

Influence of media and culture on self image assignment



Is culture today experiencing information overload leading to self confusion? Having access to information twenty-four hours a day does not necessarily have a positive impact on society and self image. Media content despite its public charge does not exactly mirror real self image. Mass communication with television ads and movies offer an unrealistic view of the everyday person in various aspects of life. Media can have a positive or negative influence on culture and the way people view their lives compared to those in the public eye. There is much speculation about how the media can affect self-concept, self-identities and self-evaluations.

Media also has the power to sway beliefs, morals and behaviors. Research has shown how media content does not reflect reality in regard to who is represented, and how groups and situations are portrayed (Aubrey, 2007). Reality television is an excellent example of how someone can develop a negative self image of themselves. The television show *The Real Housewives of New York* is a good example. The women shown on this program are not like the average women. The profile of these women is they are usually wealthy, thin with perfect hair, skin and teeth. In addition, these women do not have to work to earn a living.

The camera's follow the cast around daily and record various aspects of their lives for all of America to see. They show the women shopping, and spending large amounts of money on clothes, jewelry and cars. If they want something the cost does not matter. Additionally, they show the women getting facial Botox, liposuction and other cosmetic procedures. After watching this show is would be understandable how the average women would have a negative image of what most women are like. The culture of the rich housewife is

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nothing similar to women who work and have to toil with a budget to control monthly expenses.

The media portrays the issues these women have as issues most women have, which is far from reality. If the average woman does relate to the issues of the real housewives the other reality is she may not have access to large amounts of money to fix whatever issues she may have about herself image. Why are people drawn to reality television shows when they do not mirror real life? Reality television allows a person to daydream about gaining status through automatic fame. People can watch the shows and imagine themselves becoming famous by being on television.

The idealism of reality shows is that ordinary people think if they become famous and gain wealth this will allow them to move up to a better more influential social group. People begin to believe that money and fame will solve a number of issues specific to self-doubting and imperfection. Reality television would have the viewers believe that people who are wealthy have the same problems as the average working person, which is not reality at all. On the other hand it is difficult to not watch reality shows to see what drama rich people have and how they solve problems.

Self concept plays a vital role in personality development. It has been established by contemporary researches that the way an individual perceives himself goes to shape his behavior patterns (Parlikar, 1972). Self concepts are individuals' mental representations of themselves. People tend to attend to the feedback they receive in their daily lives and the influence of culture on image. For example people do not remember exact life

experiences that help formulate self perception. Overtime people translate specific experiences into a general representation of oneself.

For instance, feeling shy in group discussions or eating lunch alone each day can cause one to perceive themselves a shy person or unsociable. In society this behavior is labeled as a person who is shy, and a person who is introverted may be able to recognize the same behaviors in others to identify and recognize their own self perception (Parlikar, 1972). Also media does not reflect all ethnic groups that make up today's culture. People tend to be sensitive and critical toward the media reflection of reality television, especially when it comes to representation of someone of their own reference group.

Ethnic groups relate to each other based on a shared sense of identity (Miller, 2007. pg 248). When groups in the media are portrayed unrealistically, the audience members who share characteristics with those persons (e. g. , gender or ethnicity) may be disappointed. Negative erroneous images may affect people in the sense that the media has altered the real identity of the social definition of the group in question (Aubrey, 2007). A second major aspect of self is identity.

Society puts people into categories, with a specific role already defined to that group so, if a person is not sure of who they are it would be difficult to fulfill the role defined (Miller, 2007 p. 244). Relating the self to society shows how over time people decide their likes and dislikes. The results of a media research were published in West Germany offer some insight to personal image. According to the research results, no person carries in his head the

exact replica of their self image. For example, on some shows young women are shown to be very slim and always pretty. This image is not realistic to today's women.

The everyday women come in all shapes and sizes (Parlikar, 1972). The sense of self identity is critical to one's status as a person. One has to have a sense of self in order to acquire and achieve good self esteem. Sexual identity and gender role also play a vital role in self identity. According to Barbara Miller scholars have debated whether sexual identity is biological or a learned behavior. In some societies there is a third gender that is not male or female regardless of one's genitals (Miller, 2007. p 162). Having a third category does not confuse the person of their role in society because it is already a defined category.

On the other hand, American society does not have an alternate category legally; one is either male or female. Many people have been known to suffer from gender confusion. Gender Identity Disorder is defined as a male or female that feels a strong identification with the opposite sex and experiences considerable distress because of their actual gender (Medical Dictionary. com, n. d). Since gender role is well defined in American society it would be difficult for one to fit into a defined role if one is not sure who they are gender wise. Culture and media has an extreme affect on how a person develops into their gender role.

From birth boys wear blue and girls wear pink. Girls are expected to dress a certain way to be more appealing to the opposite sex and vice-versa with males. These are just a couple of examples of how culture predefines

gender. Culture has people interact with others that are similar to themselves or they have something in common. Society also impacts the way a person would describe themselves. In most cases the way a person would describe themselves is not same way a friend or relative would describe them. In most cases people choose to interact with others who will treat them consist with their own self perception.

How does one verify the accuracy of self perception and the way culture defines how people should behave? One way to start is with routine behaviors in every day life. For example, each morning when arriving to work are you in a happy or unpleasant mood? Do you say good morning to everyone or you do go to your desk with out speaking or making eye contact with the people you work with? Is this behavior the same each day you arrive at work? Would coworkers see you as easy going and fun to work with or unpleasant and unsocial? These types of observations can help assist with self perception.

Furthermore, in doing this it can be determined if a person is acting according to the way society deems correct. Culture impacts various parts of lives of people today. People display behavior based on society's expectations of how they should act. Each of us holds a number of different social positions and which role we inhabit at any given time depends on the situation and the people in which we are interacting. While assuming other roles and then another, one will change how they act, tone of voice and speech. At work one may assume the role of supervisor or manager based on the fact that is the role the company expects for you to assume.

At home one may assume the role of mother and wife, who interacts with children and a spouse. Behavior will vary from one role to the next. As a supervisor in the work place the conversations you have with employees will not be the same conversation you have with a best friend outside of work. Individuals have several personalities and assume the most appropriate identity for the situation at hand. The end result is that culture has an objectifying impact on self image. Culture and media influence predefines the roles people are to assume in life.

Television, movies and predefined roles in society have power and influence on reality. The current generation has access to more information with use of the internet and twenty-four hour cable news. The media has the power to sway people into buying certain products for self improvement. The media helps culture to evolve in its ever changing ideas and behaviors. We live in a society that relies on instant information to keep communication open and to help push us in the right direction. References Aubrey, J. (2007, n. d) Vol. 10. Mass media, Gender, Self image, Sexuality, Media Retrieved from ProQuest Direct database.

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