, but being here, I feel now that I have inspired at least one person or hope-

fully more.” This discourse of the experience as educational and of personal value suggests RTV works as a “surveillance-based commodification ... as ‘priceless’ authentic experience.”⁹ The assertion of authenticity is false and true—false in being a manipulated product through production processes, but also true, as within the context of these shows, that is the “reality” of their world and the experience they provide.¹⁰

Discipline and Transformative Labour: Self and Body

ANTM operates as a discipline in both senses of the word: as a form of regulating behaviour and as a learning discipline. The show features two types of labour that intertwine; the labour of self-as-commodity and labour as a disciplined model. On *ANTM* “discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise.”¹¹ Contestants are positioned as malleable commodities, constantly monitored by the cameras as they compete against each other and undergo a gruelling series of ritualistic tests to determine if they have what it takes to win. These rituals embody Foucauldian discourses of discipline, power, normalisation and docile bodies.

ANTM operates on the principle of transformative labour whereby contestants are constantly assessed and critiqued by experts in the field. This type of programming has a disciplinary regime, “a preoccupation with testing, judging, advising and rewarding the conduct of “real” people”.¹² On *ANTM*, success is measured by skill; a true model is one that has, as Tyra herself declares, “passed all the tests.”¹³ The models are encouraged to attain a wide skill set—they must bring the whole package, that is, the ability to do print modelling, runway and video campaigns. They need to look the part, but also bring personality and their own “brand.” A strong work ethic is encouraged, emphasising the idea that models are not born, they are made. This stems from Tyra’s life story, which frames Tyra as an example for potential models to emulate. Banks’ voiceover for cycle 2, episode 1 reiterates this:

America’s Next Top Model is about a dream—plain and simple. And it’s about accomplishing these dreams through hard work and talent and passion. I worked my butt off to get to the top of the modelling industry, so I know exactly what it takes to make a star.¹⁴

Through this rhetoric *ANTM* “constructs a world of personal agency and fair competition, echoing and reinforcing the fiction of a merit-based market.”¹⁵ The world of modelling is framed as accessible, where one is rewarded through hard work.

On *ANTM* two types of labour operate simultaneously: self-commodification and bodily discipline. In this instance, self-commodification refers to personal expression of identity and behaviour. Bodily discipline is an external means of physical representation such as the body, the face and clothing. Bodily discipline is often enacted through transformative rituals that include lessons, challenges, photo-shoots and eliminations. These two types of labour are not mutually exclusive; they operate in a fluid relationship. Evidently, both types of labour are intertwined into the personal narratives of the potential models. Personal narratives are documented through a “confessional” camera—models break the fourth wall by looking into the camera lens, speaking candidly and reflecting on their personal journey. The labour of self-branding positions the self as a commodity. One that is packaged and sold; the winner graces the cover of a magazine and becomes the face of a cosmetic brand. Self-commodification and bodily discipline are two processes that work to transform the girls into models.

Foucauldian Discourse and *America’s Next Top Model*: Transformation and Commodification

RTV programs are centred on surveillance, characterised by panoptic power processes. The *ANTM* cameras chronicle the journey of contestants on the show—sharing similarities with the panopticon. An architectural design by Bentham, the panopticon allows an observer to watch prisoners without them knowing when they are being watched.¹⁶ Under constant surveillance, *ANTM* guarantees “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.”¹⁷ The constant camera gaze is a permanent reminder that participants are being watched. Numerous gazes watch the girls: the cameras and production crew constantly following them, the panel of judges, the photography camera and television audiences who view the final product. Moreover, the photography camera both observes and chronicles the contestants’ “selves” and their potential as models. Power processes underpin surveillance; the models know that they can be captured on camera at any time, but have no input or awareness of what will be shown on television or what photo will be revealed to the panel. They sign away their rights as a condition to be on the show. The editing process decides what viewers will watch, and can comprise of any given moment. These power mechanisms position the potential models as manipulated “bodies.”

The body is the predominant site of modification and objectification on *ANTM*, where discipline imparts docility. The models’ bodies are focussed upon, policed even, and the ideal body is one “that is manipulated, shaped,

trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful".¹⁸ Foucault refers to soldiers when discussing docile bodies and the girls on *ANTM* are exposed to a similar disciplinary regime. Foucault theorises that the army, schools and hospitals all epitomise the hierarchical structures evident in prisons, and are pertinent institutions for regulating and controlling the body.¹⁹ The disciplinary structure of daily routines are implemented through systems such as timetables and are monitored by observation and individual records. Interestingly, *ANTM* explicitly draws on themes of domination and subordination. During one episode from cycle 8, Miss J and Jay Manual acted as drill sergeants in charge of a top model "Boot Camp." The girls were all dressed in military style outfits for the skit-like scene. Indeed, even on their website, *ANTM* credits the show as a "highly accelerated modelling[sic] boot camp, a crash course to supermodel fame."²⁰ Similarly, cycle 10 had contestants attending "Top Model Prep," and cycle 9 featured the "Fashion Madhouse," a mental asylum where Miss J played a chilling nurse. The incorporation of hierarchical structures such as the military, hospitals and schools verifies and celebrates the transformative nature of this show, albeit in parody mode.

Foucault's theory of docility, that bodies may be manipulated, can be applied to *ANTM* in relation to the judge-contestant relationship. Foucault suggests that the body is an object, a target of power.²¹ Similarly, the *ANTM* judges situate contestants as objects to be subjectified and coerced in order to "transform" them. This is evident in the ritualistic eliminations, which unearth these power relations. Panel eliminations thoroughly assess each participant in front of the "normalizing gaze"²² within "the ceremony of power."²³ The judges or "experts" are placed in a higher position, representing a hierarchy of industry knowledge. Due to this sense of superiority, it is an unspoken rule that they are to be treated with respect and their opinions are not to be questioned. However, one incident in cycle 12 violated these power relations. Contestant Celia interrupted elimination, arguing that one girl had wanted to quit and thus lacked the right to remain in the competition. Tyra vetoed Celia's request, informing her that it was not her place to give that information. During the following week's elimination, Celia was admonished for her actions and was placed in the bottom two for lacking professionalism. This can be construed as punishment for her behaviour. Similarly, talking back to the judges is deemed as rude and disrespectful. Contestant Victoria from cycle 9 was eliminated for her "prickly disposition" during judging panels and reluctance to accept critique. In cycle 4, Tyra yelled at contestant Tiffany for her defeatist attitude after a challenge where Tiffany struggled to read a teleprompter and gave up. Tyra addressed Tiffany after eliminating the contestant:

I have never in my life yelled at a girl like this. When my mother yells like this it's because she loves me...Learn something from this! When you go to bed at night, you lay there and you take responsibility for yourself—because nobody's going to take responsibility for you. You're rolling your eyes and you act like it's because you've heard it all before...you don't know where the hell I come from. You have no idea what I've been through, but I'm not a victim; I grow from it and I learn.²⁴

Tyra attempts to make Tiffany docile and disciplined, drawing on the discourse of transformative labour. This speech suggests that if Tiffany works like Tyra did, she has potential to empower herself, attain a better life and become a better person. Again, Tyra often uses herself as an “example” for the contestants to follow and draw inspiration from. In the context of the show, Tyra’s “expert” status gives her permission to normalise contestants as to how models “should” act.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault suggests that the power play between prisons and the body formulates prisoners that self-normalise. He explains that the prison forces the prisoner to approximate his own behaviour, effectively self-governing, or as Foucault terms “he becomes the principle of his own subjection.”²⁵ This concept of self-normalization is evident in *ANTM*, in order to impart docility upon contestants. Contestants on *ANTM* are expected to make their own bodies docile, and eventually able to master their own bodies with the acquired skill-sets taught by the show’s mentors. Constant scrutiny and critique under surveillance promotes transformative labour. For instance, *ANTM* constantly gives the girls challenges to style themselves or others. This ranges from choosing an outfit, altering an outfit, acting as an artistic director, doing makeup, photographing models and so on. At the elimination panel, contestants are expected to look a certain way, to be presentable as “dressed bodies.”²⁶ They are critiqued and face elimination or lowered ranking if their outfit is perceived to be inappropriate for a model to wear, or lacking “style.” Tyra and the other judges often perform “mini-makeovers” at panel, telling contestants to remove accessories, swap outfits or change hairstyles. Accordingly, the ritualistic lessons, critiques, challenges, photo-shoots and eliminations are forces that manipulate participants’ behaviour into a certain idea of what a “model” should be like. *ANTM*’s ritualistic modes of transformation are strikingly similar to soldiers, as examined by Foucault:

[O]ut of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pli-

able, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit.²⁷

As with soldiers, the girls on *ANTM* begin with only the fundamentals of a model and then go through a transformation. Week by week they are moulded into models, with the ideal result being a successful governing of their own bodies. Within later weeks of the competition, the finalists are expected to self-regulate their behaviour. Through the rituals of transformation the contestants acquire the skills to dominate their own bodies and make them docile.

The first main physical transformation is the “makeover” that demonstrates the docility expected of the contestants. Contestants must have some raw material to work with: height, angular bone structure and good physique. Discipline normalises, it breaks down components that can be seen and then modified.²⁸ The makeovers do just this; they select physical components and alter them. *ANTM* embodies the principal that the “body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.”²⁹ Bodies become canvases; the girls are given new hairstyles, hair is cut, coloured, weaves added, or sometimes hair is shaved off completely. In some instances, teeth were extracted (Joanie, cycle 6 runner-up), gaps in teeth were minimised (Danielle, cycle 6 winner), and a gap was created between front teeth to emulate celebrity Anna Paquin (Chelsea, cycle 15). The makeover crafts a new image—the first step to looking like “real” models. Tyra states this distinction preceding Cycle 12 makeovers, instructing Miss J and Jay Manual, her fashion gurus: “I need you to transform these wannabes into high fashion top fierce femme fatalian models.”³⁰ Tyra goes on to say “there will be tears ... but I don’t care. Cut it, slice it, dice it.”³¹ Along with Tyra’s speech, images are shown from previous makeovers on the show, girls crying as their hair is cut. Although this is represented in parody mode, the dialogue represents the authoritative force exerted over the girls, situating the body as object to be manipulated, coaxed into submission. Tyra, the hair stylists, Miss J and Jay Manual are portrayed as “experts” who are to educate the girls on style. The girls have no input into their makeover and are simply told what will be done. In recent cycles, contestants are not shown their makeover until it is finished, heightening the power processes in play. If a girl is seen to rebel against her makeover she is berated for lacking industry professionalism.

Commodification of the participants is a part of the makeover process. Often the girls’ makeovers are explained by reference to a celebrity or model such as Naomi Campbell, Mia Farrow or Brigitte Bardot. These celebrity “looks” are copied onto the girl, imposing normalisation. Moreover, by commodifying the self or at the very least self-image, RTV makeovers

demonstrate the power of consumerism.³² Paradoxically, the girls find their “unique” model identity through copying a supermodel “look.” The “before” and “after” images situate the contestants as both “the subject *and* the object of transformation.”³³ This visually expresses how consumerism is both a facilitator of metamorphosis on *ANTM* and a means of constructing an identity-as-commodity.

Sometimes the makeover extends outside of the show. Isis King, a former transgender competitor on *ANTM*, was offered gender reassignment surgery by Tyra Banks after her run on the show had ended.³⁴ Isis had progressed along what Heyes terms a “normalized trajectory,”³⁵ in this case, transitioning from gender ambiguity to having the “right” body. The makeovers on *ANTM* signify bodily dominance, where problems are “fixed” according to normalising standards.

Bodily deportment is crucial to success on *ANTM*. As the weeks go on, closer scrutiny is paid to a model’s technique of posing, especially during photo shoots. There are certain terms that Tyra has coined on the show to teach models about posing—an invented dictionary of sorts. The most famous of these terms is the word “fierce,” which means a strong, confident picture; it’s the highest compliment a contestant can get. The verb “smize,” is often used, a shortened version of the term “smiling with your eyes.” According to Tyra, the secret to a great photo is for a model to do this look, isolating the smile only in eyes, not the lips. In cycle 13, episode 3, Tyra dressed up as “super smize,” a silver caped superhero with the power of “smize.” She went on to coach contestants on the skill of smizing, before pitting them against each other for a “smize-off.” A more recent Tyra-ism is the phrase “h to t,” meaning “modelling from head to toe.” Tyra has also given lessons on the “booty tooch,” upon where a model isolates her “booty” so that it pops out enough to give her shape, but not so much that it becomes a “hoochie tooch.” There’s also the “poochy tooch” when the stomach sticks out, and the “smoochie tooch,” which is also seen as a bad image, and which involves the model posing “with too much lips.” This modelling lingo is frequently used during panel sessions when judges deconstruct contestants’ photos. In this mode, lessons on bodily deportment are humorous and fun, less technical. There are even clips on the YouTube channel for the show, whereby Tyra defines these terms in her “dictionary hour.”³⁶ This amusing approach embeds discipline into the show in a way that engaging and entertaining.

The powers of personal transformation are ever present on *ANTM*. On each episode the girls are given dramatic hair and makeup for photo-shoots or commercials, or sometimes they are “stripped down,” with no makeup for naturalistic beauty shots. In turn, each episode transforms the

girls with various “looks” which they have little to no control over. They are also retouched, a necessary procedure of transformation—one that is rarely addressed.³⁷ This lack of acknowledgement contributes to the illusion of perfection that is ubiquitous in the modelling industry. Even when the girls are asked to style themselves, it is done within specified and limiting criteria. Thus through every micromanaged aspect, they become “docile” subjects that must embody normalising standards.

Foucault and Normalising Models

As part of the disciplinary nature of *ANTM*, normalisation becomes enforced by judgement. According to Foucault, disciplinary regimes aim to regulate the behaviour of individuals, binded by normalising codes and standards.³⁸ These standards are regulated in accordance with critiques and the constant assessment of the girls. On *ANTM*, lessons, challenges and photo-shoots are explained in relation to the skills they are meant to demonstrate. By stating the goal of the task, the “experts” are commanding a specific outcome, thus imposing normalisation upon the contestants. Foucault theorises that discipline is standardised by gratification and punishment.³⁹ If the girls do not embody expectations, then they are subject to punishment in the form of critique, lowered ranking and the threat of elimination. Constant assessment processes work to “correct” contestants in order to “improve” them.

Foucault’s concept of gratification-punishment as a form of training and correction are evident in the transformative rituals of this show. *ANTM* incorporates both reward and punishment in shaping behaviour. Reward challenges are frequent, with at least one in each episode. Punishment is exemplified on *ANTM* through harsh critique, lowered rank at panel and elimination. As such, *ANTM* uses these techniques to increase what is perceived as model-worthy behaviour and decrease poor conduct. Similarly, on go-see challenges, girls are evaluated on criteria such as their portfolio, runway walk, general appearance and personality. If the girls are late, they are disqualified and thoroughly critiqued. Likewise, challenges, lessons and photo-shoots also command normalised standards for which the girls are measured against. In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault determines that disciplinary normalisation prescribes an optimal model, with a specific result, and that this process involves people, movements and actions conforming to the norm.⁴⁰ On *ANTM*, rewards and punishments are effectively utilised in order to have contestants encapsulate the “ideal” of how a model should look and act.

Ranks and grades are a significant element of judgement on *ANTM*,

forming a hierarchy of the competitors. Throughout each episode, contestants are compared and contrasted with each other—ranked from “best” to “worst.” Frequently, photo-shoot creative director Jay Manual will certify this ranking by speaking to camera, stating which girls were “best of the day,” “worst of the bunch” or just plain “mediocre.” Based on the feedback from the first three segments of the show, the girls attain an indication of where their rank may be sitting. Further feedback may come from guest mentors in challenges and the photographer. If they think they have performed poorly, they fear judgement because of potential elimination.

The ultimate ranking occurs during the elimination panel. This is parallel to what Foucault terms “the examination.” This is a “ceremony of power”⁴¹ that is normalised under “a Surveillance, which makes it possible to quantify, to classify and to punish.”⁴² There is a ritualistic aspect to the eliminations on *ANTM*, as each panel session repeats a distinctive structure. Each panel has underlying power processes, situating the contestants’ fate under the authority of the panel. During the panel, the judges avidly discuss contestants’ strengths and weaknesses to settle on the rank order for that week. Top ranking itself serves as a reward. As of recent cycles, the girl who is ranked first for the week has her picture displayed in the model house as “digital art,” and also a reminder to the other girls of their lower positions in the competition. The girl who performs “worst” is eliminated from the competition. This is symbolised by her dissolving image shown at the end of the show. The girl ranked first is the one who is regarded as best exhibiting the skills and qualities that a “top model” is expected to have. The bottom two girls face elimination as they have deviated from expectations of the panel. Consequently, the panel examination rewards conformists and penalises nonconformists, thus generating a normalising gaze.

The use of documentation during the elimination panel exercises power over the models while archiving the individual. Models are constantly subjected to the gaze, whether it be the moving camera, still camera, judges, or viewers. These gazes make the models appear docile and quantified; the elimination panel becomes a ceremony of objectification. Each individual is observed and discussed while a screen projects the photo/video/commercial for all to see while the judges’ comments either validate or negate their progress. As their body of work grows, the judges refer back to the contestants’ progress, both in front of the photography camera and the RTV cameras. This documentation becomes an archive of their progress. In the finale it is these documents that are used to compare the last two models and ultimately decide the winner. The judges, however, are largely cloaked in a field of invisibility; their everyday lives are not documented and far less personal information is revealed about them. This is

representative of “descending individualisation,” demonstrating that “as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualised.”⁴³ When each model leaves, her journey is verified through their documentation of photos, which flash on screen. These photos are a signifier of her labour of transformation throughout the show, starting from her first photo to her last.

While other RTV shows also mobilise issues of discipline and docility of the body, such as *The Biggest Loser*, what is most intriguing about *ANTM* is that its process of transformation clearly aligns with Foucault’s theory. What is perhaps rather unique to the American version of this show, is that the host and creator Tyra Banks is such a crucial aspect—the structure weaves her personal experience and views into each episode as a means to motivate and discipline contestants. Tyra situates herself as the epitome of success in the modelling industry and willingly portrays herself as a role model for contestants to emulate. Although the show has a standardised layout—one that has been adapted by many countries for international versions—there is diversity in the range of “tests” and skills that contestants must learn. There is also enough diversity with casting of contestants and photo-shoots to make each cycle different from previous, which perhaps attributes to its longevity (currently the show is up to its 20th cycle). There is also emphasis on “branding the body” by moulding contestants into a “marketable product.” Unlike *The Biggest Loser*, *ANTM* is considered a springboard for a career, rather than simply a “makeover.” Interestingly, *ANTM* often becomes a parody of itself, and of its own disciplinary procedures. This is usually when Tyra performs skits during casting, makeovers and at coaching sessions with contestants. For all these reasons, *ANTM* is perhaps one of the most intriguing RTV shows in terms of bodily discipline and self-transformation.

A Model’s Journey: Cultivating Selfhood

The two intertwining narrative strands of *ANTM* are the cultivation of selfhood and discipline. The former promotes individuality, the latter homogeneity. This imposes a near-impossible mission; the girls must be normalised and individualised. Power is exercised through individualism; “the individual is one of power’s first effects.”⁴⁴ Individualisation within these constraints is expressed in a number of ways—through the confession camera, the personalised narratives of each episode, challenges involving “personality,” and the casting of diverse bodies. *ANTM* fosters the cultivation of self, by positioning the self as commodity; self-branding becomes spectacle.⁴⁵ In addition, Foucault discusses three types of “individualism.” The in-

dividualistic attitude, the positive valuation of private life and the intensity of relations to self in which “one is called upon to take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself, and find salvation.”⁴⁶ The latter will be emphasised here. Foucault argues that “the power of normalisation imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful...”⁴⁷ This is very much what occurs on *ANTM*; the girls are negotiating the paradoxical task of being both unique and homogenous, fitting into a certain mould but needing to break it at the same time.

During casting, contestants are defined by what makes them “different.” Racially and physically diverse contestants are cast on *ANTM* to encourage the ideology of individuality. *ANTM* represents a range of bodies, often those that challenge industry stereotypes. Executive producer Ken Mok explains the reasoning behind this:

We want to redefine what beauty is. ... You can be tall, you can be short, you can be plus size, you can be transgender. You don't have to be what the modelling industry says you have to be. That was one of Tyra's original missions.⁴⁸

Ethnicities that are considered “underrepresented” in modelling are often cast—African American, Latino, Asian and mixed race. Plus-size models are eligible to compete, with plus size model Whitney Thompson going on to win cycle 11. There are also models of shorter height such as winner Eva Pigford, who at 5'6.5” is considerably “short” for the modelling industry; cycle 13 placed the height limit at 5'7.” Age is no limit either—girls in their late 20's and early 30's, considered “old” for modelling have been on the show. There are also contestants with physical quirks and oddities—twins Amanda and Michelle, blind contestant Amanda; Heather had Asperger's Syndrome, and Isis was transgender. Bodies that have been through “distress” have also been cast; Mercedes had lupus, Caridee had psoriasis, Fatima was a survivor of female circumcision, Talia had burn scars across her body. As each cycle goes on, the diversity of bodies continues to evolve. No body is treated differently—they are given the same expectations and homogenising standards. The way that these bodies are represented signifies individualism, a central ideology that this show is predicated upon.

Paradoxically, the normalising challenges, lessons and photo-shoots on *ANTM* are often explicitly centred on expressing individuality. Representing the self-as-commodity involves contestants showing “personality” and personal style in a variety of contexts. One episode in cycle 8 had a

lesson where the girls crafted their own “super self” nickname and introduced themselves with it at a party with industry mentors. The photo-shoot for the week incorporated the same theme—the girls had to style their own hair and makeup to show four sides of their personalities—influenced by a past photo-shoot of Tyra’s. Interestingly, Tyra later swapped three of the contestants’ nicknames during panel discussion, with the contention that the new ones suited better. Cycle 11 had a lesson where the girls had to discover their “signature pose” with Tyra mentoring them, telling them what their pose was. In each cycle there is a photo-shoot where the girls have to “stand out.” One such photo-shoot in cycle 5 was Bollywood themed. The girls had to hold their own amongst extras and elaborate scenery.

The CoverGirl commercial is the most overt example of how the self is a branded commodity. The ad is built upon the personality of the contestant. The distinctiveness of each girl’s rendition of her lines is what qualifies her as a potential spokesperson and winner. If a contestant delivers what is regarded as a bland or forgettable performance then her value as a self-commodity is seen as compromised.

The prominence of the confession camera on *ANTM* places emphasis on the individual and emotion, creating a narrative of the self. Stylistically, the confession is embedded into the show, with girls talking to camera in an isolated room. The girls often “confess” to camera how they feel about their progress, the other girls and the competition. These clips are intercut as events unfold, and act as a personal commentary. These narratives engage with a therapeutic ethos through talk, a part of a larger context where RTV programmes focus upon what is said.⁴⁹ When the girls leave the house, they voice their final thoughts in this seemingly private space as an authentic articulation of their journey on the show. Often these departing clips are embedded with a “euphoric rhetoric of experience,”⁵⁰ equating “surveillance with self-fulfilment: that being watched all the time serves to intensify one’s experiences, and thereby to facilitate self-growth and self-knowledge.”⁵¹ The self is allegedly authenticated when such displays of emotion emerge. At the same time, these confessions become commodified, in a bid for ratings. In searching for signifiers of “real” emotion, we are searching for true selfhood through a highly mediated product. On *ANTM*, an expressive self is equated with an authentic self, and thus “not opening up” is a flaw that will get contestants on *ANTM* eliminated.⁵² Evidently, the requirement to display emotion is an imposing standard that normalises the “authentic.”

Limitations: Feminism, Post-Feminism and Aspirational Framework

While Foucault's theory is used here as a framework for analysing *ANTM*, it is worth noting that his work is not without its own limitations. Most importantly, Foucault offers what McNay terms as a "desexualised perspective."⁵³ As such, Foucault lacks a consideration of sexual difference, overlooking the implications of gender in relation to discipline and the body. This may be, at least partially, due to the fact that "power relations are only examined from how they are installed in institutions and not from the perspective of those subject to power."⁵⁴ Foucault's failure to consider sexual difference in relation to power has been the subject of avid discussions in relation to feminism. This is largely because: "A notion of the body is central to feminist analysis of the oppression of women because it is on the biological difference between male and female bodies that the edifice of inequality is built and legitimated."⁵⁵ Although Foucault's work has been hugely influential, it is worth considering this argument more in depth.

The definition of sex/gender, from a social constructionist approach, situates the body as biological, gender as social.⁵⁶ Because the definition of gender is so intertwined with other factors, it is a complex issue. Judith Butler also acknowledges this difficulty when she writes that "gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex."⁵⁷ Butler's definition of "sex" encompasses power, demarcating "sex" as a regulatory force that differentiates the bodies it controls.⁵⁸ This gendered force is one that Foucault has not accounted for in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. Moreover, while Foucault's indifference to gender is a valid criticism, McNay asserts "female bodies are worked upon in socially and historically specific ways rather than in terms of an eternal, undifferentiated difference between the sexes."⁵⁹ This is to say that there are social, cultural and historical contexts that impact on this argument. Such contexts are fluid and hence difficult to verify. Furthermore, care must be taken with such feminist arguments so that they do not perpetuate or overemphasise the oppression of women.⁶⁰

To return to the concept of self-normalisation, Judith Butler's work opens up the discussion of sexuality in association with power. Butler expands on the idea of subjection, incorporating the notion of identity by applying psychoanalysis, and questioning the issue of resistance. From here, the question emerges as to why docile bodies are capable of resistance in *The History of Sexuality* but not in *Discipline and Punish*.⁶¹ The most significant difference between these texts is the discussion of sexuality, and so Butler asks whether it is the relationship of sexuality to power that offers re-

sistance.⁶² This raises the question of sexuality, one that deserves further discussion. However, it may be the case that a new approach is needed. Butler suggests it is not possible to elaborate on the issue of resistance within Foucault's own framework.⁶³

Returning to the notion of normalisation and femininity in a contemporary context, post-feminism offers a different perspective. A slippery term to define, in a RTV context post-feminism seems to regard the body as a celebratory site for transformation and personal empowerment.⁶⁴ Within this liberal consumer culture, bodily transformation is believed to facilitate the process of self-actualisation with the imperative of personal choice. On *ANTM*, the normalisation of contestants is portrayed through an empowering framework. On such reality makeover shows, contestants freely give over their bodies for transformation. Shows like *ANTM* demonstrate the "rhetoric of individual choice"⁶⁵ but in fact contestants are "reshaped" according to a normalising criteria.⁶⁶ Beneath this façade of personal transformation, contestants are not as "free" as they would like to believe.

The aspirational mode of *ANTM* draws in both contestants and viewers. The show promises that the winner will be elevated to enviable status—a working model with top representation and a beauty contract. Hence, contestants eagerly surrender their bodies. What could take years of work in the "real world"—gaining extensive exposure and a slick portfolio—can be attained within months, an alluring drawcard for model wannabes. There is also an underlying sense of climbing the class stepladder, invoking ideas of neoliberalism—that through hard work, class can be transcended.⁶⁷ This ties back to Tyra's idealistic work ethic that determination and personal agency is rewarded with success. A number of contestants profess coming from a rough or modest upbringing, some are unemployed, others living in small towns with little opportunity while yet others simply want to provide for their family or children. *ANTM* becomes a vehicle for them to fulfil these aspirations. This also increases the stakes and makes the show more compelling because these contestants become desperate to prove themselves. Further to this, I would argue that part of the show's appeal is that a "nobody" can come to fame and success in a short period of time, with little experience. This possibility hooks viewers, because they can relate and also aspire to such success themselves.

This empowering framework proves difficult for feminists, due to the "liberal logic that celebrates disciplinary practices of femininity as 'free' choice and individual pleasure."⁶⁸ This paradox of liberation within normalisation creates a theoretical difficulty in regards to feminist readings of RTV. Perhaps this contradictory notion is indicative that *ANTM* is not as empowering to women as it sets out to be, but rather it is cleverly veiled in such a

discourse. The docility that is expected of contestants is re-appropriated as entrepreneurial models of selfhood, and hence masquerading under an alluring guise.

Recent Developments to the *Top Model* Format

Cycle 17 was an “All-Star” cycle, featuring contestants from almost every cycle prior. These contestants did not win their cycle, but placed well and were memorable personalities. “All Stars” was more intensely focused on branding than prior cycles, also reflected in the prize package. In addition to a spread in *Vogue Italia* and a CoverGirl contract, the winner would be a guest correspondent for *Extra* as well as the face of an *ANTM* perfume.

During the first few episodes of the “All-Star” cycle, contestants had to establish what their brand was, drawing on how they were portrayed in previous cycles. From the start of this cycle contestants were given one word that summarised their brand. Interestingly, they were told their brand, and not given the opportunity for personal input—they simply had to accept what they were told. Their portrayal on television from their prior cycle became a document that fixed them into a particular niche. Contestants were often eliminated during this cycle because they did not represent their brand well—even poses and facial expressions during photo shoots had to be authentic to their new brand. Challenges were based around being a spokesperson and retaining their brand essence. Winner Lisa D’Amato was branded as “daring” and often commended on being the most “truthful” to her brand. Throughout the cycle, Lisa stuck to her brand ideal and disciplined her body and behaviour to reflect this. Although, the judges often commented on the repetitiveness of her “signature” pose. This cycle had novel challenges where contestants wrote their own lyrics for their own music video, created their own perfume, wrote and styled their own fashion/travel blogs. Finalists even had the opportunity to design their own gown for the final runway challenge. The branding structure implemented for this cycle pushed contestants to become a recognisable and specific brand; not just a photogenic model.

ANTM has evolved into even more of an assessment-based format. As of cycle 20, contestants are ranked explicitly, with social media playing a part. In this cycle, contestants were graded out of 10 for their ability in challenges, photo-shoots and across social media. Fashion blogger Bryanboy became a new addition to judging panel, representing the social media aspect of the show. Bryanboy shared brutal and effusive blog opinions of contestants, as well as viewer-submitted clips to give contestants further critique. He then presented contestants with an overall score out of

10 for social media. In addition, Tyra, Kelly Cutrone and new judge, male model Rob Evans each told contestants the score they had rewarded them out of 10. These scores were added with the challenge scores to finalise the contestant rankings each week. The girls watch their percentages tabulate on a video screen to designate their fate. However, one girl was allowed to re-enter the competition. The first six contestants still participated in photo shoots, and these images were uploaded online for fans to vote on. The most popular girl got a second chance and rejoined the competition. This cycle placed a lot more power into the hands of the public, allowing them to play a significant role in deciding the winner. This rigorous assessment format has continued onto cycle 20, with the exception that the contestants were “girls vs. guys.” This was the first time male contestants competed on the show and could be a bid to keep the concept “fresh” and interesting.

Conclusion

ANTM brings a new meaning to Foucault's concepts of “cultivation of the self”⁶⁹ and discipline and punishment through docility and normalisation. Not far removed from the panopticon, this constructed “reality” naturalises these Foucauldian notions. Constant tests, challenges and critiques facilitate the girls' metamorphosis, situating “RTV as less as a genre than as a televisual mechanism for conducting powers of transformation.”⁷⁰ The show acts as its own institution, which invests in disciplining the contestants week to week and quantifying them through their photos as “documents.” The discourses surrounding the labour of the disciplined body and the self-commodity in *ANTM* operate as two intersecting narratives of transformation. The paradoxical nature of promoting both individuality and normalisation presents a near-impossible challenge for contestants. This hierarchy of power is evident within each episode through the transformative rituals of lessons, challenges, photo-shoots and eliminations. The success of the girls on the show is focused upon whether they can self-regulate themselves under surveillance as viable self-branded commodities using the skill sets given. The show then becomes a vehicle for the transformation of the self, hence altering the experience of transformation into a commodity itself. This disciplined femininity is framed within a post-feminist media culture, with the rhetoric of liberation within normalisation. Intriguingly, *ANTM* situates itself as an enticing experience of self-entrepreneurialism, but upon closer examination, its emphasis on docility positions contestants as submissive subjects.

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NOTES

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- ³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 184.
- ⁴ "About the Show," The CW, accessed April 16, 2009, <http://www.cwtv.com/shows/americas-next-top-model12/about>.
- ⁵ A go-see is a model's audition. Models meet with prospective clients and present them with their portfolio. A client may be a designer, art director, casting director or magazine editor. The client will usually ask the model to wear one or more outfits. The model will do a runway walk whilst wearing the garments. The prospective client will use the portfolio and their impression of the model to inform their decision as to whether they will book them.
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- ¹¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170.
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- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

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- ²⁰ "About the Show."
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- ²² Ibid., 184.
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