

INSIDER | SPOTLIGHT



Mark Bouris of *The Apprentice*; Emily and Sam on *The Bachelor*; and Australian Idol contestant Emelia Rusciano.

Reality TV is just unreal

Andrew Fenton and Anna Brain reveal how far producers will go to create 'real-life' dramas

Sleep deprivation, no food, setting you up to fail and race-casting are some of the sneaky tricks reality TV producers use to make their viewing figures look good — and their contestants look bad.

Only a few insiders are brave enough to speak out, with competitors forced to sign confidentiality agreements, and producers and crew fearful they may never work again if they spill the beans.

One of the most widely used strategies is depriving contestants of sleep and food to heighten their emotions. “(They) used to say ‘tired equals tears’ and make us get up at 4am for hair and make-up — even though we did our own,” says former *My Kitchen Rules* contestant Emily Cheung (of Carly and Emily fame). And with shooting days often stretching for 16 or 17 hours, “We were all very over-tired and more inclined to overreact”.

Former Australian Idol contestant Em Rusciano agrees. “When we (first) got to Sydney we had to stay up for 24 hours straight, we didn’t eat,” she says. Rusciano recalls producers trying to provoke her about being separated

from her baby for the first time. “Are you missing your daughter? Then a camera would appear when my tears came so I got pigeon-holed as the crying contestant.”

One producer admits that when a contestant was injured on the show, the first thought was not for her welfare. “On a day off the house minder took the girls down to the beach and one of the girls broke her leg,” the producer remembers. “I went ‘Oh no! Did you get it on camera?’”

Many of these incidents could have been lifted directly from the TV program *UnREAL* — a bitchy, behind-the-scenes drama about a morally bankrupt Bachelor-esque reality program by co-creator Sarah Gertrude Shapiro, who worked on the US *Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*.

Bachelor Australia contestant Emily Simms revealed recently she felt manipulated and edited into the role of “bitch”. She also claimed the rose ceremonies are often held at midnight after heavy drinking and says she’s now been banned from media interviews. A *Bachelor Australia* insider, speaking on condition of anonymity, says

producers engineer situations where whatever happens results in good television.

So in the first group date — a photo shoot — producers arranged for the “strong and outgoing” Emily to be shot in her underwear with a shirtless Sam Wood in a recreation of the famous pottery scene from the film *Ghost*.

“(We knew) it would get a reaction from some of the girls,” the insider says.

Like on *UnREAL*, the girls

are assigned character types. “When we cast a show ... we’re thinking ‘you’re going to be our Country Girl’, ‘you’re our Bitch,’” the insider says.

Older or overweight contestants need not apply. “Nope, because people are basically shallow.”

Unfortunately there are race-based casting rules too — even if many in the industry are uncomfortable about that fact. “Are there rules? Absolutely,” says the insider.

“Look how many people who are cast are not white, Anglo Saxon. But they are getting better and we now actually second guess ourselves on all reality shows and say: ‘This week we’re eliminating the Asian girl — is that too soon?’”

Cheung says she and her sister were cast as the “token Asians” by *MKR*’s producers and pushed into submitting recipes for, and cooking, Asian dishes, which are not their speciality. She believes the producers set them up for failure in the instant restaurant round when they had to cook a Chinese dish they weren’t familiar with — smoked quail — and scored two out of 10. “Manu asked me: ‘What happened? What went wrong?’” recalls Cheung. “I said ‘we’ve never cooked quail before’. He said ‘why would you choose it?’ I said ‘we didn’t’. They (producers) said ‘we can’t air that, we’ll have to do it again’.”

It was a similar story in a Port Douglas “honesty box challenge” in which the team who arrived at each location first got their pick of produce. Cheung says the producers deliberately left too little

seafood for the other contestants to make it look like they took too much.

“They know just how much of each ingredient to leave to get a catfight going,” she says.

“In a game where money is at stake, the other contestants believed we had tried to sabotage them.” The next day Cheung says producers spent half an hour in a “48 degree room” trying to encourage them to “admit” it on camera.

“For half an hour we were at loggerheads with the producers who wanted us to say we took the seafood because we want to win. We knew that would be the promo for the week, so we wouldn’t say it,” Cheung says.

A former *Apprentice* contestant feels similarly manipulated, saying he believed producers had already decided who they wanted to win when he was eliminated. “I had all the answers in the boardroom so then they’d have to rewrite the scripts for (host Mark) Bouris to reply to,” he says.

“I found it a little bit disappointing they’d already come up with an outcome and kept rewriting the boardroom scenes to suit themselves.”

They were just trying to make me look like an arse.”



Carly and Emily Cheung of *MKR*.