

Embracing the obsession with reality television media essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Many shows which have gained major popularity in this era are based on reality television. My family is following the television show 'Bigg Boss' hysterically; and this makes me wonder about the obsession with reality television and its origins. When I think about it, I myself am unable to resist these shows, becoming a devout follower of shows like 'American Idol', 'So You Think You Can Dance', 'Top Chef' and many others. This makes me want to know, what is it that has even caused me to become obsessed with reality television, like so many others. Obsession is " the domination of one's thoughts or feelings by a persistent idea, image, desire, etc" (" Obsession") and unlike many consider it, is not necessarily bad. Thus, what I want to do is to completely understand the reasons behind this obsession with reality television, proving that it is good for people to watch these shows rather than ignoring them. To comprehend this obsession, we have to go over why some people relate to reality television, while others watch these shows for enjoyment, fascinating characters and skills, socializing and learning.

Reality television " is a genre of television programming in which the fortunes of " real life" people (as opposed to fictional characters played by actors) are followed" (" Reality television"). The first reality television show was 'Candid Camera' which came out in 1948 [and] has been called " the granddaddy of the reality TV genre" (Rowen). 'Candid camera' was a hidden camera show in which pranks were pulled on random people to catch their reactions, but no one at that time would have called it a reality television show or imagine the impact it would have on the future. Since then, reality television has evolved into many sub genres, such as game shows, talk shows, dating shows and many other forms. Even when it came out, reality

television gained international popularity, but it was not until MTV's 'The Real World' that it became an obsession; and in this day and age, it can be said that reality television has something for everyone.

A reason as to why people watch reality television is that they relate to the participants on it. In reality television shows, many people who are not professional actors get a shot at fame. 'Survivor' is an example of this, where people get an opportunity to win prizes and become famous, even though they do not have a rich or glamorous background. The feeling that anyone can be a contestant is a major reason as to what causes people to watch. Individuals hope that they might get a chance to win the grand prize and apply for a spot on the show given the opportunity; an example of this can be taken by looking at the 'American Idol' auditions and the sheer amount of people that take part in them. Peter van Beneden while writing about viewer identification with television characters says that according to a study by Sonia Livingstone it was " found that it was not sociological or demographic factors that influenced the interpretation, but psychological factors. The most important factor was identification." Furthermore, people tend to compare their own stories to those about the contestants on the show, like how the participants used to live before the show and how the loss of a loved one occurred and affected them. Also, people also on the basis of their occupations, some have jobs that are the same as the theme of the show, for example chefs watching 'Master Chef' and aspiring models in America watching 'America's Next Top Model'.

Now, a question that might arise from people connecting to characters on reality television shows is whether relating to the characters is good or <https://assignbuster.com/embracing-the-obsession-with-reality-television-media-essay/>

delusional. Several people believe that it gives individuals unrealistic expectations, thinking their lives will just work out like that on television. It has been said about reality television that "[i]t's a classic psychological flight into fantasy (flight as opposed to fight reaction), which, is easier than dealing with anything as real as our own problems" (Aazami). However, think of it in this way, if someone is delusional does it really involve reality television; the concept of people relating to someone existed far before the invention of reality television. Dr. John Grohol said something quite interesting about this, " if we start diagnosing people based upon how much they identify with a particular movie, wow, we'll have tens of thousands of new diagnoses tomorrow! In fact, I see so many teenage and young adult men who think they're Batman and really identify with that character." Moreover, is identifying with a person on television really that awful? If someone with a similar background is doing something remarkable on television, is that not something to be inspired from rather than something to disregard.

Watching reality television for amusement creates one of the major controversies going on due to the viewing of reality television. There are many fights on these shows and these attract a lot of spectators. 'The Jerry Springer show' got famous due to all the fights that occurred and the sheer stupidity of the people who were on it. The reason for this show getting popular can be considered that the audience just wanted to be entertained. Fights occur on a lot of reality television shows, where people are confined to a house; I think that even a lot of the viewers of 'Americas Next Top Model' watch it for the arguments. Furthermore, in numerous shows people do uncharacteristic things for attention and sometimes this leads to humiliation.

Stunts like these tend to make people talk and raise the popularity of the show. Eating weird items to earn money is a concept that has escalated in shows and this is because the creators of the shows realize that most people want to be entertained, not caring about how it happens and what the consequences are. Again, take the 'American Idol' auditions as an example, there are some interviewees that you admire, while others you can not help but laugh at. Using this as an outlet for amusement is not necessarily terrible, because people might use other sources to quell their thirst for satisfaction, which might be much more destructive.

Another thing to consider is whether laughing at others is moral and ethical. A large amount of people find the degradation of others demeaning. Reality television can be considered the guilty pleasure for many individuals and extremely addictive as well, because "[w]ith a combination of deception, sexual encounters, drunken ramblings and sudden outbursts it's no wonder that reality TV keeps viewers glued to their televisions week after week" (Rentmeester). However, if the people are willing to show their characters with all the quirks they possess with the risk of being laughed at, then why is laughing at them absurd, if they are doing something which is the embodiment of stupidity. Moreover, this kind of content attracts media attention and is probably not something that will end. Moreover, these situations are often even left to the perception of an individual and are usually not as harmful as they appear. If someone does something amazing, but embarrassing, would it not be better to commend them for their courage for actually attempting the feat rather than laughing at them. Furthermore, tabloids also make fun of people who have a sense of style which is different

compared to the consensus. In comparison to reality television, tabloids are almost never accused to be undignified. In addition, how are the activities shown on reality television shows any different from those shown in magazines?

According to the Steven Reiss, the Reiss profile " is a comprehensive, standardized, objectively validated instrument that assesses 16 basic psychological needs. Everybody embraces all 16 basic needs, but to different extents." One of those 16 basic needs is curiosity, which is the longing for knowledge. This yearning can be highlighted in people watching reality television for incredible people and skills. In the show 'Stan Lee's Superhumans', the host " Daniel Browning Smith, who's been dubbed the most flexible man in the world" (History. com) travels around the world looking for people that have some extraordinary talents, such as the man who is immune to electricity and the blind man who uses radar to ride his bicycle. My point of view is that humans are fascinated by anything that we ourselves are unable to do. Viewers watch these shows to find out what makes these people different, as most people try to appreciate things which they are not familiar with. In addition, many reality television shows contain disabled people doing amazing things, like the " hip-hop dancer who does not have legs [has] found fame after performing on the Indian version of " Britain's Got Talent"" (Arnold). These shows are watched; due to the fact that they show acts which we do not see in our daily lives and this curiosity makes us want more of that show. It enlightens people, as to how anything is possible with absolute dedication.

People might argue that reality television gives people impracticable expectations and over dramatizes things, but in a way is that not a good thing. Does it not compel people to believe that they can do activities, which they would not even have attempted? Think of reality television as a double edged sword. It gives people a chance to show their special skills and it gives them the opportunity to shine. To someone skilled, it is a weapon that can be used for fame, while to those who are not it might lead to mortification. Think again of " American Idol" and how the gifted even from small towns have become famous, while those who are less skilled are laughed at and then usually forgotten.

Reality television can also be considered as a social catalyst. From Reiss's profile, it was noted that " Significant but small differences were reported on the motives of social contact, honor, order, and romance" (Reiss and Wiltz). Most of the 16 motives in the Reiss profile indicate that the people who watch reality television usually long for some kind of human contact, like the motive of family which is " the need to raise children" (Reiss). Equally important, vengeance which is one of the motives involves other people, although it is a negative characteristic. Furthermore, it gives some people who find it hard to start a conversation, a new and interesting topic to discuss with colleagues and friends. Steven Reiss and James Wiltz write relating to this point of view that when they conducted a survey of 239 people it was found that

Two of the most commonly repeated " truths" about reality TV viewers are that they watch in order to talk with friends and coworkers about the show, and that they are not as smart as other viewers. But our survey results show <https://assignbuster.com/embracing-the-obsession-with-reality-television-media-essay/>

that both of these ideas are incorrect. Although some people may watch because it helps them participate in the next day's office chat, fans and nonfans score almost equally when tested on their sociability.

This indicates that fans of reality television have the same sociability compared to those who do not like reality television, so it can be inferred that reality television does not destroy social contact, but actually helps it; as it provides people a matter to discuss.

Some people argue that sitting at home and watching reality television is a waste of time and equivalent to end of ones social life, because the person leaves home less and loses socializing abilities. However, reality television lets communities gather together in support of a fellow member of the society in a show, such as when the hometowns of contestants on 'American Idol' come together and have parties to commemorate the participant's success. Likewise, people take their families and friends to sit in the audience of talk shows and game shows, to have fun and watch the show. Hence, if there is so much social contact as a result of these shows, it can be said that reality television is not the killer of social activity that many consider it to be, but rather a tool that can be used for socializing.

Furthermore, there are some people that watch reality television to learn. Reality television is not just fun and games mixed with heaps of drama; it does tend to teach a few lessons and skills, every now and then. Such as, there are instructional shows which teach anyone who is willing to watch, about how to cook food, renovate houses and many other activities. Shows like 'Project Runway' help anyone who watches to acquire knowledge about

the current fashion trends and informs individuals about clothes and accessories which a person should never wear. Similarly, shows like 'Who wants to be a Millionaire' educates people and raises their general knowledge about the world. On these shows, people make a lot of mistakes and rather than just making fun of these mistakes, people can actually gain knowledge from these mistakes. The reason why some people make sure history is not forgotten is to make sure we do not make the same mistakes as our ancestors; I think reality television can be used the same way in this generation.

The problem countless individuals have with these shows is that the information given on these shows is always the same and nothing original ever comes on these shows. Also, one might argue that there are far better methods of learning. However, if people are watching television anyway, should they not do something constructive with their time and watch reality television as a source of information. Also, the knowledge being shown might be something new for some people and it might even educate people on how something common is done properly. "" Television is appealing. And if you can use that to help teach your child about something, that's pretty powerful," Rivadeneyra says. " With reality TV, we can teach our kids to think critically about what they're watching. What's real about the shows and what's not. It's important for them to have media literacy"" (Weinstein).

In America, " Survivor led the ratings in 2001-02, and Idol has topped the ratings three consecutive years (2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07)" (Aazami).

This evidence suggests that reality television has dominated the world of the television and it is further stated that " The shows Survivor, the Idol series, <https://assignbuster.com/embracing-the-obsession-with-reality-television-media-essay/>

The Amazing Race, the America's Next Top Model series, the Dancing With The Stars series, The Apprentice, " Fear Factor" and Big Brother have all had a global effect, having each been successfully syndicated in dozens of countries" (Aazami). These statistics are quite compelling, it was noted that " Over 15 million people watched the first " Survivor" that figure rose to 18 million the second week" (oregonstate. edu). These numbers keep on escalating, such that " 23 million tuned in [to watch] 'Multi-Millionaire' and 51 million watched the finale of 'Survivor'" (Reality TV's Real Survivor 77). Also, in a study it was noted that between the ages of 18-29 around 68% of the people either liked or loved reality television (oregonstate. edu). As mentioned before, there are many reasons to watch these shows and thus it attracts such a large audience.

In my perspective, people who are against this obsession with reality television do have some good points, such as people spending way too much time watching television and the networks preying on the viewers by showing them non-stop advertisements. Nevertheless, there are ways to cut down the number of hours that are spent watching reality television such as, downloading the episodes and only going over the interesting parts, without any advertisements. Also, by not viewing the shows alone and by not watching the elimination episodes one can save huge amounts of time (Pagliarini). Audiences are often made to vote and many consider it a waste of money. However, I think that the huge amount of people who vote, vote because it gives them a feeling of empowerment.

Reality TV has given the audience more and more power over the years.

Whether you get to vote for the winner, or vote for something the
<https://assignbuster.com/embracing-the-obsession-with-reality-television-media-essay/>

contestants have to do, or just play a game to win a prize, the audience has more to do other than just watch the show. What other shows are there where you can possibly affect the outcome besides Reality TV? (Suzanne)

. As stated, by going over people how people relate, laugh, admire, socialize and learn using reality television it can be said that reality television does have its negatives, but there are far more advantages of watching reality television. Also, reality television has something that appeals to everyone and if viewed properly, can be of great help in different aspects of life for the viewer. Hence, the obsession which comes with reality television is not something that should be ignored, but rather embraced.