

Opinions

Obsessed: Reality TV Infatuation

Pop culture benefits from embracing unfounded enjoyment of shameless entertainment



Liv Dubendorf
Columnist

Every time I turn on the TV, I see some advertisement for the "newest and most compelling reality show ever created," or so the producers claim. On almost every major network, you can find a plethora of reality TV shows for each and every interest you may have.

But you have to wonder why and how these shows are getting enough viewers, to keep the networks paying to produce them.

Are major networks creating a product and telling the public they should like it? Or are they just appealing to a pre-existing fascination that our culture has?

I spent fall semester in Heidelberg, Germany, far from the U.S. culture I know and love. Despite the distance, I was never too far from the reaches of societal influences that bleed past geographical boundaries. MTV Europe provided me with my weekly dose of American culture in the form of "Jersey Shore" via the Internet.

I'm addicted to "Jersey Shore." The contagiously spectacular personalities of Jenni "JWoww," Mike "The Situation," "Snooki," DJ Pauly D, Ronnie, Sammi "Sweetheart" and Vinny — not so much Angelina — can keep me fascinated for even the longest of marathons.

But I still found myself wondering why I like "Jersey Shore" and why many of my peers find it as fantastic as I do.

Maybe some people wish they could rock the "poof" like Snooki. Maybe a few people wish they lived life like "The Situation" — a 27-year-old talentless, gym-obsessed Italian-American "Guido" without goals that reach beyond dry-cleaning his wardrobe for the weekend.

Though it is markedly unlikely that viewers look to these eccentric and unreliable human beings as role models, it's undeniable that we find them interesting enough to continue watching.

Who doesn't want to watch people get in fights? It is remarkably similar to high school, when everyone would gather to watch two people claw at each other. The only difference is that we can sit down in the comfort of our own homes and watch the hilarity unfold.

As a person with what I consider to be good morals and a normal social upbringing, I can't just smack someone when they don't do what I

want (think back to "JWoww" and "The Situation" in Atlantic City). If I did that, I'm pretty convinced I'd be put into anger management.

Reality TV has turned into a pop culture goldmine. Beginning with "The Real World," it has morphed into a stratosphere that is currently dominated by the seven human wonders starring on the "Jersey Shore."

MTV isn't teaching us what to love. The network is merely tapping into something that Americans already love: drama.

To offset the fast-paced, stressful lives of Americans, MTV provides a welcome respite from what is socially acceptable, and receives a significant profit.

On a basic level, the people we watch on reality TV aren't completely real. The situations are aggravated, sometimes even constructed by the producers who tell characters what to say, put people in awkward situations and edit footage to misconstrue a sequence of events. We just get to come along for the ride.

Will reality TV ever be worthwhile? Probably not. Do I care about how worthwhile it is? Absolutely not. I will continue to shamelessly watch reality television. The simple and condensed drama of these shows is a huge comedic release to a taxing daily routine. If you can get past the characters' appalling behavior, I suggest you watch too.

Proposed town center necessary for Elon development



Jack Dodson
Columnist

Elon University is frequently commended on its academic and student life improvements. It has made significant strides to create a welcoming, exciting atmosphere throughout

the past decade. But one issue plagues the school in its efforts — a lackluster surrounding area that offers few opportunities in the way of social attractions for potential students.

With the dawn of the new millennium, Elon made the shift in status from college to university. Since then, its graduate programs have become distinguished in the world of academia, earning nods

from the Princeton Review and the Institute of International Education.

The recent transformation has been years in the making: the university has worked incredibly hard to portray dedication to the student body with each improvement made in student initiatives. Study abroad programs encourage global mindfulness and promote student engagement, while academic rankings and rigor continue to propel Elon to new heights on the center stage in the national community.

The key to long-term change starts on a local level, and Elon University seems to acknowledge that fact. The Town of Elon hopes to follow the University's recent path toward success.

Around the same time Elon College officially became Elon University, the Town of Elon College became the Town of Elon. In the wake of Elon University's newest strategic plan came the hope for a developed downtown Elon.

The plans for the town center were initially discussed in November 2009, just before the Elon Commitment was passed by the Board of Trustees.

Without a town center, the Town of Elon has little to offer, especially to a college student.

An attractive local atmosphere promotes community-student integration. Elon University runs the risk of losing students who could be valuable. Students who may have otherwise come to Elon could end up at schools like University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Wake Forest University or North Carolina State University, simply because of appealing activities offered in the area.

The town also loses an opportunity for developing local businesses — perhaps ones within walking distance.

A plan for a town center is imperative, to not only the student body and the university, but also

the town itself. Economically speaking, the strategic placement of the university would almost guarantee that local businesses will thrive, while ensuring that students are more actively engaged in the community surrounding the school.

According to CollegeProwler.com, the city of Burlington, the closest off-campus destination, is lacking interesting venues as well.

"If you're looking for a city," the report said, "with buildings taller than three stories, buses, metros and people always busy going somewhere, Burlington is not the best area."

Burlington is currently working on developing its downtown through the Burlington Downtown Corporation, a nonprofit that works to revitalize the city center.

The university's strategic plan offers the perfect catalyst for the Town of Elon's plans. With the school's plans to break ground on campus, the town should surely follow.

ILLUSTRATING THE ISSUES:

