

Aca-Media EP69: Reality TV Labor and Unionization

Christine Becker 00:14

Welcome to the Aca-Media podcast brought to you by the Society for Cinema and Media Studies.

Michael Kackman 00:21

And the Association of Prepositions.

Christine Becker 00:23

Yes, sir. We should seek a sponsorship. I'm sure there's an organization like that out there somewhere. We could get some free prepositions. I don't know.

Michael Kackman 00:30

I think so. I mean, there's Lolly, Lolly, Get Your Adverbs Here. There's gotta be a, you know.

Christine Becker 00:35

Yeah, we gotta work that angle. We've done this many episodes, and we don't have a sponsorship.

Michael Kackman 00:44

Yeah, we might as well.

Christine Becker 00:45

Well, I mean, we do, we have SCMS, of course.

Michael Kackman 00:47

We do. We do.

Christine Becker 00:48

Yeah.

Michael Kackman 00:48

I am Michael Kackman at the University of Notre Dame.

Christine Becker 00:51

I am Christine Becker. Still not at the University of Notre Dame right now.

Michael Kackman 00:55

So how are things going out there in not at University of Notre Dame land?

Christine Becker 01:00

It is good. I mean, I think when we last bantered, I mentioned how I was looking forward to it being November, and it is November and you know, not to be a jerk. But the weather's really nice.

Michael Kackman 01:12

Hey, it's pretty good up here too, it's, the sun is shining. It's 55 degrees.

Christine Becker 01:17

That's perfect. That's perfect.

Michael Kackman 01:19

It's okay.

Christine Becker 01:20

Late fall weather.

Michael Kackman 01:20

Yeah. I have a topical question. You getting a lot of work done?

Christine Becker 01:27

I was for a good while there, like I was as efficient as you can be. In September, I wrote a whole chapter. And then October came, and I had a few trips. And then you know, just sort of like turned a little bit more to research than writing. And so now I'm trying to get that train chugging again. And it really is hard when you stop to get that momentum going again. So I'm trying.

Michael Kackman 01:50

Well, thinking is working too. And that's what we're here to talk about this week.

Christine Becker 01:55

Yes, labor.

Michael Kackman 01:56

Yeah, see that was a good segue, wasn't it? It was, it was so subtle.

Christine Becker 02:05

Yeah, and we aren't breaking news, this has happened, whatever, 24 hours ago, and you'll not hear this for like a week after we record it. But finally the SAG-AFTRA strike is nearly over, there'll be a ratification vote, maybe that happens, you know, before this podcast is out, I'm not sure. But basically, the strike is over. Right? We have, you know, kind of labor rest at this point. But a lot of fallout still to come from, you know, finding out what all these deals add up to, to, you know, people and especially below-the-line workers who have been out of work for many, many months, getting their lives back on track, moving back into their, you know, to LA, all of that kind of stuff. So still some upheaval to come.

Michael Kackman 02:46

Yeah, it'll be interesting to see how things how things go getting these machines started back up again, because they don't exactly turn on a dime.

Christine Becker 02:54

Yeah. Well, and we have more on labor strife in Hollywood. And you might have heard a lot about it lately. I noticed it's being picked up by a lot of the industry, you know, sources like Puck and The Ankler, and this is reality TV, labor and efforts at unionization within reality TV.

Michael Kackman 03:13

I hate to spoil the lead, but it's not great.

Christine Becker 03:16

No, it's not.

Michael Kackman 03:18

Yeah, working conditions are pretty rough.

Christine Becker 03:20

Yeah, and in some ways, even worse than, you know, certainly scripted efforts. You've, you know, you may have heard also about challenges within the animation space. But for various reasons, it sounds like late reality TV is even worse. And if you don't know the particulars of that you're about to learn them, courtesy of our very own Stephanie Brown, who sat down with or sat at a zoom, I guess, with Andrea Ruehlicke, who is at the University of New Brunswick, for their a conversation about reality TV, labor and unionization efforts.

Michael Kackman 03:51

Let's go.

Andrea Ruehlicke 04:01

We are not the first people by far to note that reality cast members tend to be understudied. It's great that we're having this conversation. I think it's really important that legally we're starting to have this conversation. Obviously, it has existed but it's picking up some traction. And the news reports as the some of these lawsuits have been filed has definitely been much heavier than the news coverage surrounding the previous lawsuits that have been going on for decades at this point.

Stephanie Brown 04:29

You've likely been following the WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes that have disrupted film and television in order to secure more fair working conditions and pay for writers and actors. But you may not have been following as closely the lawsuits and calls for labor action within the realm of reality television. While it's not anything new for production companies or networks to face lawsuits from former cast members or contestants, there seem to be something more brewing lately from multiple ongoing lawsuits against Love is Blind production company Kinetic Content, to Bethenny Frankel's calls for unionization of reality stars back in July. We also spent the summer talking about exploitation and the responsibilities of producers to the safety of on screen talent in the wake of things like the firing of multiple cast members from Below Deck after producers had to intervene to stop sexual assault on camera. So to talk about reality TV and labor in the context of the ongoing labor actions, I decided to talk to Dr. Andrea Ruehlicke.

Andrea Ruehlicke 05:28

My name is Andrea Ruehlicke. And I am both a contract instructor in sociology and the assistant to the deans in the School of Graduate Studies at the University of New Brunswick,

Stephanie Brown 05:38

And her work on reality TV show contestants and the labor that they do.

Andrea Ruehlicke 05:43

So I wrote my dissertation on the labor of Canadian reality contestants, individuals that were participating in skill and talent based competition programs, people who were going on shows based on singing ability, fashionability and modeling ability dancing ability, trying to potentially pursue careers in various industries. A bunch of people were lovely with their time and were willing to talk to me about their experiences and how they navigated the process how they felt about the process.

Stephanie Brown 06:14

More recently, she wrote an article for *Celebrity Studies* about the echoes from the control studios had over actors during the heyday of the star system and the way that reality contestants lives and future work are similarly controlled by production companies and networks, but without any of the monetary reward or recognition, or even their labor being taken seriously.

Andrea Ruehlicke 06:34

In looking at that history, it gives us a sense of potential options for reality cast members today, who in many ways are beholden to a lot of these similar constrictions around their names, their lives, everything being recorded, compensation, and yet don't have kind of the benefits. At least the names in the studio system right were rewarded with for giving up that control over their image itself.

Stephanie Brown 07:01

To wit, Tim Gunn has been talking about the way *Project Runway* has been trying to own the work of its designers since the beginning of the show.

Media Clip 07:08

Tim Gunn: I'm with Jay McCarroll, the season one winner, going through his winning contract. We're going through it simultaneously. And we both reach page 11. And look at each other with wide, wide eyes saying, and I looked at him, I said you can't sign this. He said I won't sign it because it said that whatever Jay McCarroll earned from that point, forever 15% would go to Miramax.

Andrea Ruehlicke 07:41

Right, and also speaks to just the importance of having someone who has more bargaining power, because Tim can threaten to leave and things change, potentially or modified, whereas a contestant threatens to leave, and the stakes are much less lower. It's like, oh, well, if you want to choose if you want to throw this opportunity away. So they're still beholden to a lot of those rules, but don't have the rewards. And so if we're looking at how that has changed for actors, then we can see potentially some movement forward for cast members today.

Stephanie Brown 08:13

She also talked about the secrecy required by contestants that disrupts their lives before the show even airs.

Andrea Ruehlicke 08:20

Because a lot of individuals can't tell or are very limited to who they can tell that they're going to be on a program until it airs or until the ads start coming out for it off, people had to create kind of whole webs of half truth as to why they weren't going to be available in their regular lives for a month to two months. How do you ask for help in arranging childcare when you can't really tell anyone why you won't be there for two months, and just kind of the spreadsheets and like life control that people had to think about.

Stephanie Brown 08:53

And the way that we often forget, as an audience, even those of us who study this, how much control producers and editors have over the way a contestant or cast member comes across in the edit.

Andrea Ruehlicke 09:03

And because people are bound by fairly restrictive lawsuits or the fear of fairly restrictive lawsuits. There's just so much of it that has never been really talked about. And so this is exactly what I study, and I'm still shocked constantly at just like the layers of things, but of course, so many of us buy into the magic of the show. We know things are edited. We know people are maybe coached in some ways or like encouraged and then you know, maybe not at all. Everything is... everything is a lot.

Stephanie Brown 09:36

We also talked about the potential for some kind of unionization of reality show talent in the wake of particularly Bethenny Frankel's calls for unionization in July.

Andrea Ruehlicke 09:46

In the past, it has always been times of turbulence in the industry. Extras were brought in to SAG-AFTRA because there was a potential cutting down of pay for actors, and so in an attempt to boost numbers, all the sudden it was like, we need we need people in the union. And so extras were brought in that way, what we're seeing currently kind of in this moment of turbulence, hence the strikes, there is a potential to kind of see these joint concerns for everyone working in the industry. And potentially, this is the moment where reality cast members and or writers are brought into the various unions. And yet, when extras were brought in, for example, there was, in some ways a creation of a caste system in the union in that they often didn't work enough or have enough hours to actually get a vote in what was happening, but were still expected to abide by the rules. And yet, once they were ensconced in the union, their working conditions did change and improve, and they were able to use the union and the union was there to help fight for their working conditions as well. So yeah, it doesn't always look great. But also once, once you're in the union, history suggests that it does help. Yeah. And then in July, we kind of see the introduction of Bethenny Frankel from the Housewives franchise, and she has started talking about the unionization of reality stars is starting to do interviews about it.

Media Clip 11:21

Q: Bethenny, why should reality stars join the striking SAG union workers and the WGA writers? Bethenny Frankel: I think that we should have our own union and terms that networks and streamers should abide by there are different issues. It's a different medium and some issues overlap. But there are different circumstances.

Andrea Ruehlicke 11:42

And has been in contact with, or her two lawyers, Mark Geragos and Brian Friedman, have been talking to and have sent letters to NBC that they are planning on or in the process of launching a lawsuit and have a number of reality cast members who are having talks with them potentially signing on to this lawsuit.

Stephanie Brown 12:06

There, of course, also been numerous lawsuits over the years by reality show talent against production companies for the kind of exploitation we've been talking about.

Andrea Ruehlicke 12:14

But some of the bigger ones that are worth talking about. In 2017, for instance, there was the stars of The Little Couple from TLC ended up suing TLC's parent company and the producer, Cable Group, over ownership rights to the program. And while their appeals, I believe their appeals are still ongoing, so far, the only settlements that have occurred have been between the production companies. So even when lawsuits are filed, it's not always the individual themselves who benefits from that lawsuit. Back in 2014, there were 10 American Idol contestants, Black American Idol contestants, who had come together to allege the program exploited their criminal or criminal background checks and rap sheets of black contestants. But it was largely dismissed when it was ruled that 9 out of the 10 plaintiffs had not filed in time. You know, there's a number of lawsuits, but I think to me, those two are kind of key ones because there once were, they were dismissed or ongoing.

Stephanie Brown 13:16

More recently, there has been a great deal of attention on lawsuits brought by participants on Netflix's dating show Love is Blind, both of them alleging exploitative conditions, a lack of food, false imprisonment, and the more recent of which alleges the production failed to protect a female contestant from sexual assault.

Andrea Ruehlicke 13:32

So late 2022. A Love is Blind contestant Jeremy Hartwell has filed a lawsuit against both Kinetic and Delirium TV about the Love is Blind working conditions. And then Nick Thompson, who is also from Love is Blind, the two of them are doing a lot of interviews together to talk about labor conditions and exploitative conditions.

Media Clip 13:54

Nick Thompson: They are in control of every element of your life. You're put in a hotel room, and you don't have a key. You don't have access to water unless you want to drink it out of the faucet or the shower. We're all just sitting there not being fed on any kind of regular cadence. But definitely being fed a lot of alcohol. My body was just exhausted and dehydrated.

Andrea Ruehlicke 14:17

And then they start You Can.

Media Clip 14:20

Nick Thompson: Hello everyone, welcome to this episode. Today we have two guests. First we have Dr. Isabel Morley, who is a licensed clinical psychologist and co-founding board member and director of mental health for the unscripted cast advocacy network or the You Can Foundation. And we have Jeremy Hartwell, who is a performance coach and consultant and co-founder and executive of executive director of the You Can Foundation.

And what is the You Can Foundation if you haven't heard? We provide mental health support to past current and future reality TV stars.

Andrea Ruehlicke 14:53

It is interesting that they're focusing on kind of the entire lifespan of participation in that their hoping to talk to people who are thinking about going on reality TV to kind of potentially providing more sense of what you might be getting into and to look over contracts. And then also to connect anyone after the facts or after filming, or who's still kind of in that realm, both as a connection point so that people can come together and talk about experiences and also to, if needed or desired, to link people up to mental health supports across the country. What is fascinating to me about this, is how this is, in some ways, a formalization of what a lot of the individuals I talked to were already kind of doing. Well, the shows just had kind of developed unofficial networks of support, and that people will tend to reach out to the next season of cast members to check in on them, see how they're doing, just let them know that they existed, right? Like there is this kind of shared community to have a stable and formalized thing, but it's not kind of reliance on one particular show, or one person or one group, small group of people kind of doing all of this labor, I think is a really important and helpful step forward. Right, like, becomes a visible tool to help promote things like potentially unionization.

Stephanie Brown 16:18

Of course, these lawsuits tend to bring out folks saying things like, well, what did you expect when you're going on a reality show, you knew what you were getting into.

Andrea Ruehlicke 16:25

Even people who watched the shows to prepare and had a sense of, oh, this is probably a thing that's going to come up or this is probably a challenge that like I should be prepared for. They went in thinking they had a decent sense of what would be expected of them, that they couldn't, they were prepared for the tasks themselves that would be set out for them. Oh, I know, I'll have to dance every week or create dishes on the fly or what have you. But they were not ready for the mental and emotional toll that that takes and how kind of being cut off from all of your support systems, right? Like what happens when you're done. At the end of the day, you can't scroll TikTok, you can't call a friend, you can't do anything other than like just exist in a world and be filmed. Yeah, that there was absolutely no way that anyone could have prepared them for that. And so the sense of like, you know, what you're getting into, from what everyone has said, You just can't know what you're getting into until you're there. And then the stakes are so much higher. Yeah, and that I know, a couple of people I talked to talked about even the like leaving the filming environment when they were done. And just not being prepared for sunlight or crowds or sounds, because everything is largely silent, except for the people you're talking to for. Right, because you want decent quality audio for filming, you can't have music playing because of rights potentially, unless it's a song you're creating in your head on the moment. And so it was just quiet and isolated. And then you go out in the real world. And there are lights and sounds and people, and it had only been a month, a couple days, two months for some people. And it was just like such a culture shock. But they weren't expecting to have to hit them like that.

Stephanie Brown 18:19

On the other hand, unexpectedly many of the folks she interviewed for her dissertation had a surprising answer when asked if they'd go on a show if they could go back in time and do it over again.

Andrea Ruehlicke 18:29

Well, one of the most fascinating things for me in talking to people who have been on shows was how many people including people who had a terrible time on it set that they would do it again. And obviously I don't know what reasoning before that. But I think in some ways part of it is a desire to have a second go at it, right, like now you've experienced it now you know, you have more of a sense of what you're getting into. So a chance to like take those lessons and see what you can do. feels kind of like a natural. I want to do it again. I want to get better.

Stephanie Brown 19:05

Of course, we couldn't end without talking about the Scandoval.

Media Clip 19:10

Alright, the pop cultural story of the year broke in March when the hit reality show Vanderpump Rules was rocked by a shocking cheating scandal. Ariana Madix and Tom Sandoval's breakup was fodder for tabloid headlines as the relationship painfully unraveled in front of millions of people. Ariana is joining us now for our first morning show interview since the break up.

Stephanie Brown 19:31

And about how Andrea thinks it ties into bigger conversations about the growing awareness and naming of exploitation and precarity and labor on reality TV.

Andrea Ruehlicke 19:40

All of the media attention and like all of the ways that that circulated through the discourse and all of the podcasts and interviews and I think in some ways is kind of instrumental. I do not think I would think this much about Scheana or Adriana or Tom Sandoval in terms of being the forefront of recent ideas of labor production. But I think because of scandal and how much attention Vanderpump Rules and its cast was given in the last couple of months, and how visible kind of the circuit have going on and various podcasts or TV shows to talk about the labor involved and timelines and who is doing what where, I think that season has kind of really brought attention to both the constructive nature, as we can see the breakdown and timelines, when we were filming this, somehow this didn't get filmed. because so much of their life is happening not on camera, which clearly belies the fact that it's just filling your lives and we're cashing everything. But I think in having everyone talk about their feelings and what was happening and who was filming when and who knew what, there was a wider cultural conversation, even as everyone is just talking about scandal, all right, and who's cheating on who and who knew what when, we're seeing the constructive nature of the filming process and how much work is happening. And in terms of heartbreak, right, like the real life emotional consequences of filming. And so I think having this happened when it did, in some ways created this, more cultural awareness, so that Jeremy's lawsuit, which was filed before a lot of us were thinking about Vanderpump Rules in this way, all of a sudden, that conversation seems more timely, when people are saying to talk about Love is Blind, you can see those connections to like a smaller version of what's happening in these shows. And it's just kind of making all of those connections and labor more visible for a lot of people. And now that those conversations are happening, more and more people are being brought in, and more and more people safety in numbers is always a thing. So more and more former contestants, current contestants, cast mates, what have you, can talk about their experiences. And so we're getting kind of a fuller sense as this acknowledgement of this as labor is coming as SAG-AFTRA and the WGA are also talking about all of the labor that they're doing. We're seeing kind of this confluence of 'look at all the ways the entertainment industry is a nightmare.' And how many people you would think to be doing well, or having financial success or being a name, are also making clear that they are not doing as well as we might think. The top of the pyramid is a lot smaller

than a lot of us like to imagine. And so everything is kind of just coming together at this cultural moment, as people are just talking about unions far more. And I think, reality television, potentially cast members, anyone involved in it, is aware, everyone is aware that the strike potentially creates a space where they're seen as the safety option, right. Networks don't have to bargain with the unions because they can rely on reality television, until I think, intentional or not, there's a very kind of clear sense of, 'we're not pawns to be used in this way. This is our opportunity to join in these labor struggles and have a space for voices to be heard, rather than a product to be exploited.'

Stephanie Brown 23:09

Thanks again to Andrea Ruehlicke, and you can read her article in *Celebrity Studies* from volume 13, from 2022. called "Everything Old is New Again: Reality Television Celebrity, The Hollywood Studio System and the Battle for Control of One's Image" and her dissertation, "So You've Been on a Show: the Lifecycle and Labor of Reality Television Contestants."

Christine Becker 23:32

So excellent work by Stephanie there, and thanks so much to Andrea Ruehlicke for sharing her expertise with us.

Michael Kackman 23:37

Yeah, it's an area of media work that a lot of people just don't pay attention to, or they don't think of it as work or they don't think of it as being about performance. And none of that stuff is true, of course.

Christine Becker 23:51

Yeah, I was thinking it's sort of like, you know, the way at conferences 10-15 years ago, we'd always say like, you know, no one's working on *Two and a Half Men*, everyone is watching it, no one's working on it. Because it felt like the something that no one really, I shouldn't say no one, but a lot of academics don't care for it. So they didn't work on it. It was seen as sort of like beneath the the prestige drama people wanted to work on the quality TV. And it seems like that same kind of realm, right? That it's in particularly as it comes up in the conversation there of, well, what did these people expect? They did reality TV, right. And that sort of dismissal of reality TV as something legitimate. And so I really, really am glad Andrea is working on this because I think it's really important, overlooked work.

Michael Kackman 24:33

Clearly the production companies think that it's that the dollars are legitimate. Yeah, and the cable TV schedules that are completely full of this stuff. Like they think it's legitimate. And so the people who were actually donating their lives and personalities and images to it, then we should treat them as legitimate too.

Christine Becker 24:53

Yeah, and that's the tough thing because the you know, that cheapness of reality TV to produce is the feature, not the bug for management, and I think that's a lot of the, you know, additional things I've read about this are that it's actually pretty unlikely you're going to end up having unionization effort because it can be so cheaply made, and you can swap out people relatively easily. So you don't have the kind of you know, kind of fighting force that you do with SAG or the WGA through reality TV. And so that seems like a difficult road ahead for this.

Michael Kackman 25:27

Yeah, for most of these people, they're not, they're not looking at a career of moving from production to production to production. It's, it's a one time thing, or maybe they'll, you know, do a follow up or something if it's really popular, but this is not. these are not career jobs. And so there's there isn't that kind of built-in mechanism to protect working conditions for yourself down the line, it's purely about whoever comes next.

Christine Becker 25:53

Yeah. The other piece I found really interesting is the use of terminology like "unscripted," right, which is a misnomer, in terms of the fact that there is writing going on, but it's the kind of, you know, the way in which, in our realm in, in college athletics, and the idea of the term "student-athlete" came up because they didn't want them called employees. Because if you call the athletes employees, you're responsible for things like worker's comp. And now we all just, I casually use the word student-athlete myself, but every time I use it, I stop and think like, wait a minute, you're using the word they want you to use, so it's framed how they want to, basically, so that, you know, they don't have to pay as much as they want. It's the same kind of thing here, as well.

Michael Kackman 26:41

I guess, you know, it'd be nice to be able to be a little bit hopeful that there's a kind of cumulative effect, have the attention to these kinds of workplace issues across different industries and across different kinds of work. And that there's a little bit of a rising tide lifts all boats kind of thing. Because I think you can't uncracked that egg once people recognize that a certain kinds of work exists and, and see its relationship to other kinds of work, then it's really, really hard to, you know, you've there's a kind of ethical obligation of witnessing there, I think, you know, once you realize that, yes, these are, which, of course, shouldn't take a moment of realization, but somehow it does, to recognize that these are humans who are being... Yeah, maybe they chose to be there, but they didn't choose to be abused and locked in hotel rooms and completely surrender their bodily autonomy, just to get one bite at this, you know, magic apple.

Christine Becker 27:51

Yeah. And I think at least another byproduct of labor organization and movements is education. So of course, they're fighting for contracts. But, you know, I learned so much more about how writers do what they do, and actors do what they do, or issues like AI, right, and understand ways in which AI are going to be used, is going to be used because of what, you know, the actors were fighting for. And so, you know, I've learned a ton about reality TV from the conversation we just heard and the ways in which the industry itself is starting to pay attention to it. So, you know, labor movements help educate as well. I think that's, that's something we've all learned a lot about in the last few years as those movements have really risen.

Michael Kackman 28:33

Absolutely. Well, these are interesting times, and the conversation is clearly not over.

Christine Becker 28:38

Yeah, well, speaking of that, no segue. We don't talk too much about things that happen at Notre Dame just because who else cares. But, you know, something recently happened at Notre Dame that is very much on the national radar. And I wasn't there, so I want to hear all about it. Michael, tell me about what happened at Notre Dame last Friday.

Michael Kackman 28:59

Oh yeah, well, you know, it was a lovely South Bend Friday. And we put on a little, we put on a little thing. We hosted a day-long symposium about drag and performance in popular culture. And Pam Wojcik, our chair and regular SCMS member and occasional leader, she ran a one credit class on the history of drag representations. And she was starting, you know, way, way back. She had silent material and classical Hollywood and TV and you know, all kinds of stuff. And then our culminating event for that rather lively day was a performance with Blair St. Clair from RuPaul's Drag Race, and a couple of local folks as well. So we had a, we had a thing.

Christine Becker 30:02

And it got a little, a little bit of attention.

Michael Kackman 30:04

And honestly, a tiny handful of students and probably their faculty advisors were grumpy about it and didn't think that our university should host such a thing, that it shouldn't exist on this campus. And they were disappointed because their campaign to get the president and provost to cancel it was unsuccessful. We had, we had good support, I think from the upper administration that recognized that what we were doing was yeah, there was a performance, but there was also a lot of information and a lot of different kinds of points of view that were represented. I think, honestly, yeah, the performance was fun, and it was great, and the performers were great. But we had a panel organized by some grad students from the Law School, who, and there are also a couple of performers that participated in that panel, talking about drag bans. And they had an attorney who was deeply involved in multiple drag ban lawsuits. And honestly, it was really, really eye opening. I mean, I feel like I generally pay attention to these kinds of things and have some sense of what's going on. But the way that they were able to really kind of articulate the issues and make a really impassioned defense of not just the First Amendment, but the Sixth and the Fourteenth. And, and really talking about it in talking about drag bans alongside other kinds of speech bans and connecting it to things like religious liberty was really, really great. And my only disappointment is that the people who were praying loudly outside, desperately hoping that they could cancel the whole thing, that they didn't come in and actually sit down and engage in a conversation because they might learn something.

Christine Becker 32:08

Right, yeah. And, you know, the kind of, you know, and I don't know that dialogue happens in those kinds of situations, especially when you have one side that's very intractable. But I, you know, I think that's one, you know, some of the issues I have with things that go on at Notre Dame, I think, at least it's a place that welcomes those kinds of questions. And if multiple sides are willing to talk, those dialogues can happen. So yeah, it would have been nice to, you know, if that kind of thing could have happened, but again, I don't know how realistic it is that they would be interested in sharing their... or hearing.

Michael Kackman 32:44

Yeah, you never know. And maybe, maybe it planted something that somebody will think about later. And that's okay. One thing that was really, really clear was that the students who finally felt like they were represented, and they had a space where there was institutional power being exerted to protect their ability to own that space. That was really, really great. You know, there were, yeah, there were students there who clearly didn't feel like they could be visible in the ways that they were visible there in the rest of their lives, or at least the rest of their lives on campus. And that was really, really palpable. And honestly, the thank you notes that came in, not just from individual students, but from people from interesting places all across campus was really, really great. And I'm not

gonna name names or, or institutions or departments, but it was, you know, there were a lot of people who were who were thankful that we managed to put this together. And so I'm, I'm proud to have helped. I am really, really grateful to Pam Wojcik for stepping out right out front and, and taking a lot of bullets from that she didn't deserve to have taken, but she did. And we had Hollis Griffin, from the University of Michigan and Meredith Heller from University of Northern Arizona, who both gave really great keynotes. Good stuff. So it was a it was a big success, as far as I'm concerned.

Christine Becker 34:24

Well, that's great then, an ideal of that kind of event where, you know, you have the kind of academic realm around it. And so we all learn something, but also it sounds like there's a lot of joy in the event as well. So that's, that's great way to put it, and hope that carries on in some way.

Michael Kackman 34:41

Me too. Me too. And I hope it's not the last. I don't think it will be.

Christine Becker 34:45

Yeah, and I hope Pam can safely check your email these days.

Michael Kackman 34:50

Well, you know, there's a lot of noise made about there being 1,200 emails of complaint, the vast majority of them were generated by an AI auto-form. And so the same typos and grammatical errors came through in every single one. So that was actually kind of handy, made it really easy to sort.

Christine Becker 35:10

Yeah. Yeah, exactly, put a filter on a couple of those misspellings and you're good to go. That was fine. All right. All right. Cool.

Michael Kackman 35:17

All right. I think the beautiful fall day is calling out to us. So thanks for listening to us in your ears. We are grateful to the Society for Cinema and Media Studies and to the University of Notre Dame for their support.

Christine Becker 35:33

Thank you to Stephanie Brown, who is at Washington College, and thank you to her interview partner and Andrea Ruehlicke at the University of New Brunswick.

Michael Kackman 35:40

Also, we are grateful to our other co-conspirators, Todd Thompson at the University of Texas,

Christine Becker 35:46

and Frank Mondelli at the University of Delaware. And then next episode you're gonna hear our first bit of work from one of our new participants is Jonathan Nichols Pethick, who will chat with his DePauw Media Studies colleague, Jordan Sjol about shows JCMS article about medium specificity, as well as his work as a co writer of the recent film How to Blow Up a Pipeline, so look for that soon, a fascinating conversation.

Michael Kackman 36:10

All right. Good stuff coming up in the pipeline.

Christine Becker 36:14

Ah, well done. At least it wasn't a banjo joke.