Religion as a makeover : reality, lifestyle and spiritual transformation

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Abstract

In this article I discuss the relationship between religion, spirituality and processes of makeover and transformation as presented in a number of British reality television shows. Programmes including *The Monastery*, *The Convent* and *Make Me a Muslim* placed participants in scenarios where they experimented with adopting religious or spiritual practices as part of their journey of self-transformation. I argue that the nature of transformation in these programmes is in line with standard reality and makeover television practices. However it also makes a claim to be more 'authentic' than these because of its unfolding within the more traditional environs of religious communities from which makeover culture's narratives of transgression, repentance and salvation were originally derived.

Keywords: Reality TV, religion, spirituality, television, makeover

Introduction

The trailer shows women in what appears to be a spa setting, carrying baskets with mobile phones and other trappings of 21st century life to be stashed away. The voiceover tells us that 'Modern Life is all me, me me, quick fix cures and instant happiness. Follow four women as they search for deeper meanings.' The women in the trailer are shown having spa treatments and relaxing as signs point to 'products' including 'conscience cleanser', 'spiritual scrub' and 'faith mask'. The door to this 'spa' bears the slogan 'All over Soul Massage'. Then

the punchline - this is no 'ordinary' spa treatment: 'For forty days and forty nights, they'll live with an order of nuns to discover their real me' as we zoom out to see the exterior of a convent. The strapline? '*The Convent*: Detox for the Soul'.

In the mid-2000s, when 'reality', 'makeover' and 'lifestyle' television dominated the schedules of the major British broadcasters (see Dover and Hill, 2007), these formats 'discovered' spirituality. This coincided with a wider cultural interest in these matters, with significant news events such as 9/11 and 7/7 and novels, self-help books, cinema, television drama and documentary all featuring religious/spiritual themes (see Hoover, 2006; Crumm, 2005; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005).

The Convent was an example of this trend, along with *The Monastery* (*TM*) (2005), *The Monastery Revisited* (*TMR*) (2006), *The Retreat* (*TR*) (2007) and *The Big Silence* (*TBS*) (2010), all of which were shown on BBC Two, a public service channel, funded through a TV licence. Commercial public service broadcaster Channel 4 offered us *Make Me a Muslim*[1] *(MMAM)* (2007), its sequel *Make Me a Christian* (*MMAC*) (2008) and *Spirituality Shopper* (*SS*) (2005)[2]. In this article I use a discourse and narrative analysis to demonstrate how these programmes construct participants' makeovers within these religious environments. I argue that, through drawing upon both traditional and contemporary discourses of transformation, the programmes construct particular forms of acceptable citizenship and ascribe religion and spirituality particular roles in achieving this.

'Reality' television can be difficult to define (Hill 2005: 172), as it incorporates techniques used in other factual television (sub) genres such as documentary, talent show and game show. The programmes I discuss are a hybrid of the 'fly-on-the-wall' and 'life swap' reality formats, whereby participants are placed in 'situations not of their own making' (Skeggs and Wood, 2012: 53). While they were not explicitly marketed as 'reality'

(Thomas 2011: 560) they were widely described in this way (e.g. Deans, 2005; Noonan, 2011) and they share common features of the genre, such as placing participants in unusual situations where they meet new people, follow rules and complete tasks, as well as containing a series of conflicts and personal 'journeys' leading to some form of transformation in the final episode (see Hill, 2005; Hawkins, 2001; Braitch, 2007; Lewis 2007), which is why I use the term to describe them.

The earliest example, *The Monastery*, has been seen as one of the most influential religious-themed programmes of the twenty-first century (Noonan, 2011; Thomas, 2011). The series followed five men living for forty days and nights at Worth Abbey monastery, observing the monks' routine and disciplines. This was followed by a 'revisited' programme in 2006 and sequels, *The Convent* (2006)[3],*The Retreat* (2007), and *The Big Silence* (2010), which showed participants move between religious communities learning the disciplines of silence and contemplation and returning to 'normal life' where they attempted to implement the lessons learned.

Spirituality Shopper (2005) followed one individual per episode undertaking four practices (such as meditation or voluntary work) from different faiths. *Make Me A Muslim* (2007) and *Make Me a Christian* (2008) featured groups exploring a range of practices relating to a number of Muslim and Christian traditions.

None of these shows were marketed explicitly as 'religious programming', a genre more often associated with worship or education and they were designed to appeal to a broader audience (see Noonan, 2011: 73). By combining the reality format with religion, broadcasters were able to fulfil their remits to show diversity (including their commitments to represent religion) and to respond to the findings of research by broadcasting regulator Ofcom that British audiences, despite not expressing strong preferences for 'religious'

programming, had 'a strong interest in programmes… [on] questions of faith, the manifestation of faith in culture' (Ofcom 2005: 2). The programmes had the potential to fulfil PSB requirements in a number of ways: combining the functions of education, information and entertainment in their delivery, representing diversity both through featuring religious groups and participants from different backgrounds and promoting values of good citizenship, often framed as not only enhancing the life of the individual, but enhancing national culture, as I now discuss.

Reality television, citizenship and makeover culture

The relationship between religion and spirituality and the consumerist, neo-liberal citizenship often associated with the makeover's concern with the 'project of the self' (see Jones 2008) is complicated. For some commentators, the West's focus on the individual and the remaking of individuals into consumers and citizens concerned with the reinvention of the self is partly a response to the decline in organised religion. For example, Giddens has argued that 'secularisation has the effect of narrowing down moral meaning to the immediacy of sensation and perception (1991: 171. See also Puttnam, 2000).

However, this 'secularisation thesis' which describes the process of societies becoming less religious in line with advances in technology and consumerism is contested, with a number of commenters identifying a greater visibility of religion and spirituality within Western cultures in recent years (see Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Hoover, 2006). Furthermore, the apparent 'rediscovery' of the religious/spiritual has a complicated relationship with consumerism and can be seen both as a reaction against its values and as being part of the same package, as a search for something more 'authentic', 'traditional' and 'meaningful' is often sold back in the form of consumer products and experiences.

Crumm notes that 'secular' products and services (including meditation mats, candles and spas) are advertised as performing a spiritual function (2005: 250-4). At the same time, religious groups adopt 'secular' marketing models (e.g. marketing campaigns for the *Alpha* course). Carrette and King claim that:

> the shift in interest from 'traditional religion' to 'private spirituality' has overwhelmingly been presented to us as consumer-oriented, that is as reflecting the concerns of the modern, 'liberated' individual to free themselves from the traditional constraints of religion, dogma and ecclesiastical forms of thought-control (2005: 27).

Religious reality shows are situated within a complex range of cultural processes – the Britain they reflect back to us is secular, but looking to the sacred; consumerist in both bad ways and good; and ancient faith traditions are blended with contemporary therapeutic and makeover practices (many of which originally drew upon religious practice, thus bringing things full circle – a notion I will return to later).

In makeover television, 'the individual is seen as a site of endless choice and potential transformation' (Lewis, 2008: 5). This notion of working on the 'project of the self' (Giddens, 1991) within 'makeover culture' has been associated with the reinforcement of consumerist values, although Weber cautions that this is a simplistic view of what is a much more complex set of processes (2009: 51).

Nevertheless, there are a number of ways that makeover culture constructs particular forms of citizenship and its concerns are with 'improving' a person or location to conform more readily to the 'accepted' standards (whether these be aesthetic, political or moral) of a particular culture (see Redden 2007). Reality television plays its part in this re-creation of subjects as 'good' citizens through its encouragement of self-development and improvement, often through a series of challenges. Within the sub-genre I discuss here, the

participants' reward is to reach the destination of self-fulfilment and personal transformation in an area of their lives presented as previously 'lacking'. There is no 'prize' associated with these programmes as in more competitive reality formats, beyond the 'prize' of self-discovery, renewed perspective or changed experience:

> If I can learn anything from this at all it would be what is good and what is bad, you know, if this can give me a really firm grounding and a launch pad for the next twenty-nine years of my life (Tony, *TM*)

> It's very important that I take stock now, I've been on this planet for fifty years… I want to be sure that I'm living a good life and getting the most out of myself (Helen, *TBS*)

The moral function of the reality television process, emphasised here in Tony and Helen's desire to live 'good' lives, is particularly significant for my examples, given the channels' public service remits. Dover and Hill (2007: 25) note that British reality/lifestyle television often draws upon public service values of informing, entertaining and educating throughout its narratives, whilst Hawkins argues that this is part of a growing trend of 'ethical' entertainment involving 'examinations of ways to live: information about the care and management of the self, explorations of the tensions between collective versus self-interest' (2001: 412-413).

In order to be successful, ethical entertainment usually involves participants on a personal 'journey' of transformation where they are made over to become better people, whether through physical transformation or the transformation of behaviours, attitudes or mindsets (see Lewis, 2007; Morreale, 2007).

The notion of the 'makeover' is present within all of these programmes; whilst this is evidenced most explicitly in the 'spa' trailers for *The Convent*, it is present throughout, often presented as part of an individual's 'journey':

> He's going on a spiritual journey to reenergise himself. (*SS*)
>
> The silence is like a wonderful spiritual bath which we invite you to get into to relax your spiritual muscles so that you can start listening to God, listening to other people and listening to the ear of your heart through your own deepest self. (Father Christopher, *TM*)

This discursive framing of the practices 're-energising' or acting as a 'spiritual bath' draws upon the notion that spirituality, more than religion, is what is attractive to contemporary Britons. Although the majority of practices featured in the programmes are from mainstream religions (most notably Christianity and Islam), references to 'spirituality' and the 'spiritual journey' are more common within programme voiceovers than references to religion. As Abdullah, the leader of *The Retreat*, puts it, spirituality 'is for everyone, whether you're religious or not'. This echoes claims made by several scholars of the rise of an interest in 'spirituality' over 'religion':

> Survey after survey shows that increasing numbers of people now prefer to call themselves 'spiritual' rather than 'religious' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005: 1. See also: Deller, 2012; Noonan, 2011; Thomas, 2011).

Interestingly, despite seeming the least 'religious' in its title and presentation, *The Big Silence* (which presents itself as offering silence as an antidote to the noise of modern life), probably contains more explicit references to religion, God, Christianity and Jesus Christ in its narration than the other programmes' voiceovers. Perhaps this is because the voiceover - a tool that is used as the authoritative 'voice' of a programme - in this instance is performed

by Father Christopher, a monk, rather than a voiceover artist or producer, as in the other programmes.

Saving the self: the participants' journeys

Jayne Raisborough has argued that in makeover and lifestyle culture, ''just living' is not enough' (2011: 45) whilst Meredith Jones argues that 'in makeover culture success is displayed as a never-ending renovation of the self.' (Jones, 2008: 11-12. See also: Weber, 2009; Skeggs and Wood, 2012). In this section I discuss the various ways that participants' lives are presented as 'not enough', the various strategies for self-renovation and transformation that the programmes present, and the role of spirituality in accomplishing and sustaining these changes.

Brenda Weber claims that 'on makeover TV, that which is subject to change marks the site of the emerging self' (2009: 5). The chief aim is often for participants to discover, or be reconciled with, something of their 'true' self:

> Gary is hoping his time in the monastery will help him come to terms with who he is. (*TM*)
>
> They'll live with an order of nuns to discover their real me (*TC* trailer)

Weber, drawing deliberately on religious language, calls the process of conforming to the makeover 'salvation through submission' (2009: 6) and religious reality/makeover formats, as with all reality/makeover formats, provide us with background narratives explaining what it is the shows' participants need to be 'saved' from. Programmes set up two kinds of obstacles that need to be overcome: aspects of individual participants' lives (usually dysfunctional relationships, problematic sex lives, negative attitudes or busy work lives). Voiceovers and continuity announcements present twenty-first century life as

hedonistic, busy and obsessed with sex and alcohol. Repeatedly we're asked whether religious traditions can provide a remedy for contemporary problems[4]:

> The aim was to see if traditional monastic ways have anything to offer to twenty-first century life (Opening voiceover, *TM*)
>
> Britain is in a mess. Anti-social behaviour (shots of people drinking), binge drinking and promiscuity are rife… Imam Ajmal Masroor wants Britain to rediscover the values of decency, respect and moderation… Can a 1400-year-old religion really sort out these people's lives? (Opening voiceover, *MMAM*[5])

The 'problems' of the participants are conflated with the 'problems' of contemporary Britain. The healing power of the religious makeover is presented having the potential not only to transform the lives of the participants, but to have a wider impact, inviting 'us' to consider the implications for our own experiences:

> Life would be changed for the better if we could embrace silence (*TBS*)
>
> What struck us most was what St Benedict said about Christian living all those years ago is still valid today and not just for monks, but for everybody (Father Christopher, *TM*)

The participants are - as with all good makeover participants - seen to be either deviant or lacking in ways that their immersion into a religious/spiritual lifestyle can 'fix'. Most participants are portrayed as, in Meredith Jones' term, 'monsters' who 'do their culture too much' (2008: 127) – they need rescuing from contemporary secular British culture, and from being overly antagonistic and/or sceptical; engaging in problematic sexuality (including having an 'open marriage' and working in the porn industry); working too hard or being vulnerable due to suffering bereavement or abuse. In addition, there are participants who are portrayed as continually seeking a spiritual 'fix' by experimenting with different expressions of spirituality without 'settling' on one, and actively religious

participants who need to somehow 'fix' the way they practise their faith. Potential transformation narratives are established for each participant at the start of the shows and promoted through trailer clips at the beginning and end promising conflict as a hook to keep viewers watching in order to see whether or not the 'experiment' works. In this regard, these programmes present the participants in much the same way as other reality shows, emphasising the chosen 'journey' for each participant up-front and reminding us at the beginning of each episode:

> Angela… [is] a shrewd sharp, successful businesswoman… having spent most of her life as a slave to her work, Angela has gained two houses but it's left her feeling empty (*TC*)
>
> Hayley's flirted with different faiths but fasting today is helping her see where she's going wrong (*MMAM*)

In *Spirituality Shopper*, trying practices from several faiths is encouraged but in the other shows, experimenting with multiple spiritualities is seen as disrupting a stable sense of self, whereas embracing one faith is perceived as a more desirable outcome – it is time for them to stop 'flirting' with faiths and 'settle down'.

Whilst the desired effects of the religious makeover might appear to be different for each participant (a more relaxed attitude; tolerance of others' beliefs etc), each has a perceived – and clear - need for change. As in much reality or makeover television, the individuals' agency to make decisions[6] is constrained within the prescribed parameters of their 'journey' narrative.

Strictness and submission – conforming to the makeover rules

Within many lifestyle/reality programmes there are 'experts', 'mentors' or 'guides' to help participants in their 'journey' (see Lewis, 2008) – in this case religious leaders and members

of religious/spiritual communities. They set tasks and challenges, meet with participants as individuals and small groups to discuss issues, discuss the Bible or Qur'an and lead collective acts of worship or prayer.

The programmes emphasise that participants must observe a set of precepts. Repeatedly, we're told that the religious observances and rules participants 'must' live by are 'strict', and are framed as giving 'discipline' and 'structure' to participants' lives. Although the 'rules' are depicted in these shows as being religiously prescribed, most programmes in the reality genre (see Kilborn, 2003; Hill, 2005) ask participants to live by a set of precepts, be that the house rules in *Big Brother* or the household manual in *Wife Swap*. The disciplines participants are to 'submit' to are often to do with adopting a more 'simple' life or with separation from the temptations of family, partners, work, entertainment and home.

Morreale (2007: 99) argues that decisions about whether to submit to the process of obeying rules in order to achieve desired transformation usually form the 'crux' point of makeover television. Almost all participants in these shows reach such a crux point around half-way through the series. Transgression in the form of rebelling as in other reality or makeover shows (see Jones, 2008; Weber, 2009) is seen as hindering an individual's progress in their remaking of the self.

For example, in *The Convent*, the women are shown drinking 'smuggled in' wine and in *The Monastery, Make Me a Muslim* and *Make Me a Christian* participants abscond to the pub. That alcohol is a key part of the rebellion for many is significant, given its portrayal as one of the problems of contemporary Britain.

These moments of rebellion – which are almost always followed by eventual repentance and submission – are connected to the narrative 'journey' the programme has

inscribed for each participant. For example, 'workaholics' such as Anthoney (*TM*) and Muddassar (*TR*) are depicted as finding it difficult to 'switch off' from work from the outset and their rebellion comes in the form of keeping hold of their mobile phones and receiving phone calls from work.

For those who already have a faith, the challenges usually come in the form of learning tolerance for others' beliefs/practices; or through learning new modes of spiritual expression within their existing faith. Aisha (*TR*) is presented as rigidly religious, uncomfortable with the more charismatic styles of prayer offered by the Sufi mentors, and Iona (*TC*), whose Christianity is normally expressed within the charismatic traditions, must engage with quiet contemplation and formal liturgy.

The modes of confrontation used by mentors in these series are often very different from, say, the strict authoritarian voice of *Big Brother*. As Thomas notes, in *The Monastery*, 'the participants are not bullied, cajoled or humiliated and are given space to reflect on their experience and formulate their own narratives' (2011: 561-2). Indeed, in most series, the mentors are seen as patient with their unruly charges, immediately evoking our sympathies and support as they seek to guide participants back onto the correct path. The only exceptions to this are George in *Make Me a Christian* and Muhammad in *Make Me a Muslim*, who are portrayed as more 'fundamentalist' in some of their beliefs – however, even these mentors are portrayed as ultimately caring for the participants.

The mentors are also there, in part, to receive the confessions of the participants and forgive their transgressions[7]. Almost all transformative experience is preceded by some form of confession. This confession may be of 'sin' in the form of breaking the makeover rules or of personal failings and past transgressions. It may also be a confession of past events, of tragedies and traumas experienced.

It is not simply enough to confess, however. Participants' confessions are accompanied by acknowledging their need for change. In this way, these programmes draw on the therapeutic tradition within factual television that Shattuc (1997) identifies as occurring within talk shows. Drawing on Foucault's (1976) discussion of confession, Shattuc argues that such programming encourages confession to a host, expert or audience who act as interlocutors to receive it. The confession made within factual television is designed to prompt a change in the individual's life or behaviour (1997: 177-178. See also: Braitch, 2007; Morreale, 2007). This process, of course, draws upon traditional Christian discourse of confession and repentance. What is most interesting about religious reality television is that the confession is simultaneously a religious act and a reality television rite taking place in two arenas, the sacred and the 'secular', with the dual interlocutors of religious leaders and TV viewers bearing witness to confessions and testimonies.

Touching the divine? Moments of transformation

The goal of most reality and makeover television is to achieve moments of transformation or 'arrival' – to prove that the 'journey' has been worthwhile for participants and has indeed 'changed their lives'. With these particular programmes there is the added tease that someone will 'convert':

> They are not the most likely candidates for conversion (*MMAM*)
>
> Even the nuns can't have imagined the journey to faith to be so rocky (*TC*)

All participants are shown to undergo 'change', but not all these changes are deemed significant enough to earn much airtime. In *The Big Silence* and *Make Me a Christian* we see participants whose journeys lead them to become baptised, and yet there is only a small amount of footage dedicated to these participants' decisions. Whilst most

participants' 'journeys' hint at transformation, usually by opening up about past trauma, confessing transgressions and/or crying on camera, only two spiritual 'transformation' moments suggesting some form of spiritual encounter or conversion experience are captured at length. In *The Monastery* Tony has a 'spiritual experience' and in *The Retreat,* Pom converts to Islam – the climax of what she terms her search 'for the divine'.

It's interesting that both Tony and Pom are white, attractive, blonde, twenty-somethings who are articulate and seemingly 'sensible', neither actively practising a faith before entering the shows. Their transformation moments are quiet and somewhat understated. For Tony, it occurs during a session with mentor Brother Francis. The men are shown praying quietly in a room at the monastery on sofas – a familiar, unthreatening environment - and Tony starts to cry. There is a lot of silence in this sequence, with no background music, perhaps to reinforce the moment's 'authenticity'.

Pom's experience is similar. We see her with mentor Abdullah sitting underneath a tree, discussing her need to commit to something and her growing belief that Islam is the right choice. Throughout, their exchange is punctuated with moments of silence:

> **Pom:** I feel, not nervous exactly, but someone said erm, if this is the one that really feels right for you, maybe you should make some kind of um, commitment and I felt really split because on one hand I was thinking wow, you know maybe I can, you know, and that's actually… I didn't expect it to be appealing but it did seem really exciting actually, but then on the other hand I was thinking that's ridiculous. I've been here for three, three and a bit weeks…
>
> **Abdullah:** So I think you need to make your decision
>
> **Pom:** I think I have.
>
> **Abdullah:** It's gonna be a profound change .
>
> **Pom:** I'm comfortable with that. I'd like to do it. (*TR*)

In this exchange, we see the kind of discourse common to reality/makeover shows: the need to make a decision, the emphasis that this will be a 'profound' life change and the rationalising of making big decisions within a small, concentrated space of time. As with Tony's experience, the stillness and Pom's 'ums' add to the sense of it being a genuine, rather than scripted, moment; 'authenticity' and believability being essential to the television makeover's success.

Both confess to camera following their experiences in a 'video diary' format, a technique that reinforces the 'authenticity' of the experience through a close-up allowing us to use our competencies in reading expressions and gestures (Moseley, 2000: 314. See also: Alsama and Pantti 2006):

> **Tony:** That's the greatest experience I've ever had in my life. I don't know. I think, you know.. I'm, it was a religious experience, quite a profound one… Something happened, something touched me very deeply and very profoundly but I tell you something, right, and this is me talking, this isn't someone that wanted this to happen, or expected it to, when I woke up this morning, I didn't believe in this and I, as I speak to you know, I do. Whatever 'it' is, and I still don't know what that is, I believe in it, 'cos I saw it and I felt it and it spoke to me. (*TM*)
>
> **Pom:** I'm not changing myself, so yeah, it just feels like a kind of natural enhancement, erm, and I feel that because over these four weeks I've began to feel more and more and more accepted and familiar with Islam... I kind of feel like I'm home. (*TR*)

The close-ups of their faces, their soft spoken tone of voice and reiteration of being changed, coupled with their inability to clearly articulate their feelings add to the feeling of these confessions being authentic – transformative, yet also a natural step in the self-cultivation process. That they occur in video diary format is significant, emphasising that,

away from the group and the mentors, they still 'truly' feel changed. Pom's description of being 'home' and Tony's assertion that it is 'me talking' reiterate the aim of television makeover to reveal a 'true' self (Weber 2009. See also Buxton 2009).

The programmes seek to reinforce that Tony and Pom have been genuinely changed by their experiences. As the series end, we are given small 'what happened next' pieces about each participant. We're assured that Pom feels turning to Islam was the right choice for her, whilst Tony 'has been back to the monastery several times and feels his outlook on life has changed. He is no longer working in the porn business'.

The 'transformation' can't be deemed to go 'too far', however. For example, in *The Big Silence*, David hands in his notice at work, but this is rejected. His spiritual adviser cautions him against making such drastic decisions too quickly. Father Christopher goes to meet him at work and has a beer, thus demonstrating the reconciliation of the religious and the 'secular' in an appropriate, measured way. David discusses how he's now learned to incorporate silence into his working life.

Even where participants' transformations are less 'obvious' than those experienced by Tony and Pom, the makeover is always shown to have 'worked'. For example, in *Make Me a Christian*, we are told 'each of the group have prepared a testimonial to share their experience', implying that they have all undergone transformation of some kind. In *Spirituality Shopper*, participant Charlie is asked by presenter Jonathan Edwards 'are you a changed man?' and Charlie affirms 'several times' before adding the qualifier that:

> I don't think I've got anything spiritual from this series in terms of I'm not going to convert… [but] collectively the experiences have refocused and re-energised me and given me a sense of direction. Prior to the journey… I was a viewer watching the world go by. Now I'm more of a player. (*SS*)

Edwards ends Charlie's episode with a piece to camera: 'Charlie says he hasn't found anything spiritual on his journey but the different religions have shown him the importance of life and connecting with family and friends'. Although Charlie has not had a 'spiritual' experience or 'converted' to a faith, transformation has still been achieved.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of the spiritual makeover in reality television raises a number of potentially interesting questions about the role of religion and spirituality in contemporary Britain. By presenting the need to 'reconnect' with spiritual traditions as an antidote to the pressures of contemporary life, these programmes offer some indication that, perhaps, 'There will always be a need for gods and for the general compensators which only they can offer' (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985: 527).

The narratives of transformation within 'religious reality' programmes are remarkably similar to those of other reality and makeover programmes: a desire to work on the 'self' and its relationship to wider culture; an emphasis on the need for rules and tasks in order to contain the work of self-development; the importance of submission to the process; and a final transformation into a 'better you' (Weber, 2009: 7). The end result is that the individual can operate in a more morally and socially acceptable way (see Skeggs and Wood, 2012) than they have done previously. In this regard, changing one's spiritual practice is perhaps little different in television discourse to changing one's diet, clothing, parenting style or home décor (see Lewis, 2008; Jones, 2008): it is just one aspect that can be used for transformation in the ongoing project of the self.

For the broadcasters, emphasising the 'good' that religion and spirituality can do whilst situating it as part of a life lived in moderation – something that can sit alongside

('stable' forms of) family life, working (but not too hard) and partying (but not to excess) enables them to fulfil a number of public service obligations. The overall effect of these programmes is to reconcile traditional religious disciplines with contemporary therapeutic techniques. In this way they cultivate a form of moral citizenship in which individuals look to the past and develop an openness to the sense that there is 'more' to life than they previously believed. Transformed in this way, they can function 'appropriately' within personal and working relationships – not doing their culture 'too much' but just enough to be 'good'.

Notes

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[1] Not to be confused with the 2013 BBC Three programme of the same name.

[2] Although my focus in this article is particularly on this 'religious reality' sub-genre, this was not the only example of reality television and religion/spirituality on British TV. Programmes such as *World's Strictest Parents* and *No Sex Please We're Teenagers* offered religious discipline as part of participants' transformations, whilst religious participants can often be found in popular reality shows like *Big Brother* and *The Voice UK*. Programmes like *Make Bradford British* and *Wife Swap* used interaction between people from different faiths as central to their appeal. Travelogue forms of reality with well-known presenters exploring different faiths have also been popular in recent years (e.g. *The Beginner's Guide…* and *Extreme Pilgrim*)

[3] *The Monastery* and *The Convent* were the only series to feature single-sex groups – the others all had mixed-sex groups (except *Spirituality Shopper*, which focused on one individual per week) although occasionally male and female participants would meet separately. *The Convent*'s four participants were all white and (appeared to be) middle-class, whilst the other series featured a mixture of classes and races.

[4] This notion is not unique to the programmes in this paper – several factual television programmes, including *Electric Dreams* and *The 1900 House* ask participants to adopt past practices, lifestyles and technologies as a way of becoming 'better' people in the present.

[5] *Make Me a Christian*, the follow-up series, utilises almost exactly the same voiceover, substituting Islam for Christianity.

[6] And, indeed, their 'real' experiences in these environments (see Deller, 2012: 256-257).

[7] It's worth noting that only certain forms of confession are filmed – these may occur in one-on-one sessions with mentors, group sessions or video diary confessionals, but we don't see, for instance, a Catholic confessional booth in the series set in Catholic monasteries and convents.

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