

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

Palmer discussed reality television, focusing on four specific series *Laguna Beach*, *Jon & Kate Plus 8*, *16 and Pregnant*, and *Toddlers & Tiaras* and the way these series demonstrate the problematic nature of reality TV including the way that reality TV presents itself as objective truth when it is merely an illusion. She identified how these shows influence audiences through public imagery and pictorial vocabulary that create hegemonic expectations about categories like family and gender roles. She noted that many reality shows only focus on Caucasians while other races and ethnicities are ignored and these shows set a clear standard of heterosexuality and Eurocentric beauty, thereby perpetuating hegemonic values. Palmer discussed the presentation of gender roles and how girls especially are made to seem passive and submissive in addition to being sexualized without their knowledge. Palmer also questioned the ethics of these shows, especially those that involve children and adolescents. She noted that these shows are unethical because the children participants do not fully comprehend what it means to be on television and have no control over their public image and self-representation. The author emphasizes how children can't give consent and are being manipulated and used to what best suits the producers needs for profit. Lastly, the author brings up the negative effect reality television can have on these children and adolescents and argues the importance of increasing legal protection for them.

Key Concepts

- **“Elevated Ordinairiness”**: “ Producers and directors record events in the lives of "real" people rather than actors, and package them in familiar narrative forms reminiscent of television dramas and sitcoms” (p.123-124).
- **“Public Imagery”**: “... as akin to 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)
- **“Pictorial Vocabulary”**: “...these repetitive concepts and stereotypes are ever-present in an individual's mind, and are referred to in any process of meaning formation”(p.125).

Key Quotes

- “... reality television can be seen as a media form that extracts visuals and narratives from archives of established meanings to discursively construct and reinforce hegemonic norms of gender, childhood, and family” (p.126).
- “Television is an especially potent media form because it combines habitual images with conventional storylines, familiarizing itself through its use of established narratives and meanings” (p.126).
- “Reality television shows have produced discourses that reinforce problematic norms and simultaneously misuse the child participants”(p.140).

Essential Question

- How can reality television be used to positively influence culture and society?