

Big Brother

Channel 4 has a hit programme on its' hands. Last week Big Brother occupied eight out of its' ten most watched programmes and in the number one spot more people viewed the programme than the BBC news or the well established Casualty. Big Brother viewing figures tripled the most watched BBC 2 programme. Whether you like it or not, the programme is here to stay and will spawn other spin-offs.

Channel 4 producers say that the success of the programme is in the casting. They certainly went to a lot of effort, time and trouble selecting the contestants. Over a period of six months each individual was screened and asked many in-depth questions about their personal lives. They gradually reduced the list of contestants, who were then given dummy runs so that producers could see if they "performed" well. Is it television and do we want it? Nine and three quarter million people obviously do.

Producers placed cameras all over the house so that people could tune into their sets and trawl the net. Browsing the Internet view cams to see what each contestant was up to. Apparently, most Internet devotees watched the girls rooms between 9 and 12 p.m. and as the cameras were infra-red they could see the girls up to all sorts of things. Twenty four hours of video tape was condensed into thirty minute chunks cleaned up for television. What does it say about the people who viewed? Are they the same types you often see on television getting drunk in Spain? Or does it appeal to everyone. I feel that this programme is an invasion of personal privacy and it belittles the dignity of the individual. Do we respect the people any more for sharing their inner most feelings? Some might argue that if you dislike the programme so much you can always turn off the television. Morbid curiosity, media and peer pressure make it difficult to reject this addictive viewing.

One thing is certain, everyone seems to be talking about it, and not just here, right across Europe. I suppose there is something of the voyeur in all of us. When there's a road accident or train crash most of us will want to stop and stare. However, these characters are specially selected types, representative of a small section of the community.

The dictionary defines the word brother as a fellow Christian and this hardly applies. This programme relies heavily on the extrovert and inadequate relationships seen by the viewer and then involves the viewer in the final termination of each contestant, involving them in a gladiatorial decision process. Thumbs up you're in. Thumbs down and you're out. The viewer is given the power and control over the outcome.

There are no losers except the viewing public. The rewards for each individual can run into six figures. Whether you like it or not its popularity and the fact that the programme is cheap to make will undoubtedly lead to more of the same. The fact that some of the contestants had to seek psychological counselling or the hum drum nature of the programme will be meaningless. The publicity and rewards for the individuals and programme makers alike will mean future clones.

Big Brother shows you their chosen people in all their tawdry, daily and private situations and for some of the viewing public they love it.