The evolution of romance in reality television

Rebecca Trelease (PhD) Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

The aim of this research is to understand the evolution of romance in reality television in the 50 years since The Dating Game (1965-1986) first aired. Quickly followed by The Newlywed Game (1966-74), these shows covered aspects of a relationship from courting through to marriage. Subsequently, the quiz show format gave way to a more observational approach for relationship reality series such as An American Family (1973), or a romantic competition format with Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire (2000). While these early examples of reality television are often referenced in analyses of the origins of the genre, there is little investigation specifically in the romance sub-genre.

Situated within television theory definitions of genre, this research will conduct historical analyses of the progression of romance reality television divided into timelines for the United Kingdom and the United States. This is followed by textual analysis of the multiple formats that have emerged since the turn of the millennium. While remaining within the genre of reality romance, the hybrid nature now incorporates not just quiz, competition, or observational elements, but also integrates melodrama, soap opera, or social experiments, demonstrating a complex evolution over 50 years. This presentation will give a report on research findings conducted for my PhD thesis in the evolution of reality television.