

Married At First Sight UK: anything but happily ever after in this toxic TV

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The 2024 series of Married at First Sight UK (MAFSUK) aired on Channel 4 this September to November. The show follows couples, paired by so-called 'experts', as they embark on their honeymoons and move in together. The couples must undertake specially designed tasks to get to know each other, with weekly expert check-ins to talk through their progress. It has received criticism for ignoring the well-being of participants, toxic masculinity and bullying, and whilst I don't have any particular agenda against reality TV, the dark side of MAFSUK is hard to ignore.

Mainly, the show sends an antiquated, frankly depressing message. It simultaneously positions marriage as the

epitome of love, whilst reproducing the old-school narrative that marriage is hard and you have to take the rough with the smooth, however soul-destroying that might be.

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The experts meet all expressions of concern or unhappiness with encouragement to just keep on trying and ride it out, despite strong evidence that couples aren't a good match and relationships are becoming toxic. Yes, the goal is for participants to finish the experiment with a fulfilling relationship; but what the

producers of the show have failed to acknowledge is that this relentless forgiving and perseverance sends a very dangerous message to the public. What about vulnerable people who watch? Or, worst-case scenario, what if someone in a domestic abuse situation watches and sees toxic behaviours go unchecked and portrayed as normal and resolvable? After all, the advice to keep trying comes from industry experts who surely have the best interests of the participants at heart, right?

Here lies the problem: like all reality TV shows, MAFSUK is designed to be entertaining. Editors, producers and 'experts' have no interest in portraying realistic, true-to-life personalities, or mediating potentially explosive

moments, as this would make for a very boring watch. Their priorities are increasing views, generating discourse, and creating hype. They have to create 'hateable' characters to do this: through careful editing and pushing people to their breaking points, through actively encouraging toxic environments and then criticising people when they leave the programme, often with little support for their new-found fame.

In short, it's exploitative

and potentially dangerous. Whilst we're all guilty of a bit of reality TV, it's important to acknowledge the unreality of it, and not to get carried away with criticising constructed personalities or taking its underlying lessons as sound advice. Like it or not, MAFSUK has been a hugely successful programme, I just hope that some care is taken to look after the participants after their ordeal and to promote images of healthy relationships as a contrast.



Credit: Daniele Franco, Unsplash