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Response Essay - *Survivor and Reality Television*

Reality TV is one of the newest art forms on television, as well as one of the most controversial. While many elitists look down upon shows such as “Keeping Up with the Kardashians”, others praise how reality television is more fair in its representation of the human condition, including such things as race, gender, and social class, than more traditional mediums. And while reality TV is far from perfect, it serves an important role in society, existing as an educational counterpoint and complement to more traditional storytelling methods. Shows such as *Survivor*, even with their limitations are positive for society both because of their educational value and the manner in which they represent the diversity that exists within society.

In the first few minutes of this episode, I had learned more about Samoa than I had in the entire rest of my life up to that point, simply because Samoa is not a place I think about frequently. After the episode finished, I looked it up on Wikipedia just to satisfy my curiosity about it. Much of the learning process comes from interest, and not necessarily hard work, and reality TV is an excellent platform to introduce people to new and interesting things that they may have otherwise overlooked for their entire life. Since it is based in reality, furthermore, knowledge gained from reality TV is much more useful than that gained from a show like *Game of Thrones*.

Another excellent aspect of reality TV such as *Survivor* is the portrayal of real humans, not just those dreamed up by a team of writers. While much of the drama is fictional or exaggerated, the people involved aren’t. And by having such a diverse cast of people, viewers are exposed to all different ideas that they would otherwise never encounter. While I was watching the episode, I found myself very surprised that Shambo was a former marine, and I thought it was interesting how the two best dressed people on the show were African American. And besides just showcasing diverse peoples, the show also presented diverse ideas. While I might not agree with Russell’s assessment that all the girls on his team were morons, it was interesting to see someone with such a different opinion from me. Exposure to these kinds of opinions helps humanize people with whom I might otherwise not have any interaction with, and thereby makes me more tolerant.

Of course, reality television is not without its criticisms. Nsenga Burton highlights some of these in the article “Reality TV Is Here to Stay”. “A lot of reality television is salacious, exploitative, and celebratory of violent, abusive, and predatory behavior” especially in shows such as *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo.*. In addition, many people criticise reality TV for being a blatant cash grab, because it is cheap to produce and can get viewers easily. While both of these objections are certainly valid, they are not true in every case. As Burton points out, “some of it isn't [exploitative]. You've got your makeover shows, game shows, dating shows and, of course, talent shows like *American Idol* and *Dancing With the Stars*, which showcase diversity in a positive light. And even the exploitative shows are still important to some degree. I would know nothing about children in fashion shows such as Honey Boo Boo and would instead completely ignore the whole area if it weren’t for *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo.* Reality TV opens up new conversations that would never have happened otherwise.

Reality TV is far from perfect. It does sometimes manipulate people, and take advantage of others. However, the cultural enrichment shows such as *Survivor* provide outweigh the drawbacks. Reality TV is both entertaining and educational, and that makes it good for society.

**Works Cited:**

Burton, Nsenga. "Reality TV Is Here to Stay." *Nytimes.com*. The New York Times, 22 Oct. 2012. Web. 13 Apr. 2016.

"The Puppet Master." *Survivor: Samoa*. CBS. 17 Sept. 2009. Television.

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**Questions:**

* What are your thoughts on how men/women/sexuality/gender/ethnicity /etc. is/are depicted in Reality TV?
* Do you think Reality TV is more negative or more positive for our society? Why?