

Testimony of Kevin and Jodi Kreider

April 14th, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Jodi:

First of all, my husband and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to discuss with you the need for guidelines and protection for children involved in Reality TV shows.

Request

Specifically, we are requesting that this new media format is included into the existing laws that are followed by scripted TV formats.

My name is Jodi Kreider. My husband Kevin and I are sitting before you today as both advocates and voices for the children involved in reality TV.

We have prepared a brief statement for you designed to outline the issue and provide the critical observations that support our request for immediate action to protect these children. We will also present two possible solutions for this serious issue.

The Problem:

The bottom line is that the current laws designed to protect children involved in television production are outdated. They need to be revised to include the new Reality format to ensure EVERY child is protected.

The Issue:

These children deserve the same legal protection and ethical safeguards provided to children involved in scripted television.

Brief Background:

My husband and I are here as "First Person" witnesses to the serious concerns raised and damages resulting from the lack of protection for the children involved in Reality TV.

My husband's sister is Kate Gosselin. Kate along with her husband Jon and their 8 beautiful children were the stars of TLC's reality show "Jon and Kate plus 8" for 5 seasons.

What started out as a simple 2-hour documentary to capture what it was like for a young couple to have one set of twins and one set of sextuplets turned into TLC's highest rated weekly show.

It is very important to make clear that we are not here because of Jon & Kate's decision to be filmed, we are here because of what we saw and what we didn't see.

We saw many concerning safety issues and didn't see any safeguards in place to protect the children's rights.

My husband Kevin and I along with our 4 children lived around the corner in the same development as Jon and Kate. We spent a great deal of time enjoying everyday activities and special occasions at each other's house

Because of our families close involvement; we were included in some of the shows for the first 2 seasons. My husband enjoyed helping Jon with small projects in the garage or I was filmed some times when I was looking after their children.

My husband will now describe a few of our concerns with actual illustrations.

Kevin:

Our direct involvement with the Jon and Kate plus 8 show have provided my wife and I with first-hand observations that will support our view that Reality TV needs to follow the same rules and guidelines as scripted TV.

I will briefly address 8 important format comparisons or concerning issues.

The format was planned and formal

Jon and Kate signed a complicated contract without a lawyer to represent them.

Once the contracts are signed, a producer sits down with Jon and Kate to develop show content for each episode.

Extensive Professional filming Schedule

Large professional Camera lighting equipment was permanently installed in most rooms in their house including the kitchen, living room, basement and children's bedrooms.

Their daily routine revolved around the needs of the designed episode rather than having the crew just follow their routine.

A crew including a video camera operator, Audio operator and producer for an average of 2-3 days to get enough footage to use for an hour episode followed the children.

What started as a simple 2-hour documentary ended with Jon and Kate producing over approximately 100 episodes in the last 2 years of the series.

PRIVACY RIGHTS CONCERNS

Video cameras were installed in the children's bedrooms. These cameras operated continuously in an effort to capture unscripted moments (positive and negative) to provide the TV production company with enough clips to fill the hour- long episodes.

The children's potty training with exposed skin was filmed by the camera crew in the children's bathroom (often without a parent present) These scenes were uploaded onto the Internet and burned onto the season's DVD. The children's potty training video remains to be highly viewed on the Internet.

POTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE

One very vivid example comes to mind. The children were told it was Christmas Eve and Christmas morning when it wasn't so that the camera crew would capture genuine reactions. They were only told the truth after the filming ended. They were told they did it for the show. The children stated directly to use that they felt very confused and were upset over this event.

One child in particular had many outbursts captured on the show. Now the media, general public and children at school have labeled her as the "difficult or bad" one.

LACK OF ADULT SUPERVISION

The children were often left alone with one or more production crew members without a parent present. These areas included the bathroom, bedroom, basement, backyard and in the woods.

INCREASED PROFESSIONAL DEMANDS

The children would voice their dislike for going on studio promotional events to promote upcoming season or special events.

Extra security was hired to protect the children from the media frenzy at their last promotional event in NYC.

LACK OF FINANCIAL SECURITY

In scripted TV, the law states that every child involved in the filming receives financial compensation. This includes an amount that is put in a trust fund. In reality TV, those laws don't exist. There are no rules to provide and protect a child's financial security.

ELEVATED PERSONAL SECURITY RISKS

TLC provided Kate with a bodyguard due to her high profile and concern for a large number of unknown people who have voiced very unkind and some disturbing comments about her treatment to her husband that was shown on TV.

There are many disturbing and threatening comments posted on newspaper blogs or TV social media formats against Jon, Kate, their children and our family.

There have also been many psychologists who have voiced concerns stating the act of providing such personal details and images of the children foster inappropriate and misleading ideas to some of the mentally unstable citizens.

I will pass it back over to my wife Jodi for some final remarks.

Jodi:

From my husband's comments, I am confident you will now realize that there is very little reality involved in the production of a reality TV show. The only thing real are the issues and concerns for the nonprofessionals who are involved.

We are simply asking that the existing law for scripted TV include reality TV as soon as possible.

URGENCY

This is an urgent issue. With production costs much lower, few filming restrictions and potential for high profit, the reality TV production companies are now seeking new large families, multiple sets of babies, families in conflict, etc to contact them for possible future filming.

During Jon and Kate's separation, Jon refused to let his children to be filmed by reality TV expressing a new insight from both disturbing comments from people towards his family members and concerning behaviors some of his children were exhibiting.

TLC sued Jon for receiving money outside his TLC contract. They later dropped their large financial lawsuit against Jon in return for the right to film his children. Unable to financially fight the lawsuit, Jon agreed to allow his children to return to filming.

Kate is now competing on the popular "Dancing with the Stars" competition show.

TLC has announced plans to start a new TV show with Kate and her children after she finishes with her current TV show.

Our goal is to have this law revised so that not only our relatives will be protected, but for all children who are now or will be involved in reality TV.

OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES

There are many people who view reality TV as an easy way to get fame and fortune. During these tough economic times, we are hearing more and more troubling stories about desperate parents doing desperate things.

You may remember the recent “Balloon Boy” story in the news. It wasn’t long ago where parents instructed their young son to be involved in a fabricated story about their son possibly in a runaway homemade balloon. This sparked national media attention and involved a major emergency response. They later admitted that they pulled this stunt in hopes to be contacted by the reality TV Production Company they had reached out earlier to pitch a show. It is important to note that the emergency responders and the public were put at risk responding to this unusual event.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS:

1. Because children are unable to provide an informed consent about a decision that has the potential to inflict serious harm to their personal development, they should not be allowed to be involved in any reality TV filming.
2. For the children that are currently involved in reality TV production, they should be required to become a member of the Screen Actors Guild, a labor organization whose mission is to negotiate the best possible wages and working conditions for professional actors—even young ones.

The Screen Actors Guild represents its members through:

Negotiation and enforcement of collective bargaining agreements that establish equitable levels of compensation, benefits, and working conditions for performers. The collection of compensation for exploitation of their recorded performances and protection against unauthorized use.

They are provided with guidance to protect their privacy and personal information as well as health and safety issues.

Most importantly, Screen Actors Guild Representatives are on set to protect all members, but especially working children. It is their job to ensure that all SAG rules, including work hours and safety rules, are being followed.

When children are on set, your SAG rep is keeping an eye out for the following:

1. Are children being asked to work overtime or beyond the permitted work hours?
2. Are children getting adequate meal and rest periods?
3. Are they being tutored in a safe and effective manner?
4. Have they been asked to do hazardous work?
5. Are they permitting the parent to be within sight and sound of the child at all times?
6. Have they been provided an appropriate dressing room area?

IN CLOSING

Reality TV is a powerful media format with the potential for serious personal harm for adults and especially children.

Harmful personal and private moments that the children cannot defend, delete or erase after they are uploaded on the internet for anyone in the world to watch at a click of a button. Children need to be protected from potential danger. Reality TV has the potential to cause real danger-Period. These children deserve the same protection as those involved in scripted TV- because they are after all, only children.

With your support, the children will be given a voice and provided their right to legal protection in regards to the Reality TV Industry.

Thank you.
Jodi