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Beyonce and Jay-Z: Couple of the decade?

This is absolute reality

In preparing a story to wrap up the decade, most of the people we interviewed expressed surprise that the aughties were even ending.

"It's weird to think of the past 10 years in the 2000s," says David Archuleta, the 2008 runner-up of "American Idol." "I think, 'Oh, that's the '90s, but that was longer than 10 years ago!"

When pressed to come up with an entity that defines the decade, Archuleta immediately suggests Beyonce before realizing that the show that gave him his own taste of fame was also pretty important in shaping the past 10 years.

"Oh, yeah," he laughs with an almost "duh" tone. "So much has come out of 'American Idol' — Kelly Clarkson and Daughtry and Carrie Underwood. It has given a different perspective of music to people."

Actor Matt Dillon suggests lower-tiered reality programming has given definition to this decade. "The upside is that I think there's been a focus on nonfiction documentaries," he says. "The downside of that is reality television. I'm not a fan. I think there's something that ultimately feels exploitive about it. I'm not saying all the time ... but I sometimes think that people commit to this stuff and they don't know what they're getting themselves into."

Reality shows have given everyday people an opportunity to become famous for just being themselves, and sites such as Twitter have even forced stars to be more like everyday people, whom we have more access to than ever before. (Privacy? What privacy?) The resulting sense of self-importance of the entire population is only magnified when considering we are more likely to pull out our iPhones and text friends or update our Facebook status rather than talk to strangers when (or if) we step outside for fresh air.

Corrinne Gregory is founder and president of a Bellevue, Wash.-based organization called Social-Smarts. She says the past 10 years have harkened back to the Me Generation, but with a lot more techie prowess.

"You could call this the All About Me Decade," she says. "Whether it's expressed via MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or any other number of outlets, our society seems to have spent increasing amounts of time being self-absorbed and self-focused, and believes everyone else will care, too."

QUOTED

Other thoughts from the aughties:

"I was looking back on this whole decade the other day, thinking did anything worthwhile happen in popular culture? I don't know, I'm not sure. Did anything good happen?"
— British pop rapper Jamie T.

"It's the decade I gave up my American citizenship, and that says something. It was a horrible decade — eight years of Bush and Cheney made me want to give up."
— Movie director Terry Gilliam

Gregory cites Kanye West's many awards show outbursts as proof.

"Many people seem to think, 'If it's all right with me, it's all right,'" she says.

Perhaps people have difficulty defining the past decade because the most popular technological advancements have been geared towards promoting self-examination — with everyone rocking to their own soundtrack on their earbuds, blogging about their day, and hoping somebody will film a reality show about it.

PAT HEALY

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