

GRANDTOUR

Bully Pulpit

By Bruce W. Cook



If you are watching reality-based television, then you may be of the opinion that Americans are only interested in sex. Okay, well, maybe that's true, and TV is just freer and easier in presenting hormonal excess to the sex-starved couch-loving public. After all, Freud and many other experts told us decades ago that the strongest pull on our feeble human psyche is the sex drive. Just the same, we face more serious issues than video voyeurism. Our society is on the verge of suffering a video nervous breakdown. Why? We are relationship deprived; searching for meaningful and loving messages via shows such as *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. Every sleazy concept-driven format that proliferates the free and public airwaves, from such gems as *Married by America* to *How To Be a Porn Star*, sends the message that love can be bought and sold.

Our children are at the highest risk of misinterpreting this campaign. The media bombards them with images of Brittany Spears and Paris Hilton. Not every young girl in our society is an emaciated blond sex-child, yet millions of children aspire to such a fantasy goal. While some may be horrified by America's fascination with current media darlings such as Ms. Hilton, many more are turned on. But then again, what is a more powerful elixir than the combination of youth, sex and money? Hilton is a goddess of The Moment. Apparently, we need these escapes more and more as the media's voracious appetite chews up the young; selling unrealistic dreams and images.

All in all, it amounts to undignified exploitation. Underneath the gross manipulation of images of sex and money, millions of viewers, predominately female, are tuning in to shows such as *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* to watch a relationship develop into a potential marriage. It's a perversion of the white picket-fence version of American life, lost in transition somewhere between the political, sexual and cultural revolutions of the 1960s, and the redefinition of male and female roles in the 21st Century. Millions of redefined males, and especially females, may not be so comfortable with their newly-minted lifestyles.

Can you imagine that so many worldly people, exposed to every iota of life via the media, could actually be swept up and hypnotized by a TV show introducing complete strangers and promising a potential love union including marriage? It's all a plot, a conspiracy against the lonely, the frustrated, the foolish folks desperate for a simpler time, a purer love, a picket-fence life.

There are two additional disturbing aspects to these reality-based programs. The first issue goes beyond the fantasy love

and relationship-sell into an even more treacherous territory. It is the mean factor. America is captivated and manipulated by sheer rotten behavior. Check out any show from *The Survivor* to *American Idol* and you will see—and probably be taken in by—people talking down, tearing down, and putting down other human beings in pursuit of ratings and financial success. The latest, and apparently hottest, reality entry features New York billionaire Donald Trump firing young people who do not live up to his capitalist standards. The show features a diverse group of young adults playing silly games based on so-called principles of business and economics. Dissect the show and it's nothing more than an abusive party game, a pin the tail on the donkey, a musical chairs with the odd man or woman out, orchestrated by an egomaniac with a comb-over.

The American dream is very broad and inclusive of all possibilities. In an age of opportunity, we continue to grasp at stereotypes instead of at new and better visions to help mankind grow, prosper and survive in what will soon be an even smaller, nuclear world.

The other perverse element, ever present in our reality television model, is the lie. Many programs are based on selling a lie, living a lie, promoting a lie. Take *Joe Millionaire*, a show that sets up the premise of a handsome young man allegedly worth eighty million dollars, searching for the perfect woman, in spite of his wealth. All a lie, all of the women are duped. Then there's *My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé*, the latest entry that sets up a family to believe that their daughter is in love with a clod. If they fall for it, and the pair of liars makes it to the altar, the girl wins a million bucks. Is this highbrow concept television?

The next time you tune in your TV, pay attention to the messages of fractured relationships, acceptable liars and unkind aggressive behavior—then ask yourself if it really doesn't matter. Is it just TV? Ask yourself if you are watching a reflection of real life, of a world that you want to live in and be a part of. Then, ask yourself what you can do about it. The first step might be to turn off the TV. Ok, you might not be able to watch *The OC*, but then again who knows what doors might open in your life.

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