

Caitlin Flanagan's beware the open-plan kitchen: a study of the perils that come ...

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In Caitlin Flanagan's article "Beware the Open-Plan Kitchen", she discusses how HGTV has taken the dreams of the American people and shown them how "easy" they are to reach, without ever addressing the problems that these dreams can cause. Flanagan states that:

"Today, House Hunters, like all HGTV shows, follows a formula as inflexible as the Latin Mass. You meet the buyers (usually a couple), learn where they live and what their budget is, and watch as they describe marriage-busting differences of opinion in a way that makes them look like they're choosing what to watch on Netflix... By the time we bid them farewell, they're in the great room, sipping white wine from giant, reality-TV wineglasses and purring like kittens" (Flanagan, Vulture. com).

In this statement, Flanagan is describing the basis of the programming aired on HGTV. By summing up every show in one paragraph, readers have an easier time understanding the point that Flanagan is trying to get across.

Flanagan points out that when HGTV first started in 1994, it was much different than it is now. "The shows were homey, centered on thrift, and they often starred regional celebrities making crafts or minor house repairs" (Flanagan, Vulture. com). However, five years later, a new show called House Hunters introduced us to the "new" HGTV. "This wasn't about people dicking around with their bathrooms or dithering over a few feet of floor tile. This was going all the way. This was buying a house." (Flanagan, Vulture. com) That is where it all started. House Hunters introduced us to this new

idea of bigger, better homes that can bring happiness to anyone. These types of shows give the false sense that a new home with walk-in closets and huge kitchens will solve all the world's problems. As for those who did not have the money to buy a whole new house, they merely had to shell out a few grand and do it themselves. HGTV soon started airing shows where they "flipped" houses. It is like moving, but without actually relocating. These shows came in the form of "an endless loop of television in which the dreams of women are made manifest by the swinging sledgehammers of men." (Flanagan, Vulture. com) Seems simple enough, but could these shows actually be causing major problems?

In the mid-2000's the United States went through a housing crisis because so many people were taking out mortgages on houses they could not afford because they wanted to fulfill the American Dream. In the words of the great (yet fictional) Dr. Ian Malcolm, they "were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should." Because so many people had purchased these houses on a mortgage, when the banks crashed, they couldn't get the money to pay for them. But that was not the only problem caused by this obsession with bigger houses. According to Youth. gov, 8.1 percent of youth and 8.7 percent of young adults had at least one depressive episode in 2008, and there were 4,513 reported suicides by youth ages 10 through 24. But "who could raise a sullen teen when there is a "great room" where the family can gather for nachos and football on the big screen?" (Flanagan, Vulture. com)

HGTV played, and continues to play, on this idea of the American Dream. The American Dream, as defined by James Truslow in his 1931 book *Epic of America* is, “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.” Everyone wants the biggest, greatest house they can get, whether that means moving or remodeling. Flanagan says that;

HGTV depends on the dream that has been with us since the saltboxes of New England and the Spanish bungalows of Southern California and the Leisuramas of Montauk: that if you can just get the right house — the one that looks like your friends’ houses look, only a little bit better — your family will pour into it, like thick cream into a pitcher: smooth, fluid, pleasing. Who could get a divorce in a house with so many lush towels rolled up in the master bathroom? Who could raise a sullen teen when there is a “great room” where the family can gather for nachos and football on the big screen?

We see this everywhere. The neighborhood I live in is next to a little airport and was designed for the pilots and their families to live in. However, we only have 3 pilots in the 16 house neighborhood and the only exciting thing that’s happened at the airport in my lifetime is that President Trump flew in and out of it when he visited Altoona during his campaign. Despite the lack of pilots, people still live there. There is not a single property smaller than an acre and almost all the houses have two or three bathrooms and three or more bedrooms. That being said, none of them were cheap. For example, my neighbors’ house is up for sale for \$375, 000. It is one and a half stories, with

four bedrooms, four bathrooms, an in home theatre, and 2 two car garages. It is a beautiful home in a beautiful, little neighborhood; what more do you need? According to HGTV, a bigger house. They want to make you believe that there is always room for a bigger house or for more improvements. And while you may have satisfied the American Dream, HGTV is there with a straw blowing more air into that dream bubble. How do they do it? By constantly playing the same types of shows, they ingrain in our brains that it is abnormal to not want the best house. They also with play the same show back-to-back for hours. This causes you to lose track of time so you spend hours in front of the TV, watching the Scott Twins on Property Brothers or Joanna and Chip Gaines on Fixer Upper for hours on end. By airing this repetitive content, HGTV can be sure that their message of “ Home Starts Here” will reach everyone. However, they do not seem to take time to look at the problems their networking may be causing.

While I’m not saying that the 4, 513 youth suicides in 2008 were because of families watching HGTV and acting on their desire for the American Dream, it could have had some effect on some kids in that way. I am also not saying that HGTV caused the recession. What I am saying is that HGTV introduced this idea of bigger and better houses that played a small part in the recession as a whole. Flanagan discusses how HGTV has taken the dreams of the American people and shown them how “ easy” they are to reach, without ever addressing the problems that these dreams can cause. They also don’t address some of the issues that HGTV is still causing today because “ our national love of HGTV suggests that the dream won’t die.” (Flanagan,

Vulture. com) Our economy is still recovering from the 2008 crash, and the idea of “ flipping” houses isn’t helping that. HGTV however, just keeps going, instilling one dream after another and leaving disaster in its wake.