

How reality tv shapes our lives research paper example

[Media](#), [Television](#)



INTRODUCTION

A lack of time is one of the most common problems people face in 21st century. The average people who have nine to five jobs piled on top of personal stress of life, is carried around on their shoulders all day. When they get home they want to be able to relax after work and be entertained. In today's media driven society that means spending more time in front of the TV. Because of this, the entertainment industry has been more and more focused on the idea of producing TV shows that will claim their attention and keep them coming back week after week. There are many different types of television shows, and producers are always up to new tricks to fascinate people. Anything new or different is always bound to be noticed, the same goes with reality shows.

Salman Rushdie, in his article "Reality TV: A Dearth of Talent and the Death of Mortality," suggests that we need to examine reality television closely because "it tells us things about ourselves," and even if we don't think it does, it "ought to," a claim that suggests that if we merely brush off reality television as a fad, we might be missing something inherently valuable about our nature. . As Reality TV seems to match the normal daily life routine people believe that what is being shown is reality when in fact we are not. This is a false reality. What they are just watching is what producers want them to watch. The producers create scenes full of drama to attract the public's attention so they wonder what is going to happen next week. There is a lead in period to the next week's program because even though scenes are settled, the reaction of competitors are real. That gives the viewing public a whole week to anticipate, speculate and discuss how the "Reality"

subject are going to react.

The primary reason why people watch these shows is to be amused, shocked and left feeling eager to see what happens next. Part of this is because people not only enjoy watching someone win, but are equally amused by watching others lose.

Reality TV is a mirror of the greater society but it is a flawed distortion of reality, no more capable of reflecting truth than a cheap dime store mirror or the mirrors in a carnival funhouse. Like the mirrors in a funhouse it is a simple escapist amusement that no one thinks of as real. Further study, and time will disclose if the results of watching these shows will reflect the understanding that “ Reality TV” is in no way real. As long as the public understands that they will be free from will be even greater social expectations and loss of standards. Put in perspective Reality TV is just a situation where people are watching to escape from the boring aspects of their own lives by focusing on the perceived drama experienced by others. The problem that arises from this is what do people see when they look into this distorted dime-store mirror?

DISCUSSION

Television now occupies a large percentage of most peoples’ free time. This is especially true for young children where sometimes it serves as an electronic babysitter. Never the less, it still has an inordinately strong effect upon older children, teens and adults. Because of the large sectors of free time that it occupies it detracts from other life activities such as family conversations, reading, exercising, and community activities.

Television programs, even the so called “ Reality TV” portray an unreal world. Television focuses upon violence, tragedy, drama, and glamor. In this manner people are led to believe that others are better off than are.

Television can contribute to education and knowledge. There are programs in the form of documentaries and other knowledge based programs designed to increase our personal and institutional educational experiences. In some countries such as Australia and New Zealand these are commonly incorporated into the curriculum. Other nations frequently include information Television as part of a multi-modal approach to education.

Television impacts on politics in a number of ways. News programs and political discussion groups analyze the politicians, events, legislature, and processes, especially in election years. During an election there is daily broadcast news and discussions, along with the candidates’ speeches and campaign news. Often the way the reporting is done and the time allotted to each of the candidates influences public opinion. For that reason a large sector of the political budget is spent on TV time so they can bring their message across in their own way.

Television Sports programs attract large audiences. This has effected many aspects of how sports teams and events are evolving. Because of the high viewership statistics TV stations are willing to pay premium prices to broadcast high profile events, such as season playoff games, the Super Bowl, and the Olympic Games. Other professional sports also enjoy broad viewership and some sports gained popularity because of TVs influence. .

Television Reality shows have grown in popularity. Some of these are competitive events, while other purport to present people in real life

situations. These can create a sense of discontent among their viewers because they also create the impression that other people have better lives. Reality television, especially in the way it pares a week's events down to the most exciting moments creates an impression that reality is supposed to be more dramatic than what it really is. As novelist Kurt Vonnegut once explained people expect reality to be dramatic: "because we grew up surrounded by big dramatic story arcs in books and movies, we think our lives are supposed to be filled with huge ups and downs. So people pretend there is drama where there is none." Reality TV shows like "The Real World," "Duck Dynasty" and "The Real Desperate Housewives" claim to present real life but are in fact but a more a distorted carnival mirror of reality. Semi-staged shows, like the talent and other competition programming and the interview programs are designed to create drama as well as enhance the presentation of the situational circumstances. This of course exists in other programming as well as in books and movies, however those entertainment venues did not claim to represent TV real life.

The claim of "Reality TV" leads people to believe their real life experiences should mirror the lives of the people they see on Reality TV. That leads them to expect an untenable existence full of dramatic ups and downs when in it does, and should not..

Psychology Today conducted a study on dominant characteristics that differentiate reality TV fans from the fans of other shows. One of these determinants is the desire for prestige. According to Psychology Today, "Fans of the shows are much more likely to agree with statements such as, "Prestige is important to me" and "I am impressed with designer clothes." .

Reality TV allows people to escape their own reality into an unreal portrayal of other people's lives and dramas. It also lets them engage in the fantasy that they could be the next ordinary person to become so interesting and important that millions of people would tune into the details of their lives. In a presentation at the American Psychological Society's 16th Annual Convention, Brad Waite, set forth his belief that Reality TV reduces society's expectations of privacy and warned that, " Expectations of privacy have been eroded Public disclosure, even of formerly private behavior and feelings, is the expectation." .

Perhaps nothing is more disturbing than the way Reality TV inspired the coining of a new term, " humilitainment," that is " the tendency for viewers to be attracted to spectacular mortification." It is a new word, but an old concept that people who feel inferior think they can maintain their self-worth by bring down others. In his article, The Effects of Watching Reality TV Shows Karger quotes Waite as saying about Reality TV watchers that " They expect it's OK to humiliate and to be humiliated by others, instead of thinking there's something wrong with this behavior.".

This belief that it is acceptable to humiliate others and that it is somehow beneficial to the dominant person is not a good social norm to establish. It is also not good for the downtrodden people to believe that if they do not, or cannot not defend themselves that they deserve to be humiliated. .

Recent years have seen an upsurge in bullying among school children, some of whom have taken their own lives as a result. To have an entire television venue dedicated to judgmental behavior, zero sum philosophy were one person can only see gain if another loses and humiliation teaches the art of

bullying early on. It also inures society at large to the real “ Reality” of the importance of small actions since they expect results arise from only the grand, overly dramatic moments that are the climax of the progression.

CONCLUSION:

Reality TV can be a window into other peoples’ lives that exposes its watchers to new experiences and ways of living. But it is a distorted view because it siphons off the true reality of day to day life and leaves only the drama. It has an effect on people’s attitudes it may encourage people to adopt some of the behaviors they see on Reality TV. Fashion styles, like Sookie’s “ poof” hair style become popular among people who never saw it before. Dancing with the Stars brought about an upsurge in interest in ballroom dancing. In some cases individuals form opinions on people and situations based on what they witness on Reality TV that has no other foundation in their personal experience. It creates an unreal reality that causes people to over emphasize status, at the cost of hurting others. Furthermore, leads people to believe that shaming and bullying other people is not only acceptable behavior, it enhances the social status of the aggressor.

Never the less it is a cultural phenomenon and whatever the effects of reality television society is positive or negative is yet to be determined. Although the mirror of Reality TV is flawed people are looking, and aping the behavior they see there. Further study, and time will disclose if it the results will be even greater social expectations and loss of standards or just a situation

where people are watching to escape from the boring aspects of their own lives by focusing on the perceived drama experienced by others.

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APPENDIX A

The Guardian home

Reality TV: a dearth of talent and the death of morality

Salman Rushdie on the perils of voyeurism

Salman Rushdie

The Guardian, Friday 8 June 2001

I've managed to miss out on reality TV until now. In spite of all the talk in Britain about nasty Nick and flighty Mel, and in America about the fat, naked bastard Richard manipulating his way to desert-island victory, I have somehow preserved my purity. I wouldn't recognize Nick or Mel if I passed them in the street, or Richard if he was standing in front of me unclothed.

Ask me where the Big Brother house is, or how to reach Temptation Island, and I have no answer. I do remember the American Survivor contestant who managed to fry his own hand so that the skin peeled away until his fingers looked like burst sausages, but that's because he got on to the main evening news. Otherwise, search me. Who won? Who lost? Who cares?

The subject of reality TV shows, however, has been impossible to avoid. Their success is the media story of the (new) century, along with the ratings triumph of the big-money game shows such as Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? Success on this scale insists on being examined, because it tells us things about ourselves; or ought to.

And what tawdry narcissism is here revealed! The television set, once so idealistically thought of as our window on the world, has become a dime-store mirror instead. Who needs images of the world's rich otherness, when you can watch these half-familiar avatars of yourself - these half-attractive half-persons - enacting ordinary life under weird conditions? Who needs talent, when the unashamed self-display of the talentless is constantly on offer?

I've been watching Big Brother 2, which has achieved the improbable feat of taking over the tabloid front pages in the final stages of a general election campaign. This, according to the conventional wisdom, is because the show is more interesting than the election. The "reality" may be even stranger. It may be that Big Brother is so popular because it's even more boring than the election. Because it is the most boring, and therefore most "normal", way of becoming famous, and, if you're lucky or smart, of getting rich as well.

"Famous" and "rich" are now the two most important concepts in western

society, and ethical questions are simply obliterated by the potency of their appeal. In order to be famous and rich, it's OK - it's actually " good" - to be devious. It's " good" to be exhibitionistic. It's " good" to be bad. And what dulls the moral edge is boredom. It's impossible to maintain a sense of outrage about people being so trivially self-serving for so long.

Oh, the dullness! Here are people becoming famous for being asleep, for keeping a fire alight, for letting a fire go out, for videotaping their cliched thoughts, for flashing their breasts, for lounging around, for quarrelling, for bitching, for being unpopular, and (this is too interesting to happen often) for kissing! Here, in short, are people becoming famous for doing nothing much at all, but doing it where everyone can see them.

Add the contestants' exhibitionism to the viewers' voyeurism and you get a picture of a society sickly in thrall to what Saul Bellow called " event glamour". Such is the glamour of these banal but brilliantly spotlit events that anything resembling a real value - modesty, decency, intelligence, humour, selflessness; you can write your own list - is rendered redundant. In this inverted ethical universe, worse is better. The show presents " reality" as a prize fight, and suggests that in life, as on TV, anything goes, and the more deliciously contemptible it is, the more we'll like it. Winning isn't everything, as Charlie Brown once said, but losing isn't anything.

The problem with this kind of engineered realism is that, like all fads, it's likely to have a short shelf-life, unless it finds ways of renewing itself. The probability is that our voyeurism will become more demanding. It won't be enough to watch somebody being catty, or weeping when evicted from the house of hell, or " revealing everything" on subsequent talk shows, as if they

had anything left to reveal.

What is gradually being reinvented is the gladiatorial combat. The TV set is the Colosseum and the contestants are both gladiators and lions; their job is to eat one another until only one remains alive. But how long, in our jaded culture, before "real" lions, actual dangers, are introduced to these various forms of fantasy island, to feed our hunger for more action, more pain, more vicarious thrills?

Here's a thought, prompted by the news that the redoubtable Gore Vidal has agreed to witness the execution by lethal injection of the Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh. The witnesses at an execution watch the macabre proceedings through a glass window: a screen. This, too, is a kind of reality TV, and - to make a modest proposal - it may represent the future of such programmes. If we are willing to watch people stab one another in the back, might we not also be willing to actually watch them die?

In the world outside TV, our numbed senses already require increasing doses of titillation. One murder is barely enough; only the mass murderers make the front pages. You have to blow up a building full of people or machine-gun a whole royal family to get our attention. Soon, perhaps, you'll have to kill off a whole species of wildlife or unleash a virus that wipes out people by the thousand, or else you'll be small potatoes. You'll be on an inside page.

And as in reality, so on "reality TV". How long until the first TV death? How long until the second? By the end of Orwell's great novel 1984, Winston Smith has been brainwashed. "He loved Big Brother." As, now, do we. We are the Winstons now.

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