contrived. When you're watching reality TV, it's not 'real life', because no one wants to watch normal people doing normal things." Too true! What's *Big Brother* without tears, tantrums and the odd racist comment? "Viewers want drama, excitement and entertainment," he continues. "Basically, these shows are unscripted dramas."

So, does this mean that when Jade Goody stirred up a worldwide debate on racism following her disastrous appearance on last year's *Celebrity Big Brother*, it was all pretend? Not exactly. Robert dishes out the eight commandments of reality television to his students, which include: show confidence, not cockiness, say "yes" as often as possible and never say, "I am an actor." The third, believe it or not, relates back to my Dolly Parton rendition. It seems that reality TV is a genre all about being yourself, magnified through the lens of a television camera. In short, you become an exaggerated version of yourself – ergo, Jade Goody is even *more* obnoxious when the ON button is pressed. Robert's job is to help bring out people's natural tendencies – which they might normally play down when a camera is shoved in their face. "Not many people are comfortable in front of a camera," says Robert. "Our classes teach people to be natural in front of the camera."

Lesson 3: Spill

The next part of the seminar is a lesson in self-confidence. Before I know it, I'm bopping around the room with other members of the class. Eunice Apia, originally from Nigeria, explains that this exercise is all about losing ones inhibitions. As a filmmaker, she has been attending the class as a way to give her more confidence when she pitches ideas to film companies. "I work in a competitive industry," she explains. "This course has taught me to be less self-conscious and more self assured." And while I am silently cringing at the thought of utter strangers seeing my *Saturday Night Fever* hustle, I have to agree, it is fairly liberating.

> "THOU SHALL GROOM HAIRY PITTS"

During a coffee break, my classmates give me the lowdown on what they expect to achieve from the course. According to Maria Dejesus, an actress from Nicaragua, reality TV is about fifteen minutes of fame, nothing more. "I don't think reality TV has the power to propel me to superstardom," she acknowledges. "It's more about immediate exposure. That said, I would love to appear on something like *The Hills*." Zhana Saunders, a singer from Florida, says that the class has helped her audition technique, while Simone Xi, a novelist from China, is keen to break into show business and views a reality TV show a golden opportunity to gain exposure.

We reconvene for the last segment of the seminar, the focus of which is how to get as much camera time as possible. I'm slightly alarmed when I scan through my list of commandments and see 'Thou Shall Groom Hairy PITTS' half way down the list. Which, I spot, is explained in brackets as: Personal Issues To Tease. According to Robert, reality TV stars must be totally accessible physically, mentally and emotionally. Likewise, their relationships, family, home and work issues should be fair game for viewers. "People like to think they know the stars, so be open. If you've got 'mother issues', talk about them. It will endear you to viewers and give them something to gossip about. Plus, the more open you are, the more air time you'll have, which definitely increases popularity." That's all very well, but what if I don't want people knowing that my nasty ex-boyfriend dumped me via text, or that I have an irrational fear of spoons? "It's simple really," explains Robert. "If you're not willing to bare all, you're not reality TV material." What's the word? Oh yeah – next! ●

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BACK TO REALITY

Jennifer Hudson: She didn't even finish in the top five on *American Idol*, but an Oscar and a record deal later, Jennifer Hudson is definitely reaping the reward of her reality TV stint. You go girl!

Cheryl Cole: These days she's more famous for her teeny waistline and hubby, but before the tabloid tales, Cheryl was living the reality TV dream. After competing in *Popstars: The Rivals*, she won a place in pop band Girls Aloud.

Jade Goody: Okay, so we know the *Celebrity Big Brother* race row isn't exactly something you'd want to put on your CV, but since she first hit the reality TV scene in 2002, Jade Goody has amassed a fortune estimated to be in excess of £8million.

Leona Lewis: After winning *The X Factor*, Leona went on to break records when her debut single, *A Moment Like This* was downloaded 50,000 times within 30 minutes of its release. Forget *The X Factor*, that's wow factor!

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