



Reality TV and Children

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Abstract:

Reality television has faced significant criticism since its rise in popularity. Much of the criticism has centered on the use of the word "reality", and such shows' attempt to present themselves as a straightforward recounting of events that have occurred. Critics have argued that reality television shows do not accurately reflect reality, in ways both implicit and deceptive or even fraudulent, such as misleading editing, participants being coached in what to say or how to behave, storylines generated ahead of time, and scenes being staged or re-staged for the cameras. Other criticisms of reality television shows include that they are intended to humiliate or exploit participants; that they make stars out of either untalented people unworthy of fame, infamous personalities, or both; and that they glamorize vulgarity and materialism. The aim of this research paper is to show aspects and dimension of reality TV.

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Reality television has spread like wild fire, leaving little doubt that your children are likely to come across multiple examples of this type of programming even those with casual viewing habits. It may leave wondering what the potential impact of this is examining what is already known about reality shows and their influence on children can help make informed decisions about how to handle the issue at home. The aim of this research paper is to show many aspects and dimension of reality tv.

Reality TV

“The format has its lineage in the Candid Microphone radio programmes (of the late 1940s) in which pranks were pulled on unsuspecting people. In 1953 Candid Camera shows debuted in the United States; in the mid-1960s the BBC reality TV series ‘Seven Up!’ was the rage.”Reality television consists of programs which purpose to showcase people appearing as themselves in a variety of different contexts. Many reality programs revolve around competitions; others feature celebrities in their everyday lives. There are shows that center on small groups of otherwise unknown people, probing their interactions with one another. There are some shows that focus on teen pregnancy and the lives of teen moms. Whatever form they take, reality shows seek to create entertainment from the uncertainty of unscripted moments and events. They also look to present shocking, awkward or otherwise inflammatory situations — a consistent characteristic of most reality programming. Many of these shows are edited to create a specific theme or outcome, making them less reality.



Reality TV brings together three genres:

- ❖ film documentary
- ❖ Game Show
- ❖ Soap opera

In reality shows viewers participate through voting via mobile messages. Elimination and participation of contest is depend upon by the audiences vote or judged support which is given by points. These formats radically change the relationship between media producers, participants and viewer thus raising, raiting and attracting advertisers. The focus, all the competition underline the whole show. Sub categories of the Reality TV genre include : Documentary style shows, self-improvement/make over shows, dating shows, talk shows, hidden cameras and hoazxes.

Children as Viewers

Children who view reality programs have been shown to suffer ill effects from the content of such programming. One Australian study revealed that children who watched reality programming were significantly more likely to associate wealth, popularity and beauty as factors that contribute to happiness. It's no surprise that these are values frequently held in high esteem by many participants of reality shows. What's more, certain other reality programs such as "Fear Factor" that feature participants involved in disgusting or dangerous behavior inspired attempts to duplicate these acts by some younger viewers.

Children as Participants

Although not all reality programming involves underage participants, some do. These have also been shown to have a negative impact on the children involved. An environment in which kids find themselves surrounded by cameras much of the time has the tendency to make the challenges of growing up that much more difficult. Additionally, when competitive reality shows incorporate children, there is an added pressure and sense of rejection when things don't work out. The Canadian newspaper "The Globe and Mail" reported in 2009 on a program called "The Next Star," which focused on kids under 15, placing some contestants in embarrassing situations and leveling criticism (albeit constructive) at them on national television.

Combating the Influence

Needless to say, focusing on limiting the exposure your kids have to television is a good start to prevent reality TV from "taking over" in your house. You should explain to your children that reality shows are decidedly not reality. That stipulation goes a long way toward setting boundaries of behavior. Moreover, it's important that you or your children don't become passive recipients of the shows' messages. You should identify the values presented by each show and discuss those in depth with your kids to maintain a balanced view of what's important.



Dr. Peter Christenson, a professor of rhetoric and media studies at Lewis and Clark College, said that because the medium is still new, comprehensive studies of reality television and its effects are limited. “I don’t think we know that much yet,” Christenson said. “It’s difficult to draw the cause and effect type of conclusion.”

Christenson co-authored a study in 2006 that analyzed reality television programs with medical and health themes. He found that, while the shows did seem to inspire healthier behavior in some viewers, there was a lot of emphasis placed on superficiality – something, which over time, he said, may have an effect on viewers’ body image and self esteem.

Dr. Brad Gorham, chair of the Communications Department at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, said studies have shown that television does have an effect. “All TV shows, not just reality shows, help construct scenarios that demonstrate how some behaviors will be rewarded or punished,” Gorham said. “The concern is that frequent viewers of these shows will learn these behaviors, see them as desirable and then model them in the actual real world.”

Gorham said one of the reasons there are so many reality shows currently on television is because they are profitable for networks. “Reality shows are much cheaper to produce than scripted dramas or sitcoms, so they need fewer viewers in order to become profitable for the network,” Gorham said. “It all comes down to money, and reality shows are good short-term performers.” With the focus on profit, some worry networks don’t pay enough attention to the negative stereotypes reality programs can illustrate and perpetuate.

Williams, whose research focuses on media diversity, said shows such as *The Family Crews* and *Being Terry Kennedy* on BET are positive programs, in that they demonstrate counter-stereotypical black male behavior. Williams also said *Mary Mary* on WETV, and *Welcome to Sweetie Pie’s* on OWN are positive reality programs that combat negative stereotypes.

Disadvantages of reality shows:

Scripted shows: The majority of so-called reality shows are scripted and everything is closely doctored. Initially, people fell for the bait but now audiences understand that stories are developed well in advance. Some of the fights on the television are staged to increase the ratings of the show.

Harmful effect on teen: The new generation of reality TV celebrity stars does not thrive on talent but use sensationalism to always be in the news. One of the worst effects of their action is on children who try to emulate their behavior. Stunts that are performed on televisions under controlled conditions are imitated by the people in real life resulting in death. Some of the shows where contestants participate to win prizes



show them in poor light as they use meanness and greed to outdo each other. The negative traits can manifest themselves in the audiences and create behavioral problems.

Abusive shows: Liberal doses of abuses are hurled on the shows because the directors think that more and more people will watch them. It is a huge mistake because bad words are caught by teens and kids affecting their personality as well as behavior.

Cost of the shows: Creating reality TV shows is not an expensive proposition and brings more bucks for money in comparison to the sitcoms and the soap operas.

Reality shows in India and its impact on children

Indian television industry is now full of reality shows and most of the shows have become controversial due to some scenes or episodes which abuses the traditional and cultural values of the country. Different people have different viewpoints on this but the impact of these reality shows can be seen today. Reality programmes revolve around competitions or celebrities' lives. They seek to create entertainment from the uncertainty of “unscripted” moments or events.

With the increase in number of reality shows, its impact is also increasing. Effect of these shows is more on children than the religious programmes as it interprets the real life situation. Reality is made basically for adults and without proper knowledge and understanding, children can be misled by it. Children who are left to watch these shows on television can often be baffled at the display and can take them as behavior expected out everyone, especially themselves and their peers.

Even children notice how people do planning and plotting against each other to win the prize. And they have the habit of imitating, especially adults. Watching these shows might have a negative impact on them and they can pick up acts of violence, false identifications, lying, cheating, abusing, and ditching their own family and friends.

It is useless to say, focusing on limiting the exposure on kids of television is good start to prevent reality TV from “taking over” in our house. We need to make our children understand that reality shows are decidedly not reality.

Reality shows to find the best singers, best dancers, best comedians, best quizzers and even shows to find the luck of a person have captured the minds of persons. Almost all the languages in India and almost every channel in the country will have their own reality shows.

With Big Boss and Swayamvar ruling the TRP ratings, it is time to analyze the consequences of these shows. Big Boss is just a fake show, so is the much hyped Roadies show on MTV. The contestants in these shows are encouraged to use the bad words which directly or indirectly impact the viewers. Such shows inculcate a degrading personality among the youth of the country. Children get affected far worse



due to this. Moral aspects are left out and an India with morally degrading youth is on the verge of emergence.

According the Arundhati Swami, Counselor and parenting expert, “The biggest concern about some of these programmes is the complex human nature, the manipulation and the back – biting that is portrayed. If there is no supporting adult to make children understand that such types of reality tv programmes are scripted, they will use their own imagination and understanding to take in the message being related to them,.” She further says, there are three kinds of risks related to children:

- ❖ **Physical Risk:** copying risky behavior put children at risk of physical injury
- ❖ **Emotional Risk:** few children will have the emotional maturity view it as just another programme . But some, who have low self-esteem might imitate negative behaviour and do something drastic to seek attention.

Parents Can Intervene

- ❖ Establish that watching reality shows is not priority in the family
- ❖ According to the age and understanding of child, parents should explain family’s belief systems and values are and that they do not match what is shown in reality TV.
- ❖ Help the child understand the impact such programmes can have and that real life is different from what is projected in reality show.
- ❖ Have discussions about this in a friendly and non-threatening manner

Conclusively it may be said that “Reality television exploded in the early 2000’s and nearly every channel is home to reality television. In our society, reality TV still remains to be today’s most popular genre. As television shows that are categorized under reality TV become increasingly popular, children in our society begin to become exposed to sex, drugs and vulgar language at younger ages. As more and more children make viewing reality tv a habit, they are more likely to be effected in negative ways. Two of the biggest negative aspects may include the change in their self esteem and lack of focus on what is important in the real world.”

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