

Hyperreality: The Reality of Reality Television

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Defining Reality TV

- Reality TV:
 - Portrays real people in real situations
- Why Do We Watch It?
 - Characters are "normal people" like ourselves
 - Unpredictable, just like our own lives

Cultivation Theory

- Suggests that TV is responsible for shaping viewers' perceptions of social reality
- The more viewers watch TV and are exposed to these distortions of reality, the more they will come to view the real world as similar to the world portrayed on TV
- TV programs viewed during childhood impacts social reality beliefs held as an adult

Method

- 5 focus groups with 40 participants (8 in each group) between the ages of 12-18
- Participants asked about their beliefs and attitudes towards reality TV
- Questions include:
 - What are your favorite reality TV shows?
 - What do you like about these shows?
 - What makes these shows real?
 - Do you notice anything that makes them less real?
 - Could the events on the show happen in real life?
 - Do the characters seem like people you would meet in real life?
 - Are they similar to your friends and family?
 - So you want to be like any of the characters on the show?
 - So you use ideas from the program to solve your problems and help you make decisions?



The cast of MTV's reality T.V. sensation *Jersey Shore* (above), and a real group of children simulating the character's on the show.



Introduction

- Hyperreality: when youth are unable to separate what is real from what is unreal, specifically in reality TV programs, leading to a false perception of what is happening in the world
- Impressionable youth between the ages of 12-18 fall prey to the effects of hyperreality
- Growing media based society:
 - Average person watches 4 hours of TV per day
 - Heavy reliance on *reality* TV
- Week of 3/14/11 according to Neilson Ratings:

• Top shows are reality TV, above news-based programs	
Cable TV	Broadcast TV
1. Jersey Shore	1 & 2. American Idol
4. Teen Mom	3 & 4. The Bachelor
10. The O'Reilly Factor	8. 60 Minutes

Hypothesis

- Children between the ages of 12-18 see reality TV as an unaltered and accurate representation of real life and are unable to separate what is real from what is unreal, leading to lasting effects like confusion and misplaced trust in media.

Expected Results

- Trend of difficulty separating what is real from what is unreal
- Overall skewed understanding and belief that characters and events are real on reality programs
- Belief that events happening on these programs happen in everyday life
- View cast members as real people, rather than characters following script and cues from producers
- Model behavior after characters, including profanity, poor decision making, negative attitudes

Expected Effects in Adulthood

- Develop stronger cognitive abilities, and awareness allowing for distinction between real and unreal
- Become skeptic of media and question trust in media
- No longer look to reality TV characters as role models
- Stop expecting to find these personalities in real life
- Understand that events on reality shows will not happen in real life

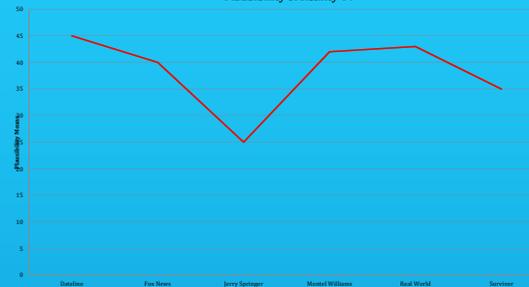
Conclusion

- Youth lack the cognitive abilities needed to separate what is real from what is unreal, often accepting the glamorized images of drugs and alcohol, relationships and experiences presented on reality TV
- Belief that reality TV is real leads to trouble in interpersonal relationships and leaves youth with an unclear picture of life beyond the TV screen
- Without more research, we may never understand how to combat the effects of reality TV on youth

Future Research

- Research on the effects of reality TV programs on impressionable youth is minimal
- Because of its relevance, more research is needed to explain the effects of reality TV on youth and their perceptions of reality

Plausibility of Reality TV



Utility of Reality TV



Results of a study done by Meng & Lugalambi showing that participants rated *The Real World* as more plausible and more useful than Fox News.