

Reality TV shows bring viewers together

Whenever I read about reality television, it's the same old tripe.

"Oh, to what depths will we sink next? Midget star search? C-list celebrity kung fu? Real World: Iraq?"

No, no and no. Of course not. The next big reality hit has a simple concept. It's set for a May release date on CBS.

It's "Peter and Friends Watch Reality Television."

Reality TV is the heroin pumping through my veins. It's caffeine, chocolate and alcohol rolled into one. It's my vice of vices. Lots of people hate it. Some people sit on the fence.

Luckily, all my buddies eat it up like

birthday cake. So whenever we sit down to watch it together, I swear they should have the cameras trained on my living room.

To the television during "Real World: San Diego," we scream "Free Brad!"

To "Average Joe 2: Hawaii," we growl, in our best Boston accents, "Nobody's gonna come into my house and push me or my buddies around." Or "Have you ever been on a yacht? No, but I been on a booze cruise."

To "American Idol," we shriek "She bangs! She bangs!"

To "Joe Schmo," we ask "What is going oooooo?"

Anybody who thinks reality TV can't produce one-liners is just plain wrong.



Peter Hockaday
Today is Hockaday

And anybody who dismisses reality

television as unintelligent garbage needs to be locked in a room with Simon Cowell for a week.

Really, nothing can unite television watchers like reality shows. The emotional highs and lows are higher and lower because the people you're watching are real. You can read me the riot act of how shows are cut to skew reality or how producers manipulate viewers.

Whatever. I can tell you right now, true reality junkies don't give a whit. We love it all. We love it because we can yell at the television. Because we can tell people, real people, they're idiots. Because Jessica Simpson is stupid.

Because Donald Trump is brutally honest. Because Richard Hatch is more manipulative than a teenage girl.

Perhaps it takes a reality movie to explain reality television. Last spring, my buddy Jeff and I needed to see "The Real Cancun" because it was the first reality movie ever. Critics slammed the movie harder than an Andy Roddick serve. Some even put it on their "worst of the year" lists this winter.

Again, we didn't care. Did I mention we're junkies? We went to the movie theater on a Thursday soon after it

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Violence in media affects future generations

I grew up watching "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Regardless of how writers (e.g. John Zerzan) might feel about the militaristic or hierarchical aspects of the show, the basic lesson that the ever-reasonable Captain Picard, the wild-eyed Data and the rest of the motley crew imparted upon me was simple: Violence doesn't solve problems; it escalates them.

Yet perhaps Star Trek is a bit too idealistic in this day and age. Because, undeniably, 21st century Western culture's greatest vice is violence, violence and more violence. Like children sucking on the proverbial teat, we're milked on this stuff from birth to the point that it's

just viewed as one more fact of everyday life, or in other words, "normal."

In this visual nation, there is little respite from the addiction to violence. In his article, "We Are Training Our Kids to Kill," Lt. Col. Dave Grossman—who spent nearly 25 years learning and studying how to enable people to kill—parallels military combat training with media desensitization.

Children "don't naturally kill," Grossman said. "It is a learned skill. And they learn it from abuse and violence in the home, and more pervasively, from violence as entertainment in television, the movies, and interactive video games."

Grossman explains that a young child is brutalized when he or she is



Aaron Shakra
Notebooks of DJ Serpentine

first able to discern what is happening on television, much like a soldier is

brutalized upon arriving at boot camp.

"When young children see somebody stabbed, raped, brutalized, degraded and murdered on TV, to them it as though it were actually happening," he says.

Two other examples outline Grossman's article. Classical conditioning, which you may be familiar with through Ivan Pavlov's famous experiments with dogs, operates as children watch vivid pictures of human suffering and death juxtaposed with pleasurable images of soft drinks, candy bars and perfume. The lesson? For a defenseless viewer, violence becomes associated with pleasure.

Operant conditioning is a repetitive procedure. An example of this would be a first-person shooter video game. "Aim, shoot, aim, shoot, aim, shoot," to the point that pulling the trigger becomes a reflexive response.

As compelling as Grossman's article is, he makes little connection to the institutions that condone violence in our culture. Media and video games are only symptoms, indicative of a larger problem. This perspective is summed up succinctly in the Michael Franti lyric: "You tellin' the youth don't be so violent / then you drop bombs on

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Caring for too many pets can strain budget, sanity

You probably have a pet, don't you? Just a cat or a dog, maybe something more exotic like a bird or a snake?

But you have a limit.

According to the American Pet Association, there are 139,654,267 licensed dogs and cats in the United States. That's approximately one dog or cat for every couple of people. Not bad.

But what about the people out there who have, say, nine pets? Are they crazy? I think so, and sadly I'm one of them.

I grew up in Douglas County, and my nearest neighbor was a cow. Literally. My family always had a lot of animals. Throughout my childhood, we had one dog, up to eight cats, a tank full of fish, some bumper lambs and a cycle of rats, birds and hamsters. You'd think that, growing up with a house full of animals, I wouldn't be

able to wait to be rid of them, right?

Wrong.

Four cages sit near the front door of my home. Inside those cages are nine Siberian dwarf hamsters: Black Rebel Hamster Mama, Peggy, Spike, Spike (Spike's brother), T. Rex, Chub-Chub, Tiny Tina, Lex and Al.

My life with pets has been a hamster soap opera. Here's the story so far: A friend of mine gave me Abdul (who I thought was male, but turned out to be female). I loved my new (and only) pet so much that I went out and bought two cages and lots of tubes. Abdul didn't like all the space her new home afforded her, so I had to buy another hamster who would appreciate the spacious settings. That's how Black Rebel Hamster Mama (who happens to be male) came into my life.

Abdul got pregnant and gave birth

to Peggy, Spike and Spike (you know, like on "Newhart": "This is Daryl and



Brandi Smith
The truth about cats & dogs

my other brother Daryl"). I bought another cage to house my growing population of hamsters and everything was going great until Peggy got pregnant. To this day, I can't figure out how it happened. She lived in a cage

full of girls, I think.

Peggy also gave birth to four babies: Bullet, Lex, Chub-Chub and Tiny Tina. Bullet was given to a friend, but I kept the other three.

As soon as she could, Abdul got pregnant again but died giving birth. The friend who originally gave Abdul to me decided giving me another hamster would help with my loss. So T. Rex joined the family.

Shortly thereafter, I bought Al (the albino). Who wouldn't want an albino hamster to spice things up?

So, in total, I now have nine hamsters. And if for some strange reason you don't think nine hamsters is a lot, just think about the costs. I cannot fathom how much money I have spent on my tiny buddies. I mean, I shop for pet supplies at Wal-Mart, and I still spend a small fortune. There's

the \$5 bag of bedding (of which I have to buy two; one cedar and one red cedar), the \$6 container of food and many \$2 treats and chewy toys. In the end, I spend about \$15 dollars a week on my little lovelies. That's more than I spend on food for myself during the same amount of time!

I love 'em, though, so I guess that justifies starving myself to keep them comfy, well-fed and entertained. Or does it?

You know those old ladies with houses full of cats? I think I'm starting to mutate into one, but with hamsters. I don't want to be an old cat lady. I'm only 21. And I do have a social life... sort of.

Contact the copy chief at brandismith@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

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