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Editorial Reality shows should leave exploitation for adults only

We know the television ratings race is reaching new lows when desperate producers start pawing off reality TV shows featuring children as quality programming.

Though there has been a slew of "reality" shows in the wake of the success of "Survivor," the stars of these melodramatic television programs should be restricted to consenting adults, not impressionable children who may be manipulated or forced into participating by their parents.

Two new shows will feature youngsters in "real" predicaments, such as reintroducing rescued orangutans to the rainforest and building survival rafts on a deserted island. The BBC is working on a documentary-style soap opera called "Serious Jungle," which has children as young as 12 roaming around the Borneo tropical rainforest. The children will have intensive survival training for a week and will then live in the forest for two weeks alongside untamed bears, rhinos, crocodiles and millions of poisonous insects. You know, just your typical pre-teen experiences.

UPN has already premiered "Under One Roof," a show featuring five dysfunctional families — including mom, dad and kids — who leave their domestic lives to move to Fiji and compete, a la "Survivor," for a vacation house on the island. The kin are mostly teenagers who provide a lot of angst and are embarrassed by the antics of their often-quarreling parents. Luckily, "Roof" was placed on hiatus by UPN last week, sparing viewers from the melodrama until further notice.

So what's wrong with putting children and teenagers into a reality television setting? Nothing, if their parents are willing to pay enormous psychotherapy bills in the future. Children shouldn't be forced or manipulated by their competitive parents to compete in "Under One Roof," and pre-teens don't need to fight off wild animals in Borneo on the whim of a producer who wants to capture the drama of cries for mommy. Reality television probably has never been truly real, and we are getting sick of the networks' repeated attempts to exploit otherwise sane people.

Kids are bound to be traumatized by these experiences, and these kinds of shows distort what young viewers see as reality. We should let adults over 18 embarrass themselves on television and leave the children alone.

Editorial Policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Please include contact information. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

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Oprah closes another book

The reigning queen of talk show television, Oprah Winfrey, announced Friday that she would no longer be featuring books regularly on her show because she couldn't find any more enthralling novels. Oprah's Book Club, a staple of Winfrey's feel-good television repertoire for six years, helped millions of her disciples get motivated about reading quality literary work. But now that Winfrey's inspiration from literature has waned, so will her fickle viewer's interest in continuing the book club's tradition.



Julie Lauderbaugh
 editorial editor

Winfrey announced last month that she is ending her show in 2006, leaving two decades of tears, laughter and shameless narcissism as her legacy. In addition to hosting the "The Oprah Winfrey Show," she is also the founder of her own production studio, Harpo Productions, runs Oprah's Angel Network, graces every cover of and writes for her own monthly magazine, "O," and continues to gracefully balance her personal life with being one of the most influential women in entertainment.

Winfrey's name gives automatic credentials to any project she touches, and she has succeeded like no other woman in the industry, earning \$150 million in 2000, according to Forbes magazine. But the unparalleled power and reach over her constituents as a television persona is proved most obviously with the success of her book club.

With Winfrey's blessing, many of her

book club selections sold more than 1.2 million copies as soon as they were announced, and all of her 46 choices thus far have been featured on best-seller lists. The role model single-handedly became the biggest authority on literary quality in the nation, thanks in part to her loyal viewers and high-profile author friends, like Maya Angelou, who were willing to talk about their work on the show.

But what will become of the Oprah Winfrey literacy crusade now that the chapter has ended on her book club? Publishers and writers alike consider a nod from Winfrey as money in the bank. Although there are critics who claim her selections are less than literary masterpieces, the arguments haven't kept people from reading.

Winfrey's stated reason for the demise of her book club was that couldn't find any more books she felt compelled to share with her viewers and that it was hard to promote a novel every month. In fact, Oprah's selections have come sporadically, with only six books endorsed in 2001, compared to 11 in 1997.

So does this mean Winfrey has read all the literary treasures there are in the world, and current works are inconsequential? With so many new titles and talented writers emerging, I find Winfrey's excuse flimsy at best. Let's call it like it really is — Winfrey is too busy preening for her magazine's cameras and building shrines to Dr. Phil to continue her bookworm ways.

In March, President George W. Bush invited Winfrey to tour Afghanistan's schools to help show U.S. support for women and girls attending classes after the fall of the Taliban regime, but Winfrey said she had prior obligations. Passing up an opportunity to further her

public appeal is uncharacteristic, and heck, if she had accepted Bush's request, she could have finished a lot of insignificant books on her plane ride to and from the Middle East.

However self-promoting Winfrey has become, she deserves praise for her efforts in keeping literacy an important issue in a daytime television market wrought with soap operas and smart-mouthed circuit court judges. And although it is pathetic that it took a talk-show guru to reignite American interest in quality literature to begin with, Oprah's Book Club commands credit for simply making reading attractive and enjoyable again.

E-mail editorial editor Julie Lauderbaugh at julielauderbaugh@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the Emerald.

Poll Results:

Every week, the Emerald prints the results of our online poll and the poll question for next week. The poll can be accessed from the main page of our Web site, www.dailyemerald.com. We encourage you to send us feedback about the poll questions and results.

This week's poll question:
How did you file your taxes?

- Online
- Hired a tax preparation service
- Snail mail
- Don't plan to file
- Frantically this week
- That's what the weekend is for