The Collective Conscience Of Reality Television

“The Collective Conscience of Reality Television” was written in 2014 by Serna Eluvia. It was published in The Atlantic Monthly, a monthly periodical that covers literature, political science, foreign affairs, and cultural events.

In the article, Serena Elavia describes several experiences that have led to terrible consequences on reality television programs. She suggests that reality television viewers become the conscience of the show’s society watch. Then, she claims how reality television families have a lot of stress and some end up in a divorce. Also, she points out the issues that have come from a few of the reality television shows. The article refers to ratings and to audience reactions to explain how executive decisions are based more on viewers’ opinions than on ethical stands.

She writes in her article that implies networks are the reasons why society is being affected. This is important because words like “society” or “the media” are shorthands for “the aggregated preferences of many, perhaps millions, of individuals.” You can’t blame “society” for much of anything; you can at best blame the many individuals who hold and perpetuate beliefs or practices or whatever. “Conscience” is distributed, and it’s arguably becoming more distributed in the Internet age when the means of discussions are (literally) at everyone’s fingertips.

In my opinion, I would not agree with her article because the reality television shows cast members signed up to be a part of the show. Elavia implies the network is “willing to show almost everything, regardless of the impact on its cast members” which is correct but it's only smart for the cast members to create a contract that prevents the network from not to air they would want not society to see (220). As Elavia's main agreement was towards the viewers that add on to the problem the cast members must deal with. I feel the networks care for the cast members because, in the end, both help each other. I did not like her explanation for why reality television shows are so successful due to dragging down the networks.

In conclusion, all Elavia observes, producers only stop when audiences protest. Which raises a question: What happens if audiences don’t protest? That sort of question underlies books like The Hunger Games. Over time it may become more salient. Fiction and history teach us that we don’t know what our neighbors and friends and strangers will do in real crises. Many, however, will indulge or release the darkness within.