"The majority of college students watch reality TV to escape from the daily responsibilities of running around campus and studying."

Emili Johnson is a columnist for the Simpsonian, a student publication of Simpson College, in Indianola, Iowa. In the following viewpoint, she analyzes the appeal of reality television, asserting that it provides a few minutes of escapist entertainment in an otherwise busy and stressful life.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. According to Professor Brian Steffen, as cited by Johnson, how realistic is reality television?
2. Why does college student Alfredo Sanchez watch reality shows, according to the author?
3. Why does Johnson believe that the popularity of reality shows will endure?

No matter what anyone says, everyone knows that they have at least one favorite reality TV show. It doesn't matter if it's NBC's The Apprentice, The CW Network's America's Next Top Model or ABC's The Bachelor. There is at least one show that will distract you from doing your homework and keep you entertained for at least an hour.

The idea of reality TV, which was at one point in time meant to show real people doing real things and fulfilling real goals, has now been turned into an easier way for ordinary people to become famous. The contestants may be duped by a lying "millionaire," in search of their soul mate or may be getting even with the mean girls at school. These contestants are far from being real people with real problems doing real things. They are looking for their fifteen minutes of fame and as long as the camera is rolling we will be watching.

The Appeal of Reality Television

As college students, we spend a great deal of time in class, at club meetings and at The Zoo [a local bar]. When we are in front of the TV, the majority of the time we are watching some reality TV show to see who will be the next person to go home or who is crying because their dream did not come true.

This made me think about why we watch so much reality TV to begin with. My favorite reality TV shows at the moment are I Love New York on VH1 and America's Next Top Model on the CW Network. During the time that I am watching these two shows, homework goes unfinished and phone calls are missed. I need to know how the drama unfolds on my shows.

So, the general question is, why do we watch so much reality TV if we have our own lives to live? What makes the people in the shows attractive to a wide audience? Do these images really represent reality?
Pondering these questions, I went to Brian Steffen, professor of communication studies. While he does not have any favorite reality shows, he did mention that the majority of reality TV is in fact unrealistic.

"Reality TV is, in fact, probably the least real thing on TV," Steffen said. "I think a cartoon like The Simpsons is ten times more realistic than any reality program such as Laguna Beach."

Steffen also mentioned that our society is wrapped in the idea that being a well-known celebrity is an instant ticket into the glamorous life. It will save us from being ordinary, which is one of the worst sins you can commit in American culture.

## Escapist Entertainment

The majority of students who watch reality TV do it for entertainment and as a break from studying to see the drama unfold on a wide variety of shows.

Junior Alfredo Sanchez has been watching reality shows such as The Real World and Survivor for about as long as both shows have been on TV. He feels that while producers of The Real World do tend to cast wild and crazy people with monumental problems, it is still something to watch and be entertained by.

"Most of the time, I watch reality shows because I am bored and there's nothing better on (TV) and it keeps me entertained." Sanchez said.

The majority of college students watch reality TV to escape from the daily responsibilities of running around campus and studying. It is nice to come back to your room from a long day of classes, meetings and practices and be able to see the drama among The Real World housemates or see teams duke it out for money on Survivor.

## A Break from Real Life

Yes, it is unrealistic to have the chance to choose your soul mate out of a group of twenty contestants, but that's what makes it entertaining. We know that it may not happen to us, but it is always interesting to see what decisions someone else will make and it is even more intriguing to see someone make a complete fool of themselves for the sake of one's heart. In today's world, that's what makes great television.

We may never see the end of reality TV because now that people know how easy it is to get their fifteen minutes of fame, everyone will always be trying to reach that goal of true celebrity. Fortunately for the rest of us, there will always be a camera rolling to document every minute of it.

## Further Readings

### Books
- Jonathan Bignell *Big Brother: Reality TV in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan,


• Kate Schuster *Is Television a Bad Influence?* Chicago: Heinemann, 2008.


Periodicals

- *Esquire* "What's Wrong with a Little Bigotry?" May 2010.

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