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The Reality of Humiliation: A Reflection

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The Reality of Humiliation: A Reflection

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"There are many factors that have played a role in the decrease of privacy in the United States today. Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, we as Americans have experienced a widening increase of governmental restrictions, searches, and inquiries that are set in place to insure our future security against terrorist threats. Coupled with this official state entrance into our privacy we also have been subject to deeper invasions privacy from the public sector. We now hunger to see into peoples' personal lives and to live vicariously through them, sometimes fanatically."



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Prize for *Brief Essay* Awarded by
Jonathan Schott, Class of 2002 & Jodi Rowland, Class of 2004

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The Reality of Humiliation: A Reflection

by

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There are many factors that have played a role in the decrease of privacy in the United States today. Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, we as Americans have experienced a widening increase of governmental restrictions, searches, and inquiries that are set in place to insure our future security against terrorist threats. Coupled with this official state entrance into our privacy we also have been subject to deeper invasions privacy from the public sector. We now hunger to see into peoples' personal lives and to live vicariously through them, sometimes fanatically.

Our nation today is also infatuated with megalomania of biblical proportions. We need bigger, faster, more powerful cars and SUV's; we need that larger HDTV, and how many of us shop at such massive retailers as the wholesale clubs and "marts?" We as Americans believe we have an entitlement to these bigger and better products and services: we are after all the world's most powerful nation. This megalomania has not only filtered through our consumerism, but is now affecting our search for entertainment. What is the product of this need for bigger and better entertainment? The nation's infatuated craze surrounding reality television.

Coupled together our megalomania and our wanton lust for entrance into people's private lives have resulted in reality television's widening array of features. It all began with Music Television's "Real World" over ten years ago. We met real people, living together, managing problems together, and we dealt with real issues like race, same-gender sexual orientation, and in later seasons HIV/AIDS. From here reality television moved more mainstream, with CBS's "Survivor" and other programming like "The Amazing Race." Much like the original "Real World" experience, the CBS programs offered viewers glimpses into real people's lives, who through the objectives of the show,

were thrown into situations that spawned real emotional and physical responses. Our hunger for seeing more and more of these responses—to see people “blow up”—and our greed for bigger and better reality television is causing a moral crisis in the United States today.

I am composing this brief reflection from the Roman Catholic Christian viewpoint. However, it is safe to say that other world religions including Islam and Judaism would also conclude that the megalomania of reality television is drawing into question one of our basic human rights: dignity. I chose to approach this topic after seeing an advertisement for one of the latest installments in the reality market, which comes from NBC. The name of this reality program is aptly titled, “The Biggest Loser.” The premise of this “reality show” is to publicize and market-for-profit the personal and spiritual struggle of obese and overweight persons who have made a commitment to enter into a weight loss regime in the attempt to become healthier Americans. While I agree with the concept: helping Americans with our endemic of obesity, I vehemently oppose the production of this program. This show, one of many such as “Fear Factor” or “I’d Do Anything” focuses on the publicly marketed humiliation of the participants, all for the “enjoyment” of the masses and the pocketbooks of the networks. “The Biggest Loser”—the title itself is a public humiliation of overweight or obese humans—challenges its contestants to lose as much weight as they can to remain on the show and win an eventual prize. However, if they do not lose weight progressively and steadily, they are “fired” from the show, and are subject to the ridicule of our entire nation for not losing weight fast enough, regardless of the risks to one’s personal well-being and dignity. Furthermore, programs like “Who Wants to Marry My Dad” call into question the

sanctity of human marriage, bypassing the discernment of love and reciprocity between the spouses for a quick and “fun” television show that ignores these essential qualities of the human relationship.

We in the Christian community have an obligation to uphold the dignity of the human person. We support the poor, the helpless, and the underprivileged of our world and we are obligated to help and marginalized people who are subject to torment or ridicule at the hands of others. The Roman Catholic community had endorsed this obligation in places like African and Latin and South America, places like Bosnia and Iraq, and now we are called to do the same right here in the United States. We must now defend the dignity of our neighbors. It is homeland security, on the moral level.

I am by no means degrading the concept of reality television. Programs like “The Amazing Race” and “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” offer us glimpses into people’s lives who are real: real people who need help, real people traveling toward a goal. Shows like these do not publicly humiliate its participants: no one must be submerged underwater until they lose consciousness and no one is forced to fall in “love.” Reality television can offer us a platform for assessing our own lives, to discern who we are and what we stand for.

The megalomania of reality television has caused a rift in our moral stability. The decrease of individual privacy has led to an increase into what can be shown on reality programs. It our own personal moral stability that should determine which types of these programs are “real.”

Brief Essay



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