

# Should Kids Be on Reality TV?

Being on reality TV can bring fame and glory. **It might also ruin your life.**

BY JUSTIN O'NEILL

**A**s a contestant on *The X Factor*, 13-year-old Rachel Crow seemed to have exactly what it

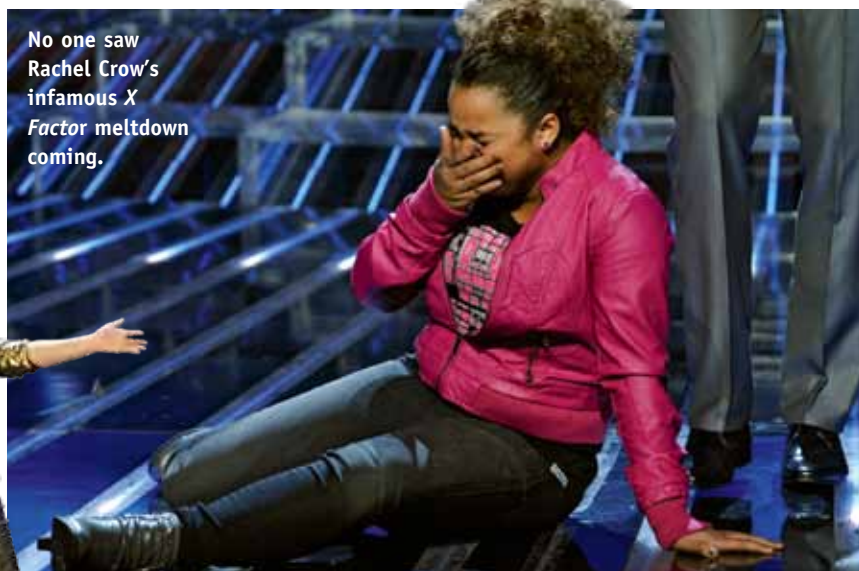
took to win: **raves** from the judges, a beautiful voice, and a lovable personality. Then she was voted off.

When the results were read, Rachel collapsed, sobbing and screaming for her mom, who had to rush onstage to comfort her. It was a humiliating moment for Rachel, but a great moment for *The X Factor*—just the kind of drama TV audiences love.

But the incident sparked outrage among some fans. They said Rachel's breakdown proved she was too young to be on the show. And though there was nothing exceptional about someone Rachel's age being on reality TV—children and teens appear in everything from *Dance Moms* to *The Biggest Loser*—Rachel's meltdown did raise an important question: Should kids be on reality



No one saw Rachel Crow's infamous *X Factor* meltdown coming.



TV at all? Many **psychologists** are saying no—that in fact, young reality-TV stars are in danger.

## Too Much Pressure?

It's well known that early fame can be harmful and that many former child stars struggle as adults (think of Lindsay Lohan and Amanda Bynes). Being **hounded** by photographers 24/7 and having everything they do reported in **tabloids** and blogs can be hard for young people to cope with. It can make them feel as though their worth depends on what others say.

Reality TV takes the pressure of early fame to a whole new level. Kids on reality TV don't play characters. They play *themselves*. Cameras expose their most private moments—friendship dramas, ugly fights with parents, embarrassing mistakes—for our entertainment. Consider the controversial *Here*

*Comes Honey Boo Boo*, which centers on 7-year-old Alana Thompson (aka "Honey Boo Boo"). It mockingly portrays Alana and her family as they discuss their farts, pick their noses, and chug "Go-Go Juice," a mixture of Mountain Dew and Red Bull.



Alana Thompson, star of the controversial *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*

Alana is too young to drive a car or have a Facebook account, so how can she be mature enough to handle being ridiculed in front of millions of viewers? Everyone is different—some kids may be able to deal with such an experience at a younger age than others—but being in the spotlight as a kid can have long-term consequences. According to Dr. Allison Baker, a child **psychiatrist**, experiencing public humiliation like Rachel did may damage one's self-esteem.

Then comes the question of **exploitation**. Laws exist that protect child actors, making sure they go to school and limiting the hours they can work. In many states, though, these laws do not apply to kids on reality TV, because they are not considered actors.

### Exciting Opportunities

Dangers aside, there's no doubt that reality shows do offer exciting opportunities—and the **potential** to make money.

Alana earns roughly \$36,000 per season. After competing on *The X Factor*, One Direction went on



Global sensation  
One Direction

to become international stars.

Even Rachel made out OK. She released an album, acted on Nickelodeon's *Fred: The Show*, and voices a character in the movie *Rio 2*. And she showed resilience. "I'm not feeling great, but I'll be fine," she told reporters after her breakdown. "I'm Rachel still." ●

# What Do You Think?

**Should kids be on reality TV?** Use evidence from the article to support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.



## YES

WHAT AN OPPORTUNITY!

1 They might earn a lot of money.

2

3

## NO

WHAT AN OUTRAGE!

1

2

3

**EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS**—and decide whether kids should be on reality TV. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become the thesis statement for an argument essay on this topic.

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