

Unscripted and Unreal

Reality tv has become a staple in many households since the early 2000s. I am an avid watcher of reality tv in all its forms, from housewives to home renovations. It's almost impossible to ignore the often-valid criticisms of the genre so I tend to speak bashfully on the topic, referring to it as only a "guilty pleasure." If I mention it, I feel the need to offset my interest with more acceptable forms of recreation to avoid judgement: I also enjoy working out and reading books! I do this knowing I'd prioritize a new episode of Love Island over either of those. Still, there is a discussion to be had on the impact of reality tv on us as a society. Should there be restrictions placed on the genre? Should it no longer be produced altogether? Should we watch more reality tv? Or is there a middle-ground? Is there a way to enjoy it while keeping the reality of reality tv in mind?

One of the first reality tv shows, The Real World, premiered on MTV in the 90's and showed the lives of a group of strangers who moved in together for a summer. The show depicted arguments and fights, but it also humanized the group and showed the audience what life for them was like. Since then, reality tv has only gotten less real. As it has grown in popularity producers have increasingly stepped in to edit shows for maximum impact. They do this with the goal of making more money while disregarding viewers' tendency to take what is being portrayed at face value. This is the primary concern with reality tv-viewers are unaware that most of it isn't real at all. Because that fact is lost on viewers, the shows can

play a role in how we interact in our day to day lives. Our favorite reality stars seem to be having a wonderful time behaving badly, so why shouldn't we do the same? The blurred lines between the shows and real life were studied in an experiment conducted by Karyn Riddle and J.J. De Simone at the University of Wisconsin. In the study 145 undergraduates were surveyed based on their consumption of surveillance style reality tv shows (The Hills, Jersey Shore, and Laguna Beach). The survey concluded "viewers of these programs believe women in the real world engage in bad behavior more often than men." "Furthermore, heavy viewers overestimate the prevalence of discord and an emphasis on sex in romantic relationships." Though it was a small sample size, the surveyors did note a negative impact in interviewees who consistently watched surveillance style shows.

I agree with the notion that reality tv can be negative especially since surveillance-style shows are among the most popular. These shows typically depict beautiful rich people navigating relationships and other aspects of their daily lives. For most viewers, the participants' lifestyle is not relatable, but that doesn't make it less interesting to watch, for some of us that is the best part. We get to watch people live carefree with no mention of bills or work. In an article written by Dr. Teyhou Smyth entitled How Reality Shows Affect Our Lives and Society she shared another reason why reality tv is so popular: "At our core we love human drama and relate to difficult decision making." It's something we can all relate to and there's nothing inherently wrong with that. The issue many people have with these shows, and one I share, is when we begin to believe the drama is anything more than entertainment. Katherine Griffin, a TV editor who has worked on shows such as The Amazing Race, Keeping Up with the Kardashians, and Bachelor in Paradise, was interviewed by Paula Goldberg for a video editing website called The Beat. She shared that editing is a form of "documentary storytelling" in which she must create a story from hours of filmed footage. She shared one of her "tricks" for making a cohesive story is "cheating lines from an entirely different scene." This and other techniques are used by editors and producers to tell the most interesting story they can, even if the story isn't completely accurate.

Reality tv is both unscripted and unreal. We can start there to formulate ways to “watch responsibly.” The genre makes up over 50% of current television programming and because of its success and the low cost of making it, it will continue to be produced. Dr. Teyhou Smyth made a valid point in her Psychology Today article. She shared that while we are impacted by the media we consume, we are more impacted by our life experiences, our family, and many other factors. She suggested using reality tv as a conversation starter and asking ourselves why we enjoy certain shows and what we would do in similar situations. I see this as a middle-ground for those who want to do something about the impact of reality tv and those who want to engage guilt-free. It is important to first acknowledge that what we are watching are stories created to elicit reactions. There will be heroes, villains, and memorable conclusions because that is the formula production companies follow to ensure the success of their programming. It is also important to check in with ourselves and ask which elements of the story we are most drawn to and why.

While I agree reality tv can negatively impact viewers, I also believe those of us who watch bear some responsibility for the extent of that impact. This starts with keeping in mind that reality tv is edited just like drama or comedy series for the purpose of telling a story. It is also important to ask ourselves which part of the story we connect to and why. Do we see ourselves in the underdog, the outcast, the bully, or another character? Do the characters we see ourselves in reflect our values? Are there changes we should make? By asking these questions we can enjoy the entertainment without being consumed by it, because let’s face it: reality tv isn’t going anywhere.

Works Cited

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What Do We Expect of Our Work?	How Well Did You Meet Our Expectations?				How Can You Prove That You Met or Exceeded Our Expectations?	
	Our Expectations	A	B	C	D	Your Evidence
Title of Your Essay: Original,			X			I think the title

interesting. Creatively (i.e., surprising, unexpected) illustrates the theme / purpose of the argument.					highlights both sides of my argument
Introduction: Engages the audience by encouraging connection, curiosity, and excitement. Establishes the focus of the advocacy (the issue). Outlines or foreshadows a specific, arguable thesis.		X			I think the intro is the strongest part of the essay and it foreshadows my argument
Audience: Addresses a specific, identifiable			X		Honestly, I'm still confused

audience. Responds to audience needs and values through appropriate rhetorical appeals.					about who the audience is.
Arrangement: Uses an identifiable, purposeful approach to argumentation (Rogerian or Delayed-Thesis). Develops clearly defined points in focused, purposeful body paragraphs. Incorporates clear, sophisticated transitions				X	I attempted to use a rogerian argument outline but I don't think I chose a side in the argument or argued strongly one way or the other.

(between sentences and paragraphs) that create meaning and propel the argument and advocacy.					
Claims, Reasons, & Counterarguments: Faithfully and respectfully presents many sides of the issue. Establishes a well- defined argument with specific claims and supported with appropriate reasons, examples, and evidence.			X		I attempted to examine multiple sides of the argument and I think I was respectful to those who are firmly against reality tv viewing.

Respectfully considers reasonable counterarguments.					
Research & Citation: Uses sufficient, credible sources to encourage understanding and support the argument. Quotations and paraphrases are purposeful, poignant. Sources clearly cited in the text and on the Works Cited page using MLA style.			X		I used and cited 3 sources
Diction, Tone, & Style:			X		

Diction is precise, idiomatic (i.e., unique to you, honest, interesting). Tone (emotional texture of words) complements the essay's purpose. Varied, grammatical sentence structures amplify and propel the argument.					
Based on this rubric, the grade I earned for Project 2 is:					