

Medias influence on behavior

[Media](#), [Television](#)



Media's Influence on Behavior By Carrie Rowland Instructor: Steven Seiler
Sociology 1010 Rowland 2 ABSTRACT For my paper I will be researching the influence of mass media on behavior. I find this topic important because of the similarities that have already been shown between people's behavior and what the media portrays, and also the different severity of it between age groups. This not only will show clarification to the problem but also give insight to how age affects how impressionable people are and their willingness to conform. I plan to research through collecting data through journal articles on not only mass media, but also conformity and pattern changes in behavior throughout society's history and the connection between this and increased media display. I believe that with my findings I will be able to conclude that media and society's norms have a great deal of influence on behavior, not only in children and adolescents, but also in adults and even senior citizens. Rowland 3 INTRODUCTION Throughout history humanity has developed rules and regulations in order to bring normalcy to society. These rules, also known as norms and traditions, have created a society that falls under impression easily and have forgotten about their own desires, just to appease what the rest of civilization thinks is appropriate and acceptable. In today's day and age media and pop culture have become increasingly important in the lifestyles of people. It has started to affect every aspect of their lives including what clothes they wear, who they associate themselves with, the value of a dollar, and most importantly the choices they make in reference to actions and behavior. People have forgotten how to be themselves mainly because they have forgotten who they are and what in life truly makes them happy. Due to the increased

popularity of media and the influence of it, society has become a collection of brainwashed people who conform, unconsciously, to the norms that society has created for them to follow. Without question, people have started basing their decisions and the choices they make on what they see the rest of society doing. The long withstanding value of self-identity that once had so much worth has now become completely forgotten because of the amplified importance of conformity to the rest of society. My purpose in researching this topic and stating my contribution is to not only lay some insight on the impact of the issue of conformity due to media's influence on behavior but to also offer some sort of solution and possibly reiterate the value of one's own identity and also the value of happiness, which can come when one makes their own choices based on their own desires and longings.

Rowland 4 LITERATURE REVIEW There are many things to consider when evaluating the impact and importance of media and pop culture's influence on the behavior of individuals in society. WHAT IS MASS MEDIA? In recent years something that once stood dependant on other social aspects has begun to gain greater self sufficiency and therefore create a larger example for its audience to follow. In this case the newly confident variable is the media and society its audience. This sudden change in the role of media leads one to ask the question, why does the media have such a great influence and what about this pop culture point is it that makes it an idol for Americans to swoon over? Throughout history mass media has been used as a sort of unity tool, something that was used to bring large masses of people together through the act of public affairs, may it be in print, through the television, or by a fictional storyline that allows one to see a crisis that turns

out to be ok. Years ago mass media was used to unite a society through common grounds, something that Lasswell defined, " as an attempt to answer the question ' Who says what, in which channel, to whom and with what effect? " (McQuail 94). But today it has formed into something that brings about certain norms and traditions that if not followed, could tear a society apart. The use and dependency of the media has increased greatly in the past few years, according to statistics, " Nearly sixty million Americans read at least one newspaper daily; television sets may be found in nearly fifty million homes, and they are viewed an average of five and one-half hours daily; an estimated one hundred and fifty million radios are in daily operation; attendance at motion picture theaters totals forty-five million weekly; and fifty leading Rowland 5 popular magazines have circulation figures over one million each" (Boram 437). With the growing popularity of the media, today it has chosen to exploit some of the horrific happenings in our nation and pass these acts off as acceptable, such as premarital pregnancy, intense use and dependency of drugs and alcohol, and unlawful acts of crime going on without punishment. Why has our society allowed the media to portray these acts as honorable and appropriate? Many scientists account this change in mass media to the decline of the " Applied Social Psychology Model" once used to determine the apprehensions of the field of mass media and communication, and its replacement with an approach that directs it more to the science of sociology (McQuail 94). This newly occurring method has taken an approach that views media and society as more of a sender and receiver relationship, indicating that choice and perception of the message are just as important as the motives for sending it (McQuail 94).

The most important aspect of this method is perhaps the fact that the media can be seen as a behavior influence as Denis McQuail in his article, *Sociology of Mass Communication*, said: "...not merely neutral channels...but instead... complex social institutions whose theories, traditions, norms, practices and self-chosen objectives all exert an influence on the messages they transmit... messages sent are much more than a set of rational acts of transmission; they belong to much broader systems of social and cultural meaning, with many possible interpretations of origin and function" (94). With this interpretation we can see that the newly accommodated method and approach to understanding and accepting the media, does just that: understands it and accepts it... but not the way it was originally intended. Elihu Katz and David Foulkes said in their article, *On the Use of the Mass Media as "Escape": Clarification of a Concept*, "It is a most intriguing fact in the Rowland 6 intellectual history of social research that the choice was made to study the mass media as agents of persuasion rather than as agents of entertainment" (378). MEDIA AS A ROLE MODEL Many years ago values and morals were acquired and gained through the belief and study of outside social systems, such as religion, who taught on a respectable level what is and is not appropriate and acceptable in a society, for example the study of the Bible and Ten Commandments. In recent years, however, society has turned from the belief of forces outside this world and instead done just the opposite and gained insight and know-how from the self proclaimed rule makers of our society, the media. Charles Atkin reported from an experiment discussed in his article, *Communication and Mass Media Information-Seeking*, "[He] noted that the conversational value of television

program content for school children, and their data showed that students who discussed news events tended to use media for reality-seeking. " (189). People of all ages have made people such as Britney Spears and " K-Fed" their role models, instead of disciples such as Jesus and Moses. All because of how the media has portrayed them. Media has picked up a tendency to glamour everything up and glorify whatever subject it is focusing on, no matter how unflattering the situation or predicament it might be covering is. If humanity sees nothing but pretty faces with lots of money on the television screen, then why would anyone sway from the lifestyle they see portrayed there? George Fisk in his article, Media Influence Reconsidered, spoke of how what people see is actually what they act out in everyday life: Rowland 7 " Environmental influences are clearly mirrored..., but variations in perception of media as sources of information are also traceable to propensity to communicate. Although this propensity appears to be related to age, education, social status, and interest in the particular topic under investigation, it also appears to be an underlying attitude which is directly and positively correlated with media exposure, media impact, and buying behavior regardless of these other determinants" (91). All people are seeing is that these inappropriate behaviors that celebrities and idols demonstrate are bringing them contentment and happiness, but in reality many of them are miserable and falling in and out of rehab due to dependency on drugs and alcohol to fill a void in their life. However the media's portrayal of their happy lifestyles causes people to believe what they see and not the reality of it. We live in a society desperate for two things: a role model or some kind of outline to live by and the need to feel a sense of belonging. And in this time

of desperation and need, media has taken advantage of this naïve society and given them not only a role model portrayed as acceptable but also in accepting these ways they have offered them a well-respected role in society, or so people are taught to believe. But the actuality of it is that in accepting these ways rendered as suitable, people are actually giving leeway to moral corruption of our society. They are doing this by abandoning all morals once considered valuable and replacing them with ways that are, to say the least, altered from their original form. This is how mass media can absolutely influence the behavior of the individuals in a society, and by doing this on a large scale and affecting the behaviors of enough individuals can affect society as a whole and lead to a society lacking in any social grace, or values such as kindness, honesty, happiness, and a sense of identity.

MEDIA'S INFLUENCE Rowland 8 If guided by the media's influence society can and will transform into something that thrives on vanity, fraud, and unlawful acts instead of the once strived for values of depth, honesty and realistic and valued goals with some sort of meaning. Elihu Katz, Hadassah Haas, Michael Gurevitch said in their article, *On the Use of the Mass Media for Important Things*: "...the media are at least as much agents of diversion and entertainment as of information and influence. .. the selection of media and content, and the uses to which they are put, are considerably influenced by social role and psychological predisposition" (165). With the transformation that the role of the media has taken in the past several years media can indeed change the behavior of society and unlike previously, it will not be for the better. It will, instead, turn society's social norms and traditions into those that could corrupt individuals in it, therefore leaving

society a misguided collection of individuals searching for something more, perhaps even their own dreams and desires that they subconsciously shut away when conforming to what media taught was acceptable. This new influence that the media is having can also begin to lead to the intellectual downfall of our society. Charles Atkin also discussed in his findings the new-found value of headlines once considered useless, such as comic strips, and pop culture entities. He reported, “ That many superficial conversations among working class males consisted of topics originating in newspaper comic pages. [He] reported that a group of foreign affairs officials tended to remember a dramatic newspaper headline of high conversational value rather than professionally relevant headlines" (Atkin 189). With this we can see the decreased worth of prevalent and significant events happening in our culture, and the larger importance that has been put on the insignificant happenings in our society, such as who is sleeping with who and who was seen at the club the night before. Instead of our society valuing Rowland 9 things like The New York Times, and Time magazine, we have fallen hard as the slave to things like Cosmopolitan, and tabloids like Star and US Weekly. Intelligence and education used to be very valued in society, no matter how much money you had; and usually it was your education that brought about one’s fortunes. However, today the people accumulating all of the money are the ones that seem to be lacking in any intellectual capacity at all, and neglected to get a college education. If so many people, especially younger school-aged, are seeing that these intellectually-lacking celebrities are making millions without an education, then what motive does it give the younger generation to go to school and get an education? The answer is

simple: it doesn't. With this recent trend of Hollywood prototypes who bask in all their glory, the percentage of students who decide to receive an education is not as nearly as high as it should be. Getting a college education has been made very doable with the implementing of financial aid, lottery scholarships in some states, and community colleges for one to get a two-year degree or to just get off their feet and raise their GPA in order to transfer to a four-year university. With all of these gateways to getting a college education at people's doorsteps, there should be no one turning down the opportunity to receive one. But instead of the easy accessibility to a good education being publicized, all people are seeing is the glory of what can happen when you pack your bags and head to Los Angeles, while disregarding the need for an education. But the reality of making your way in Hollywood is not nearly as glamorous, or as easy, as the media is making it out to be. And because of this publicized falsehood, the value of education could drop drastically and therefore could leave the amount of uneducated citizens to skyrocket. MY CONTRIBUTION Rowland 10 I believe the increased importance found in the media is due to people's desperation and long for a role model. People of all ages, but especially adolescents, have a strong desire to follow some kind of lead or example, and it seems that in our society today the looking glass that celebrities are viewed through, the media, is the only option that young people have been given. Young people are creatures of trend and persuasion, and as soon as they see that the trend is what the Hollywood hot-shots are portraying then they are going to follow accordingly. And if media, like TV and movies, are portraying their achieved happiness, then it is only natural for all people to assume that they

can achieve it as well. But the reality of it is that what the media is showing is nothing but lies and a collection of failed dreams made out to be “ a Cinderella story. ” Young people believe what they see and furthermore fall victim very hard to whatever behavior is surrounding them. And until the media puts a stop to their faulty showcase of stars, then the future of the next generations could be in jeopardy. I believe whole heartedly that this problem, however, goes much deeper than a media obsession. I believe that society has lost sight of the once valued traits that made up a fulfilling lifestyle: those of true happiness, love, kindness, and compassion. And until this is realized then society will continue to fall as the injured party to the ridiculous standards and norms that make up the brainwashed society we live in. I believe above all else that people have got to begin to look inside of them and figure out who they are, not what society or the media wants them to be.

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