

Palmer, L. (2013). Sluts, brats, and sextuplets: The dangers of reality television for children and teen participants. *Studies in Popular Culture*, 36(1), 123-143

Synopsis

In this article, Palmer criticizes reality television and the effects it has on its stars and audience. She states that although reality programming aims to portray the lives of real people and real events, the genre's realness is nothing more than an illusion. She goes on to discuss how reality television is fabricated and packaged just as much as any other scripted program (p. 124). Some of the most popular reality programs are those centered around children and teens. The author argues that these programs, such as *Laguna Beach*, *16 and Pregnant*, *John and Kate Plus 8*, and *Toddlers and Tiaras*, are heavily dramatized through misleading editing and narrative techniques. Many times, the stars of the show are portrayed inaccurately; an issue that is particularly problematic for young children who have no control over their self-representation. They are often portrayed as powerless, bratty, and, essentially, "other" from adults. As for the shows' audiences, Patricia Holland states that they are bombarded with repetitive concepts and stereotypes that discursively construct hegemonic norms of race, gender roles, sexuality, childhood, family, and beauty. Reality television ignores "differences", such as interracial/ethnic dynamics and homosexuality, thus establishing them as peripheral and abnormal. The norms, which are implicitly mediated through Reality TV, can have detrimental effects on viewers by convincing them that they must meet a certain societal standards in order to be valued. To finalize her critique, Palmer focuses back in on the dangers of reality television stardom. She states that since these stars are unable to separate their person and persona, their lives become a mere product sold by the media in the form of entertainment.

Key Concepts

- **Reality Programming:** "characterized by its effort to reproduce everyday life and create a semblance of the real that is unachievable in scripted television" (p. 123).
- **Public Imagery:** "a database that is accessible at any time and from any place: certain images are present across media forms and create a simplistic "pictorial vocabulary"" (p. 125).
- **Archetypal Characters:** evolve from the frequent recurrence of televisual representations of families and children; their repetition has material hegemonic effects on society (p. 126).

Key Quotes

- "Reality television shows have produced discourses that reinforce problematic norms and simultaneously misuse the child participants" (p. 140).
- These routine images and themes may not be created with sinister intentions, but regardless of intent, their repetition amalgamates and has material hegemonic effects on society" (p. 126).
- J. Scanlon: "Television socialization has been shown to breed intolerance in adolescents towards deviations from gender norms in their peers, while heavy television consumption is linked with stereotypical ideas about sex and gender" (p. 131).

Essential Question

- At what point can reality television stars justify a show/network's invasion of privacy?