

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 excerpt, Palmer highlights the sharp contrast between reality television and the real world that we live in. Specifically, the divide between the two is exemplified through gender roles, sexuality, representation, and voyeurism introduced to children at a young age. She continues by noting that reality television ignores “the people behind the camera, creating the illusion of observing an unknowing subject” (125). These unknowing subjects are often young beautiful people, in search of a nuclear family, who intertwine themselves into overly-heterosexual situations. Palmer then provides evidence to show that the way in which the skewed reality is presented is often in favor of heterosexual, white males. For example, she claims the adult gaze on a girl child, or woman of any age for that matter, is tainted with sexual innuendos such as a tilted head or opened mouth. The editing techniques employed in reality shows further highlight these subtleties and more so exemplify the true audience that these shows are positioned for. According to Palmer, the distorted reality presented is more an act of sexualizing women than actually depicting a realistic situation. Palmer ties it all together by offering a call to viewers everywhere to become conscious of these techniques and consider the feelings of those being framed in that light, as often the subjects have no control of their portrayal which is extremely dangerous in the realm of sexualization and children.

Key Concepts:

- **Public Imagery:** a metaphorical database driven by the bombardment of mass media that creates a correlation of visual themes across all media outlets (p. 125).
- **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).
- **Slice of Life:** A skewed concept of reality that is unattainable but is shot, edited, and framed to represent everyday life (p. 124).

Key Quotes:

- “In these reality shows, the handling and portrayal of their child stars are ethically dubious in their presented characters, which are heavily constructed through editing and narrative techniques to enhance drama” (p. 124).
- “Media discourses often use children to represent an idea of childhood as separate, or other, from adulthood. The differences articulated by media representations of children construct a binary between adult and child, which serves to define adulthood by childhood” (p. 135).
- “With the rise in the popularity of reality programs and their increasing presence as an established television genre, the ethical complexities of the use of child stars should be considered in both the production and consumption of reality television” (p. 140).

Essential Question:

- Should there be regulations in place to protect young girls filmed on reality television? If so, which regulations would be effective?
- Since 2013, when the article was written, has LGBT representation increased? What should be done next?
- What should the viewer ethically consider when viewing exploitive reality television?