

# The effect of media influences on youth

Sociology, Violence



The Effect of Media Influences on Youth Natasha Wiseman San Diego City College Abstract This paper explores the effects of media influences on socialization of children. I will discuss the effects of media influences on body image, aggression and sexual behavior in children. The increasing thinness of models in the media are leading our youth to unhealthy eating habits, violence is opening doors to reenactments of violent acts seen in the media and sexual attitudes of teens in TV show are leading to youth who are relaxed in thought of sexual activity. All these things combined are socializing our youth. They are becoming a society of youth who are numb to societal norms. The media can have a negative influence on the life of children. Unrealistic situations in movies, magazines and television shows glamorize potentially destructive body images, increases aggressive behavior and foster a relaxed attitude toward sexual relationships. Directly and indirectly the media is hugely influencing children. “ Thin is in” is the image that is exhibited to our youth. The excessive use of violence in movies and video games desensitize our youth to the point of destructive aggression. Teens are being portrayed as popular because they are sexually active sending the message that promiscuity is cool. All of these influences are lending a hand in the socialization of today’s youth. The media has been projecting the image of women being thin as perfect. Television shows geared toward young adults exemplify thin men and women in a positive fashion. Those that do not fit the media image of thin are represented in an undesirable manner. Although at times not blatant, these attitudes began to shape how our youth perceive their body images as well as that of others. These influences lead today’s youth to take extreme measures to look like

the images they see on the movie screen, in magazines and on their favorite shows. Prime examples are the principal characters on “ The Wizards of Waverly Place”. This is a program aired on the Disney Channel, a channel gear toward young adults. On “ Wizards of Waverly Place” Alex Russo is the central character, she is played by actress Selena Gomez. Alex is a teen who is seen as pretty, popular and fashionable. She is always getting into trouble; however she always comes out on top. This character is depicted as the perfect teenager whose problems are easily solved by flashing a smile. On the contrary from the same show is Harper, Alex’s best friend. Although the actress who plays harper has a body image that can be seen on the average teenager, she is seen as overweigh and awkward. Her only significances is that she is the friend of the much more popular and thin Alex. Harper’s character is designed around the fact that she is overweight, unsuccessful and always associated with food. This character is an example of the statement, “ When fat people show up TV, they aren’t usually serious people but are either comics (the jolly fat person)... (Fraser, 1997). Teens are lead to believe that they cannot be successful unless that they fit into the media image of thin. This ideas that the only way to be popular and happy is to be extremely thin has led to teens developing severe eating disorders. The media is giving our children unrealistic views of life. It provides a constant diet of media violence. This exposure to violence in the media makes youth impassive to the horror of violence. The more they are exposed to this glorified violence the more aggressive they may become. As the violence becomes more realistic the impact on our youth is greater. The violence shown is always inconsequential and never shows the effects that it has on

the victims. “ Violent video games provide a forum for learning and practicing aggressive solutions to conflict situations” (Anderson, 2002). As our children continue to see these violent acts they develop ideas that violence is the way to solve conflict. Youth began to take these images and bring them to the real world. This is evident in the incidence that occurred in Long Island, New York. In 2008, six teenagers started a two hour long crime spree in which they committed a violent mugging, several break-ins and thefts before finally being caught after a carjacking attempt (Crowley 2008). Authorities reported that the teens were duplicating the actions of Niko Belic, the thuggish protagonist from the video game “ Grand Theft Auto IV.” This event represents an example of how violence in the media can promote violence in real life. During adolescence sexual attitudes begin to take form. During this time the media acts as a type of sexual super peer for teens seeking answers to their questions about sex. These media images become the standard that they use for their sexual behavior. Sexual encounters are shown with sporadic uses of contraception if any. Sex lives of the teens they see on TV, in films and music depict sex as casual fun. Youth begin to believe that sex is a no risk activity where protection is not necessary. This inconsistent use of contraception and relaxed view of teen sex encourages them to become sexually active without thought to protection against disease. Children have been found to copy naturally. Research has shown that as early as 14 months old children will imitate actions they see on television. It is only natural that as children develop they will continue to model their behavior after images they see in the media. The areas impacted by these media influences include body image, aggressive behavior and

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