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## Democracy and Discourse: How Reality TV Fosters Citizenship

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**T**hrough reality TV, we are introduced to the families of *Teen Mom*: “A year after the adoption, Catelynn and Tyler have an emotional reunion with their daughter Carly. Amber & Gary try to work out custody of Leah now that they are broken up and dating other people.”<sup>1</sup>

... And those of *Little People, Big World*: This is a “reality series about life in a family of little people, also sometimes called midgets or dwarves. Standing only four feet tall, Matt and Amy Roloff are struggling to raise their four children, who are mixed in stature, on their 34-acre farm.”<sup>2</sup>

... And *Sister Wives*: “Meet husband Kody – along with his four wives: Meri, Janelle, Christine and Robyn and their combined 16 children – and see how they attempt to navigate life as a ‘normal’ family in a society that shuns their lifestyle. From their unconventional family structure and living arrangements to financial challenges, each episode exposes the inner workings of a polygamist household, revealing the unexpectedly tight-knit and loving relationships between Kody’s wives.”<sup>3</sup>

These shows are intriguing, but what do they have to do with democracy,

the subject of this chapter? It's easy to think that the values portrayed by reality TV and those that support democracy are at opposite ends of a spectrum. According to this view, reality TV is all about exploitation of private individuals who sacrifice dignity and integrity to achieve fame and fortune. Reality TV promotes deception as contestants in direct competition first befriend and then betray each other in their climb to the top. Dating and performance shows seem to delight in denigrating and rejecting untalented participants or those who don't conform to mainstream society values. The programs themselves are deceptive in that producers snip and attach material to create a patchwork-quilt storyline of their own invention. The dramatic narratives are comprised of living, breathing quotes and segments that have momentary truth but that lack contextual accuracy. They are exploitative, fictional and intentionally hurtful, according to the accounts of many of the wounded characters.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have democracy, a governing and societal ideology that promotes the values of individual freedom and community good. It is relational and trusting of the outcomes of both liberty and civic process in that it asks each to speak his or her truth, drawing citizens together for civic (and civil) discussion while simultaneously allowing maximum freedom for individuals.

Of course, neither of these extremes addresses the variety of experiences that occur on reality TV or in the practice of democracy. Reality TV can certainly be argued to cause unjustified harms, and those arguments can be found elsewhere in this volume. While democracy preaches acceptance and equality, a long string of minority groups including women, people of non-European descent, people who identify as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or trans-gendered, people who aren't Christian, and people with disabilities have historically been denied a place in the polis by law and by convention.

It is precisely because of the limitations of how democracy is practised – and because of the limitations that individuals create for themselves by gravitating toward sources and resources that simply reinforce their own prejudices – that reality TV can be instrumental in promoting a more vibrant and accepting civic life. This chapter reviews communication essentials for the ideal practice of democracy and illustrates how the presentation and viewing of alternative lifestyles through reality TV can be instrumental in supporting those communication essentials.

Reality TV helps promote democracy in the following ways: First, viewers have a safe opportunity to see how people who are different from them think and live. Yes, editing can skew the "reality" of reality TV, but when comparing participants in reality TV with actors in situation comedies or made-for-television dramas, viewers believe that reality TV participants are presenting real lifestyles and beliefs. Second, reality shows help viewers

better understand what they think, believe and value. Viewers imagine themselves in reality TV situations and try on how they might respond in those situations. The vicarious experience provides an opportunity for viewers to think more deeply about themselves. Finally, through reality shows, viewers have an opportunity to experience democratic action. Some shows demonstrate community involvement and philanthropy, others promote the common good through encouraging individuals to develop a democratic sensibility, and still other shows lead to discussions that are governed by the rules of civil discourse, where individuals can practice having conversations that contribute to a truly deliberative democracy.

Each of these ways in which reality TV can promote democracy will be explored later in the chapter. Before that, however, the chapter will set some foundations by, first, introducing the fundamentals of a deliberative democracy, which can be applied to reality TV, and, second, considering reality TV's origins and how those have contributed to its development as a genre that can promote democratic practice.

## The Dream of Democracy

Democracy at its best is self-governance that grows out of citizens engaging in civic discourse about controversies and choices facing their communities. At its core, democracy requires that, first, citizens know what they believe about public controversies and, second, that they express those beliefs through actions they think enact or reinforce those beliefs. Or, if citizens choose not to actively participate, it follows logically (although not necessarily emotionally) that they should be content to let other citizens make public policy decisions on their behalf. Democracy that is deliberative, however, demands much more than expressing an opinion.

Deliberative democracy is based on collective engagement rather than individual expression of belief. This sophisticated view of group decision-making starts with the assumption that citizens cannot understand their world or even their own views without actively engaging the ideas of others. Long before reality TV and an interactive internet, British philosopher John Stuart Mill argued that it is essential for citizens to seek out opinions different from their own because they have a duty to "form the truest opinions they can."<sup>4</sup>

Mill noticed that few people looked beyond their own beliefs. We can see this today when people listen only to those who reinforce their own viewpoints or consume only those media sources that reflect their particular

worldviews. What communication scholars today call “selective exposure” Mill argued was a sign that people didn’t have justification for whatever they might believe. He said that most people “have never thrown themselves into the mental position of those who think differently from them, and consider what such persons may have to say; and consequently they do not, in any proper sense of the word, know the doctrine which they themselves profess.”<sup>5</sup>

Mill offered four reasons citizens need to seek opinions different from their own: (i) the contrasting opinion might be true or partly true; (ii) even if the contrasting view is completely false, there is good reason to seek it out because looking at our own point of view against one that is completely false helps us remember why we believe what we do. Our true opinion is better understood when tested against alternative points of view; (iii) it is likely that an opposing view has some elements of truth that we might have previously ignored; and (iv) the constant testing of beliefs is good for society. An opinion shared by a group, a nation, even a world of people may lose its meaning or context – that is, become “dead dogma” in Mill’s words – if it goes unquestioned.<sup>6</sup>

The process citizens use to form the truest opinions possible so they can best participate in self-governance is the process of civic discourse. Citizens hear different points of view, check out the facts, and really work to understand how other people think and why they think it. Mill describes a person who engages in this process as someone “who has the calmness to see and honesty to state what his [or her] opponents and their opinions really are, exaggerating nothing to their discredit, keeping nothing back which tells, or can be supposed to tell, in their favour.” Mill adds that, “this is the real morality of public discussion.”<sup>7</sup>

Mill argued that as citizens become educated about the differences and needs of their fellow citizens, they begin to understand that each person’s self-interest is benefited by making the community as a whole good for everyone. Rather than compete for societal goods, enlightened citizens are propelled to recognize the common humanity among people and make choices that support the good of the whole. This can be understood philosophically, in that one’s own need is no more important than the basic needs of every other individual. Or it can be understood pragmatically, in that we are certainly happier if we live in communities that are safe where individuals are not driven to steal what they need.

Contemporary scholars have put the argument for engaged and thoughtful discussion in a slightly different context than Mill did. They emphasize that what’s important is not just the expression of opinion, but of deliberation about which opinion is best and why. For example, according to political theorist Jane Mansbridge:

If a deliberative system works well, it filters out and discards the worst ideas available on public matters while it picks up, adopts, and applies the best ideas. If the deliberative system works badly, it distorts facts, portrays ideas in forms that their originators would disown, and encourages citizens to adopt ways of thinking and acting that are good neither for them nor for the larger polity. A deliberative system, at its best, like all systems of democratic participation, helps its participants understand themselves and their environment better.<sup>8</sup>

## The Familiar Frame of Reality TV

With the proliferation of reality TV programs that focus on narrow, segmented and specialized portions of the audience, such as bargain shoppers (*Extreme Couponing*) or people with problem dogs (*The Animal Whisperer*), it's easy to forget that television has a history of encouraging viewer interactivity from the mass audience and giving viewers a peek at lives different from their own.

Television has long served as a medium that allows selected private individuals to exchange exposure for fame and fortune. Historically, quiz shows did not ask contestants to risk bodily injury or eat live bugs, but they selected and reinforced individuals who demonstrated exaggerated responses or otherwise played best to the medium. For examples, the producers of shows like *The Dating Game* (which first aired on ABC from 1965 to 1973) and *The Newlywed Game* (which ran on ABC from 1966 to 1984) edited their shows to serve up half-hour programs rich with conflict and sexual references that kept audiences coming back for more.

*Queen for a Day*, which ran weekly on NBC from 1956 to 1960 and then on ABC for an additional four years, provided an eerily prescient example of audiences selecting their favorite contestant and deciding who should be eliminated. *TV.com* describes this precursor to reality TV like this:

Four women, each having a sob story to tell, told [host Jack] Bailey why they believed they should be crowned the show's "Queen For a Day." Usually, each contestant asked for a merchandise prize such as a washer and dryer. After all four sad stories were told, the audience chose the winner by applause (determined via the "applause meter"). The winner was awarded her prizes and was bedecked in a sable-trimmed red velvet robe and jeweled crown. Interspersed between the contestants' stories was fashion commentary.<sup>9</sup>

PBS's *An American Family* in 1973 and then MTV's *The Real World* in 1992 and CBS's *Survivor* in 2000 were "earthy anthropological experiments," according to *The New Yorker's* Kelefa Sanneh, that showed the economic worth of creating drama from encounters between "real people" instead of actors.<sup>10</sup> Over time, the genre has evolved to include the theme of reality TV participants bettering themselves in the process. The "transformation" narrative that Sanneh describes<sup>11</sup> fits neatly into the American assumption that individuals have the freedom to gain self-knowledge and become better – physically and spiritually – than they were prior to some pivotal experience (such as appearing on a reality TV show). This assumption fits nicely into the notion that citizens have a duty to grow and develop through public exposure and public discourse. The viewers' vicarious experience complemented by their ability to express their ideas and hear the ideas of others in interactive community discussions potentially allows viewers to learn as much as the participants do. In fact, Laurie Ouellette and James Hay call reality TV a contemporary source of "guidelines for living" for viewers, who see the ordinary people on reality TV as examples of what – or what not – to do to succeed as citizens.<sup>12</sup>

### Experiencing People With Different Ideas and Lifestyles

One attraction of reality TV is that it exposes viewers to participants who are strongly perceived to be "like" them. As one *Survivor* viewer said: "I like the fact that it's real people – people I can identify with instead of superstars and Olympians." Another viewer who is part of the predominant demographic to which reality TV caters, women aged 18 to 25, wrote: "I can see myself or others I know in the actions of those on television."<sup>13</sup> Involving participants who are seen by the audience as "regular" people also suspends "the typical dominance of expert and official knowledge over television content."<sup>14</sup>

But reality TV also exposes viewers to people who are perceived to be *unlike* them. This is important for democracy. As Mill argued, citizens must try on the ideas of others to really know their own and to find the best truth possible. Reality TV can open a window for viewers into a community larger than their own circle of family, friends and neighbourhood. Andy Dehnart, who runs the reality TV website *Realityblurred.com*, said: "Television can provide an intimate entry point into the lives of people who are otherwise misunderstood or underestimated." <sup>15</sup> We're offered this entry through a non-threatening process that allows us to simply "take it all in," to see how

others live, how others think, and what others value. We may not have any sense what it's like to be a teenager with a child, but *Teen Mom* gives us an idea. We may have never met a little person, but *Little People, Big World* gives us that chance. We may have definite perceptions about polygamy, but *Sister Wives* helps show us how accurate – or inaccurate – those perceptions are. (This book's Chapter 2 on stereotyping also makes the case that viewers have an ethical duty to try to get used to those who may differ from them.)

Exposure is the first step; interaction comes next. Viewers of many reality shows are encouraged to engage with one another in blog discussions hosted by network- or interest-based websites. The discussions, or community groups as they are sometimes called, provide further opportunity for viewers (or "posters") to be exposed to beliefs and opinions different from their own. Through discussion with others, viewers can further formulate their own ideas regarding the lifestyle or situational challenges posed by reality TV participants.

*Sister Wives* provides an example of this point as viewers discuss the polygamous lifestyle examined in that reality TV show. Using the familiar "argument by analogy," discussants in this Celebitchy blog<sup>16</sup> struggle to decide what polygamy is like:

*Heatheradair*: My problem with the entire glamorization of their lifestyle is the message it sends their kids. These kids are being taught that it's OK not to expect your dad to be around more than a night or so a week ... and this is different than kids of divorced parents who might only see their parents on the weekend.

*Hakura*: You make some very good points ... I don't think it's right for the state to pursue a prosecution for 'polygamy' when Kody is only *legally* married to one of the women. Polygamy, like gay marriage, is an example of the law applying 'traditional religious moral standards' to people's lifestyle choices ... I'm torn as to how this affects children.

*Pakka*: So what – he's not forcing me to be his wife so don't care ... am fascinated by it.

*Carol*: I love this show. wanted to hate him but I thought he came off better on the show.

*Lisa*: Leave this family alone! They are wonderful parents and they seem to love each other very much.

*Mandy*: Who are WE to judge their lifestyle? ... I'm sure people thought the first women to ask for voting rights or the first black people to insist on being able to sit in the front of the bus with the whites were "disgusting" as well but thankfully our world continues to grow and evolve and accept

These viewers use analogies and disanalogies to express their own beliefs, and the common comparisons help them to understand how other viewers think. They are all trying out the foreign lifestyle against those with which they are more familiar. "What is polygamy like?" might be the theme of this exchange. Is it like same-sex marriage or other civil rights issues from the past? Is the relationship of a child to a polygamous parent like that of the relationship between a child and divorced parent, or not? What viewers think polygamous marriage is like helps inform their opinions. In exchange, trying on others' analogies opens new pathways for how to think about the unfamiliar lifestyle.

In another example, a *Supernanny* discussion group member, who is wondering how to control her daughter when she becomes a toddler, starts off a thread with this question: "Are there some alternative techniques, other than those shown by the Nanny, that are equally effective?" In response, spanking is suggested, which leads to a discussion of how to discipline small children. Other posters warn readers to "steer clear of physical punishment/violence." Instead, they are encouraged to put the child to bed with kisses and cuddles after a warm bath. "Don't use your words! Just hit," says one poster, "is not a lesson I want to impart to my child."<sup>17</sup>

Not all conversations about reality TV, however, encourage diversity of thought. *Blind Date* is a show that uses animated pop-ups for producers to comment on participants' clothes or actions, or to superimpose what participants "really" think or mean (or what interpretation the producers think makes for good entertainment). According to one analysis, "*Blind Date* aims to reinforce stereotypically desirable characteristics for partner selection, related to gender, class and ethnic representations, by framing the divergent participants via the supertext in a manner that comically punishes deviance from hegemonic norms,"<sup>18</sup> Indeed,

producers go out of their way to attract and select daters from outside the mainstream who do not embody the traditionally desirable characteristics of a mate ... [Then] the show seizes the opportunity to poke fun at daters who exhibit marginal or unorthodox characteristics, going so far as to place participants in situations designed to make their deviance from social norms appear comical.<sup>19</sup>



In doing so, producers are implicitly telling viewers how they should respond – with derision to men who value something other than high income and with ridicule toward women who try to relate to something other than men's physical attributes.

Ultimately reality TV shows are controlled by their producers. Do producers want viewers to believe that a woman's breasts are her most important assets regardless of her graduate degree and professional career? If so, animated pop-ups in *Blind Date* point the way to that conclusion. On the other hand, producers can provide viewers the opportunity to compare their own ideas with others but without the inclusion of canned judgments that lead viewers to the "right" conclusion. Consider, for example, the parenting styles of families portrayed on *Supernanny*. It is assumed that the families chosen to appear on that show and other similar help-oriented programs have a problem to solve. But the locus of the problem and the nanny's treatment are transparent enough that viewers can feel engaged and provoked by the *process* as well as by the outcome.

## Developing Self-Knowledge

After being exposed to the ideas of others, the next step essential for democracy is to apply that new knowledge to better understand what we ourselves think, believe and value – in other words, to further develop our sense of self. Mill argued that one can come to know the truth only by testing one's views against the views of others. Hearing others' ideas is not simply an exercise in tolerance but rather an instrumental part of developing a coherent view of one's own. Mill warned that the ability to change or clarify one's values and beliefs is fragile. "Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant," he says. "Easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance."<sup>20</sup> Viewing reality TV can provide that sustenance needed for developing those "nobler feelings," as can participating in community discussion groups about reality TV.

Viewers confronting their own biases or assumptions can recognize alternative perspectives offered by reality TV participants. In one example, Zach Anner, a comedian with cerebral palsy, received hundreds of phone calls after co-winning *Your OWN Show: Oprah's Search for the Next TV Star*, on which he proposed a wheelchair-based travel program. One of those calls came from a man whose son had just been in an accident. "He was crying because my idea gave him inspiration that he and his son could travel someday."<sup>21</sup> The reality TV participant inspired this viewer to think of new possibilities for

himself. Sarah Reinertsen, an amputee who finished seventh on *The Amazing Race 10*, taught a viewer a similar lesson. While taking a walk in a short skirt that exposed her metal prosthetic leg, Reinertsen was stopped by a stranger who recognized her from the show. This man's friend had recently lost his leg in Iraq. According to Reinertsen, the friend had been "totally depressed, but watching me on the show had totally renewed his hope... That's when I realized just how powerful the show really was and that it could help change perceptions and lives."<sup>22</sup> This power of reality television illustrates what Ouellette and Hay mean when they call television a "cultural technology" that can shape individuals and democracy.<sup>23</sup>

Online discussions about reality TV can also prove powerful as we develop coherent views about ourselves and about the world around us. A 21-year-old *Teen Mom* viewer and poster who said she was a mother of four, started an online discussion thread on the MTV website by saying that she "got pregnant at 15 and [has] had it very hard and complicated ever since ... I'm sick to death of these teenagers coming on these shows and putting on a show that life is so hard for them, when they have no idea."<sup>24</sup> The clear statement provoked others into stating their own truths:

*Maybe you need to stop having kids and get a job.*

*I'm very sorry for it all, but it will turn out to be ok.*

*Everyone's situation is different. The girls on the show lucked out by getting a nice paycheck for having their lives taped. But there are thousands of others who have it just like you or worse.*

*You have it hard because you have made it hard for yourself.*

*We all have our own hard knock story as teen moms ... we need to prevent future girls from following the same road ... use your story to help with prevention and education.*<sup>25</sup>

Through this online discussion, the mom who started the thread is given the chance to consider (or reconsider) her own views about herself in light of those offered by other posters.

While growth and change is a laudable goal for those watching reality TV and participating in discussions about it, the result can also be simple reinforcement of viewers' beliefs. For Mill, this reinforcement is one reason for listening to false opinion: we remember why we hold the true ideas that we do. For at least one *Supernanny* poster, this is exactly what participating

in the online discussion accomplished. "I have to say, watching this show makes me think I'm a pretty darn good mom, and my kids' behavior is fantastic (relatively speaking)."<sup>26</sup>

## Experiencing Community Involvement, Democratic Action and Civil Discourse

### *Community Involvement*



Mill recognized that happiness is found, in part, through realizing that society has shortcomings and that individuals can be actively involved in making the world a better place. While Mill acknowledged that relieving human suffering is "grievously slow," those who engage in helping others "will draw a noble enjoyment" from the act itself.<sup>27</sup> Shows like *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* and *Secret Millionaire* provide examples of individuals and corporations joining forces to help those in need. Philanthropic action requires that those who can help must first recognize the need, then think creatively about how they might best help, and finally have the motivation to carry through with helpful action. Philanthropic reality shows demonstrate all three of these requirements. The formula results in both individuals who are better off by the end of the show and satisfied participants who contributed to the good action. Mill would find the formula an effective illustration of what he considers true individual happiness.

Ouellette and Hay suggest that philanthropic reality shows fill a public and social service role that government in an era of deregulation and privatization has failed to fill and that the shows may introduce needy people to active roles as functioning citizens.<sup>28</sup> However, these shows are not without their detractors. Media critic Christian Blauvelt says of *Secret Millionaire*: "While it's admirable that ABC is giving deserving non-profit organizations much needed publicity that they wouldn't receive otherwise, the narrative impulse of the series – based largely around rich folks encountering the less fortunate – reveals much about how lacking our national dialogue on poverty remains."<sup>29</sup> But Blauvelt's comments did not go unchecked. In true illustration of the interactivity of reality TV discussion groups, many of the viewer-commentators critiqued Blauvelt's criticism. They said the good works should be celebrated, not "bashed."

### ***Democratic Action***

Reality TV history is littered with the tarnished crowns of program heroes whose avarice has led to tragic ends. But among the “teen moms” charged with drunk and disorderly conduct and “survivors” who are arrested for domestic violence or assault, we also see participants turn the popularity of their shows into political power. In July 2011, *Sister Wives* provided a good example of how reality TV can lead directly to democratic action when Kody Brown and his four wives filed a federal lawsuit, asking that Utah’s bigamy statute be declared unconstitutional.<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Turley, the attorney representing the family, said: “What they are asking for is the right to structure their own lives, their own family, according to their faith and their beliefs.”<sup>31</sup> Turley added that “the focus of the lawsuit is really privacy – not polygamy,” and the suit follows the principles of other lawsuits that have held “private intimate relationships between consenting adults’ are constitutionally protected.”<sup>32</sup>

The same month, ABC announced that first lady Michelle Obama would appear on an upcoming episode of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. Obama was to help expand a centre for homeless female veterans located near Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina, another of her efforts intended to assist those in the armed services.<sup>33</sup> Real life public officials stepping into reality TV reinforces the truth of the experience, as do reality TV participants stepping from the front of the television camera into the courtroom.

Another example of combining reality TV with a view toward the democratic goal of promoting the community good is the network, OWN, The Oprah Winfrey Network. OWN calls itself “the first network about living your best life.”<sup>34</sup> According to a 2009 news release announcing the network, its goal “is to create an innovative experience for that broad audience of people who are living their lives with a purpose.”<sup>35</sup> Audiences are rewarded for viewing by being identified as “living their lives with a purpose,” and shows are classified as “Best Life All Stars,” “Best Life Experiences” and “Best Life Inspiration” The network airs documentaries, magazine shows and fictional programs but also reality shows. Viewers are recruited to participate in some of these reality shows through a “Casting Call” page on the website, which also invites community discussion of the shows.

### ***Civil Discourse***

For deliberative democracy to truly be promoted, deliberations must be productive. Oprah.com “House Rules” provide specific guidance for those who wish to participate in online conversations about the network’s reality

shows, OWN as a whole, and *O* magazine.<sup>36</sup> In doing so, Oprah.com also helps shape *civic* discourse by insisting on *civil* discourse. “[W]e require respect and good manners from everyone participating in our online communities, commenting forums, twitter feeds, message boards, blogs, O Groups, chat rooms, user review forums or other interactive communities.”<sup>37</sup> Oprah.com explicitly states hallmarks of deliberative democracy in providing the boundaries of participation:

Our community is a place where people can strive to live their best lives, achieve personal growth and generate positive, thoughtful dialogue. Members can come to one another for support, comfort and shared experiences. While we invite healthy debate, Oprah.com is not intended as a forum for personal attacks and destructive postings.<sup>38</sup>

Consuelo Arroyo, President of NETIZEN Media Solutions, who manages the OWN communities, said that no messages are trimmed or edited for content. A message is either judged as appropriate within the guidelines or is not posted to the site. The writer is then notified of the reason the message was denied.<sup>39</sup>

Reality TV World, a website devoted to all things reality TV, is more explicit in its warning to posters and more aggressive in its moderation of discussions. The following warning appears at the top of the discussion forum page:

The Reality TV World Message Boards are filled with desperate attention-seekers pretending to be one big happy PG/PG13-rated family. Don't be fooled. Trying to get everyone to agree with you is like herding cats, but intolerance for other viewpoints is NOT welcome and respect for other posters IS required at all times. Jump in and play, and you'll soon find out how easy it is to fit in, but save your drama for your mama. All members are encouraged to read the complete guidelines. As entertainment critic Roger Ebert once said: 'If you disagree with something I write, tell me so, argue with me, correct me – but don't tell me to shut up. That's not the American way.'<sup>40</sup>

in contrast to OWN with its “use it or lose it” approach to viewer messages, Reality TV World posts a “flag” button next to each post, inviting readers to alert the forum moderator to violation of rules or standards. On a variety of discussion groups, posters have indicated that parts of their messages have been edited, although they contend those messages did not violate the site's guidelines.<sup>41</sup> As this example demonstrates, the tension between free speech and regulation aimed at keeping civic discourse non-offensive is no different online than it is in the physical world.

## Reality TV as Stimulus but Not Solution

Passive consumption of reality TV, or even the more active involvement in web-based discussions of the programs, will not alone make viewers better citizens. Freedom of expression, in reception and in production, is of instrumental worth only. The emotional involvement provoked through reality TV and interactive community groups does not fulfil citizens' responsibility to act; it is just a start. Education is needed to help citizens recognize both their power to act directly in the public arena and the methods they can use to take direct action. Nonetheless, reality TV can provide an easy avenue for citizens to be exposed to lifestyles different from their own, to develop self-knowledge, and to experience a variety of forms of democratic action.

### Notes

- 1 MTV, "Season 2, Episode 212 Summary," *Teen Mom*, 2011. [http://www.mtv.com/shows/teen\\_mom/season\\_2/episode.jhtml?episodeID=170102#moreinfo](http://www.mtv.com/shows/teen_mom/season_2/episode.jhtml?episodeID=170102#moreinfo).
- 2 TV.com, *Little People Big World*, 2011. [http://www.tv.com/little-people-big-world/show/61776/summary.html?tag=page\\_nav;main](http://www.tv.com/little-people-big-world/show/61776/summary.html?tag=page_nav;main).
- 3 TLC, "About the Show," *Sister Wives*, 2011. <http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/tv/sister-wives/about-sister-wives.htm>.
- 4 John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," in *John Stuart Mill: On Liberty and Other Essays*, John Gray ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1859/1991) 59. *Ibid.*, 42–3.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 61.
- 8 Jane Mansbridge, "Everyday Talk in the Deliberative System," in *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement*, Steven Macedo ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 211.
- 9 TV.com, "Show Overview," *Queen for a Day*, 2011. <http://www.tv.com/queen-for-a-day/show/20880/summary.html>.
- 10 Kelefa Sanneh, "The Reality Principle: The Rise and Rise of a Television Genre," *The New Yorker*, 9 May 2011, 72.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 75.
- 12 Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV: Television and Post-Welfare Citizenship* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).
- 13 Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004) 9.

- 14 Justin DeRose, ElfriedeFürsich and Ekaterina Haskins, "Pop (Up) Goes the 'Blind Date': Supertextual Constraints on 'Reality' Television." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 27 (2003): 173.
- 15 Neal Justin, "Reality TV Gets More Real," *Star Tribune*, 17 April 2011, 1E.
- 16 These excerpts have been edited for space and emphasis. Deleted sections are indicated by ellipsis marks. See Celebitchy.com, "Sister Wives Husband Kody Admits He Gets his Wives' Names Mixed Up," 10 March 2011. <http://www.celebitchy.com/145013/>
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 DeRose, Fürsich and Haskins, "Pop (Up) Goes the Blind Date," 172.
- 19 Ibid., 176–7.
- 20 Mill, *On Liberty*, 141.
- 21 Justin, "Reality TV gets more real," 1E.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV*, 2–3.
- 24 MTV, "Message Board," *Teen Mom – Your Story*, 2011. <http://community.mtv.com/Content/Discussions/DiscussionResults.aspx?tcid=39738>.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Reality TV World, "Message Board Forum," *Super Nanny*, February 2005. <http://community.realitytvworld.com/boards//DCForumID17/1171.shtml>.
- 27 Mill, *On Liberty*, 146.
- 28 Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV*, 14–33.
- 29 Christian Blauvelt, "ABC's 'Secret Millionaire': Why it Sends the Wrong Message," *Entertainment Weekly.com*, 6 March 2011. <http://popwatch.ew.com/2011/03/06/secret-millionaire>.
- 30 Associated Press, "'Sister Wives' Stars Challenge Utah Bigamy Law," 14 July 2011. Available at First Amendment Center. <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/sister-wives-stars-challenge-utah-bigamy-law>.
- 31 Ibid.
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