

Meaner than fiction: Reality TV high on aggression, study shows

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(PhysOrg.com) -- All the gossip, insults and dirty looks add up fast on popular reality shows, far outpacing the level seen in equally popular dramas, comedies and soap operas according to a new Brigham Young University study.

The researchers looked at five reality shows and five non-reality shows and found 52 acts of [aggression](#) per hour on reality TV compared to 33 per hour for the non-reality programs.

“The Apprentice” topped the list at 85 acts of verbal or relational aggression per hour.

Simon Cowell and “American Idol” checked in a little lower at 57 aggressive acts per hour - but then again, backbiting is tough to do while singing.

“I knew the level of aggression was going to be high, but I had no idea it was going to be this high,” said Sarah Coyne, a BYU professor of family life and lead author of the study. Coyne’s findings will appear in the June issue of The Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media.

The researchers analyzed 120 hours of programming and coded every instance of physical, verbal and relational aggression. The 10 shows selected for the study are popular with audiences in Britain, although several shows are American productions.

And despite the “reality” label, half of the aggression appeared to be incited by producers. One common tactic is to put participants in a booth and bait them into saying something nasty about their competitors.

What’s the big deal?

Numerous other studies, including one by Coyne, demonstrate that meanness rubs off on viewers. And that was using very contrived and clearly fictional scenes.

“Of any type of program out there, I would think that reality programs are the most likely to be imitated,” Coyne said. “All audiences think it won’t affect them, but we aren’t as immune as we think we are.”

Provided by BYU News

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