A Guilty Pleasure with a Perfect Ten

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The Overview

*Dancing with the Stars* is opening its 17th season on Monday, September 16, 2013. The show features twelve professional dancers who are each paired with a celebrity whom they coach and work alongside with in a dancing competition for the coveted mirror ball trophy. The celebrities represent a wide variety of facets: country singers, football stars, Disney television, Olympians, reality television, comedians, and other pop culture stars. Each season, except for in the all-star season, the show combines new faces of celebrities with the already recognizable and endearing professional dancers. As an audience member, one cannot help but choose a favorite professional and follow him or her season after season on the show. *Dancing with the Stars* is shown live from CBS Television City in Los Angeles, California.

The show is on the air on Mondays and Tuesdays, featuring the prepared dances on the former and results and special guests on the latter. On Monday, the pairs perform a choreographed two minute long dance routine of a given style such as tango or fox trot that generally follows the theme of the night. At the conclusion, Len Goodman, Carrie Ann Inaba and Bruno Tonioli, who are the judges, supply feedback and give the contestants a score based on a one to ten scale. After the performance for an hour after the show, the television audience is given a phone number to call, text, or email in order to cast a vote for favorite teams. On Tuesday night, the suspense builds until the eliminated couple is announced at the end of the show. On the final Monday night of the season, the finals occur in which the remaining three couples are selected to compete for the mirror ball trophy. During the season, it becomes more complicated as the dance teams have the song and the style chosen for them, and they also have
to perform a group dance number in which they compete as couples on larger teams. Every season has new surprises, which is part of the hook that makes this show so addicting.

*Dancing with the Stars* became my guilty pleasure in the fall of 2011, as I entered the 11\textsuperscript{th} grade and my show entered its 13\textsuperscript{th} season. In hindsight, I wish I had begun watching the show earlier but it was better late than never. My mother decided she thought it would be a fun show to see because of the dancing, so I watched it, too, in the living room with her and my younger sister. It was only a matter of time, however, before I got hooked.

**Personal Influences on my Life**

Although I am looking forward to my guilty pleasure next week, the likelihood of *Dancing with the Stars* becoming crippling additively is highly unlikely for the simple reason that it is only on television for ten weeks at a time and a maximum of four hours a week. I can continue on with my daily life during the day, unlike an addiction that is 24/7. I may occasionally look at a dance again on Youtube or research more about the celebrity or dance partner on-line, but it is not obsessive. I am not at all hesitant to admit that this is the only show I have religiously watched on television since my obsession with the Disney Channel TV show *Lizzie McGuire* in elementary school.

*Dancing with the Stars* became a bonding experience for my sister, my mother and me. Together, we not only watch the show but also write down phone numbers to call and vote, pick our favorites, argue over fair scores from the judges, and critique dance numbers and costumes. Most of all, we use every possible way to vote: texting, calling, and voting on Facebook. In my family, the favorite couples sometimes vary week to week, but for me, the best couple will always be the one that contains the incomparable Derek Hough. Not only does he hold the record
for winning four mirror ball trophies, he also carries a charisma as he both teaches and dances, and his creativity makes for some of the most fascinating and entertaining performances of the show.

_Dancing with the Stars in View of Today’s Culture_

In today’s culture, we are taught for some unknown reason that what our parents like, we should not. I am slightly embarrassed about the fact that I became hooked on it because of my mother’s interest in it before me. Sometimes I wish I had been interested in _Pretty Little Liars_, _Harry Potter_, or any series that was more popular in my age group. I cannot share my excitement with my peers, as I do not have any friends who watch _Dancing with the Stars_. I would not say, however, that watching this show conflicts with the norms of my gender as I do not know a single male who will willingly watch this show. Statistics show that the median age for viewers of my guilty pleasure show is 61 with a mostly female audience. (Associated Press, May 2012).

On the other hand, King’s College has picked up on the popularity by creating its own version: a one day event on campus called “Dancing with the Staff.” This gives me hope that perhaps others my age may take an interest in a show I adore.

_Dancing with the Stars_ is relevant to the majority of society because of the qualities the show emulates. Qualities such as hard work and dedication are admired when overweight dancers lose weight to perform better and when people push through physical injuries. The celebrities represent a genuine slice of America through their culture, economic status, age, gender, and race. Some contestants have been born rich; others came to America as immigrants with no income whatsoever. It is truly a show about the American dream that anyone can make it here. Moreover, members of society like to feel as if they are a part of a greater purpose. Because they can vote, the fans have an influence and are part of a team. When a favorite dancer
moves on in the competition or wins, the audience feels as if they somehow contributed to their team’s success. This aspect of any show is more likely to bring viewers and more community building across the United States.

On the other hand, my guilty pleasure often seems cast aside by other forms of media compared to my peers because it is on television. Music by individual performers takes precedence, because many of my peers focus on the newest top hits or little known songs by independent artists. Another much more popular form of media is recordings at your fingertips, in the form of YouTube or Netflix. Videos that have negative connotations such as failures of people or silly ideas such as singing cats seem more appealing although nonsensical because they can have an immediate effect of enjoyment. To have a guilty pleasure for entertainment that lasts over twenty four hours is not the norm with my peers. The normal cable television no longer appears to be enough for my peers in today’s culture. Moreover, many of my peers are not interested in the struggles of a comedian getting over a drug addiction, such as Andy Dick, or admiring a former ice skater who struggled with breast cancer. They are more interested in what is relevant in their daily lives.

**Analysis of the Positive Impact on my Life**

Watching *Dancing with the Stars* has made a positive impact on my daily life. Because I work as a student choreographer for a local high school’s theatrical productions, I have much to gain from watching the training sessions between competition performances. First, I see creative and innovative steps that often inspire me in my own choreography. Sometimes dance numbers for the competition combine two radically different styles such as ballet and tango. This motivates me to think outside of the box when I am teaching students to make the dance moves be not only relevant but fun. Second, I am able to study the relationships between professional
and amateur in order to observe teaching techniques and relationships. Although I am far from a professional, I am working with nervous students who may have never danced before, and I need to show patience and to be clear in my teaching technique. For example, Derek Hough generally is able to obtain a higher placing in the competition because he is not only skilled as a dancer but caring and descriptive in the dance classroom. Other newer teachers, such as Sharna, do not have the experience to know when to stop pushing their partners or how to work limitations and strengths to the best potential performance. Even some older professionals also make the mistake of being too harsh on their celebrity partners, which can also have a negative impact. All of these concepts can be applied to my personal life as I stand in front of thirty or more of my peers and try to grasp all of their skill levels and teach each performer individually. Third, watching people that are famous try to perfect a step and dance in front of millions unafraid has made me motivated to be unafraid of my own strengths and weaknesses.

I also believe that watching Dancing with the Stars has made an impact on my life because of watching the personal stories of the stars that are on the show. I have been inspired by life stories that are told to the audience through interviews during the competition. Too often in the past, I have put stars such as Kellie Pickler on a pedestal thinking that she had an easy life, not realizing that she has overcome major difficulties in her life such as her father serving time in prison and her mother leaving her at a young age. Through this I have learned not to prejudge. At the same time, I have cheered on people like J.R. Martinez who served in Iraq and suffered third degree burns because he persisted until he won the 13th competition. I have learned that physical obstacles and setbacks should not stand in the way of my dreams. Also, every season has definite underdogs. Sometimes these less gifted celebrity dancers are able to overcome all odds and make it farther in the competition than expected, thus teaching the value of hard work
to audience members and to me, as I struggle to overcome obstacles in new or unknown situations.

**Effect on my Career Exploration**

*Dancing with the Stars* has been influential with how I view my career and the media. On the show, the camera crew and editing staff work together to record and then edit what they feel is most significant or dramatic to play live on the show. These recordings show a definite bias that often could be responsible for swaying the audience to like or dislike a certain individual because of actions or words witnessed during a rehearsal. The dancers spend hours a day in rehearsal, yet the clips are barely minutes in length. Thus, much of the time spent practicing is cut off, only to have the most exciting moments shown. The understanding of bias from the media is helpful for me, as I wish to pursue a career in which I would need to decipher when media is making attempts at swaying its audience. At the same time, I wish I could gain a better understanding of how the show works from a marketing standpoint. For example, I would like to ask how the producers pick which dancers are allowed to return season after season, how the celebrities are selected, and most importantly, how the pairings are made. This entire process makes me realize the marketing aspect behind the television show.

As a mass communications major, this show has also made me realize the importance of the media in television productions and the success of the show. The show encourages its audience to discuss results on all forms of social media, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, so as to reach today’s social media obsessed culture. In addition to the internet, People Magazine and some newspapers report updates on the celebrities and the gossip. During the show, tweets are encouraged to be posted that create an excitement for the audience. The only reason I even created a twitter account was because of *Dancing with the Stars*. Only a truly
devoted fan would join a form of social networking specifically to vote for and tweet about his or her favorite competitor, who in my case is unquestioningly Derek Hough. So, the success of the production not only lies within the hours of the television show itself, but the ability to generate an enthusiasm amongst the general public between episodes so that it can continue to maintain a fanbase and keep its sponsors. Understanding all of this has given me a broader scope of broadcast television and the media which is helpful for my field of study.

I would like my job to include a great involvement in the community that brings families together. *Dancing with the Stars* is able to provide a bonding experience for my family and gave us something to talk about and look forward to every week. Hopefully, even as I am living away from college now, my mom, sister and I will still be able to Skype during the show and discuss it together. The show has helped me mature into being aware of prejudice and stereotypes while encouraging me to follow my dreams despite obstacles that I may face. As I apply what I’ve learned from *Dancing with the Stars* to my life and career, I realize that I am much better off as a person because of sitting down with my mom two years ago. After all is said and done, I feel no guilt over watching this show, knowing now how much it has contributed to not only who I am, but who I want to be.
References