

Reality dating shows

Romance never dies

Does our obsession with relationship reality television reveal some deeper truths?



RELATIONSHIPS
With Joanne Wilson

DID you know Sophie Monk is going to be the new Bachelorette? No? Who? Some of you are only vaguely aware the show exists or who Sophie Monk is. Some knew the day it was announced, belted out a Bardot tune and speculated on what she'll be wearing.

We really, really love our reality relationship shows. If you're disputing this and you have an intense "unlike", this does not apply to you. I bet you know someone who does though.

The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, Seven Year Switch, Married at First Sight – every channel you surf, there's another reality relationship show staring you down. Did I mention The Last Resort and First Dates Australia?

Why does watching other people's relationships enthrall us so? It turns out there are a few reasons that I find more interesting than the shows themselves.

Empathy: People like watching other people, real or fictional, similar to them or going through similar circumstances. Relationship drama shows certainly tick that box for many.

Married at First Sight is a pretty good reflection of how sudden, jarring and tumultuous the modern dating scene can be. Online dating apps like Tinder are throwing people together at breakneck speed. Swipe right, don't mess up the opening line, strap yourself in and go for the ride – rinse, repeat.

The lightning speed at which Married at First Sight seems to throw its cast together and run them through various wringers is very familiar territory to the modern online dater. We can utterly sympathise with the struggles and indulge vicariously in the fantasy presented on Seven Year Switch.

We watch the 'burning car crash' as two obviously incompatible people are contractually obliged to date. Is it equal parts

catharsis with wish fulfilment? It's an easy way to spend an hour effortlessly on the couch, nodding and muttering "Uh huh, I've been there" or "Oh my gosh, I nearly went there" now and then.

How many of us actually find ourselves surrounded by multiple suitors, or 'suitresses', in a quaint chateau in the country ala The Bachelor/ette? That's where we find:

Voyeurism (and maybe a little schadenfreude): From the mundane to the explicitly voyeuristic, our desire to see what's hidden permeates every aspect of our lives. We peek out the window when there's an argument outside and eavesdrop on the conversation at the next table. We see tragedy on the news, then watch people on TV having intimate candlelit dinners (surrounded by a film crew).

Reality TV gives us a nosy view into situations we're not normally privy to. Even in something as innocuous as Dancing with the Stars and The Voice, we're able to see backstage antics and heart-wrenching stories that we don't normally see at a performance. Now I realise this explanation starts to paint dating reality show viewers in maybe an unpleasant light. So then there is the benefit of self-reflection.

Self-reflection: When we see these people and their dating joys and woes, we compare them against our own. Maybe we're really happy we're not in the situations others are or wish we were. How would I react in that situation? It might even reveal some insights we might apply to our own lives.

The uptick of all this self-reflection is relationship counselling is trendy! Seeking expert assistance has been normalised. Sometimes the best motivator is to watch someone else who reminds you of yourself and realise: "That's me if I don't do something ASAP."

Oh, and in the name of keeping 'abreast' of current relationship affairs, I knew about Sophie Monk.

Joanne is the Founder of TheConfidante Counselling. Visit www.sunshinecoastcounselling.com for enquires.

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Why does watching other people's relationships enthrall us so? PHOTO: PEXELS

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