

Media influences

Media



When we as individuals have the desire to learn more about current events and the condition of the world it is only natural that we turn our focus towards the mediums that broadcast the information in which we are seeking. These information sources can be televisions, newspapers, magazines, and/or the most recent technological phenomenon, known as the internet. As of late, devices such as the television have been proven to be much more than just an amusement for many Americans. With awareness of the power that television possesses, it has arguably become a given that the content broadcasted through a television also possesses great influence. The media is becoming an ever more powerful force in shaping the world's perception of itself. An individual's struggle to develop, and maintain a unique identity and self-understanding apart from media's influence is steadily becoming increasingly difficult for the youths of today.

When the people of the world absorb the many manifestations of the media they believe they are simply viewing reality, but in actuality, the media often proves itself to be the sole instigator of stereotypes, as well as the creator of adverse social problems that often plague our society. Personally, I believe in order to eliminate the stereotypes that the media generates the public must have a heightened awareness of both the existence of as well as the potential damage caused by these unrealistic and/or stereotypical images and messages we are bombarded with daily. Unfortunately, and just as it was discussed in the 'Killing Us Softly' video, these detrimental messages are difficult to fight and to even identify effectively because of the ways in which they are "wholesomely" or "harmlessly" presented via advertising. Overwhelming amounts of time and money are devoted to raising

a small, specially selected portion of the population as models of physical perfection – and ‘Killing Us Softly’ creator Jean Kilbourne exclaims, “These body types practically do not exist! For the most part, the types of people we see in the media are television and movie celebrities, fashion models, and sports figures. It is one thing to be acknowledged for one’s achievements, but the issue lies in that the glamorous ways in which these occupations are portrayed by the media are seemingly impossible to separate from the physical appearance of the people who hold them. The glamour that surrounds the media presentation of the lives and careers of these individuals extends, not surprisingly, to the clothes that they wear and the way that they look. One example solidifying this would be the fact that many celebrities, like Jennifer Lopez and Paris Hilton, create their own clothing and perfume merchandise lines, and both are prospering due to the constant bombardment of self improvement that television urges teenagers to make.

In fact, so much attention is given to celebrity appearances that entire television programs are devoted to little else but visual exploitation of celebrity clothing, and their tangible products of their latest fad workouts – so we too, as common folk can also aspire to be the dangerously skinny, 6’2”, 97 pound beauty with the flawless skin and natural stage presence... achieving such characteristics is no sweat, right? The media presentation of the celebrity body has a single unifying image, regardless of the specific job title of a given celebrity. It can be argued that, because the media portrays celebrities' bodies as attractive, desirable, and “good,” they become national symbols of these characteristics. On the contrary, bodies that do not meet this lofty goal frequently are, consciously or unconsciously, regarded as

“ bad” or ugly. Consider the ‘ successfully’ popular advertising campaign used by Subway, the national fast food sandwich chain. Jared,” the “ star” of the recent number of television commercials, supposedly lost hundreds of pounds while on a diet consisting mainly of the chain's sandwiches. Jared's “ before” pictures show him considerably larger than his current size, but they also show him alone, with no friends or family. In stark contrast, however, his “ after” action shots consistently show him not only thinner, but also constantly in the presence of a beautiful woman.

Although this is not always the case,) the advertising message here is clear and simple: being fat/not part of the 1% of the population that most models’ bodies fall into is considered to be the equivalent and/or predictor of one’s life being bad, ugly, unhappy and lonely; while being thin/having no source of natural body fat leaves one happy and with attractive partner. Through these commercials, Jared has assumed celebrity status, solely on the basis that his body has changed to approximate more closely to the current standard of what the media considers to be attractive. In truth, there is a huge difference between the male and female body types glorified in the media and those of the public at large. For women, “ desirable” physical characteristics (as they are portrayed in the media) include being thin, long-legged, slim-hipped, and large-breasted. In addition, the media-portrayed “ desirable” physical characteristics for men include being muscular and possessing a full head of hair. While this has been the normal projection of a “ desirable” man for decades, in some cases this desirable form has also been altered to an extreme (much like the unrealistic physical expectations of women. Just like the counterpart Barbie dolls, G.

I Joe has evolved into a highly influential and popular action figure that displays levels of muscularity far exceeding the outer limits of actual human attainment. Thus, the unrealistic evolution of both Barbie and G. I Joe may seem insignificant, but in truth it reflects an ever changing and demanding projection of the human body that has been fabricated by none other than, the mass media. In the gap between what is absolutely beautiful in the eyes of the media and the physical reality of the popular majority, it seems as though nearly everyone, at some point in his or her life attempts to alter him- or herself in a physical way, in order to conform more closely to the marketed “ norm” of attractiveness and desirability. Television, magazines, and newspapers are filled with advertisements promoting self-loathing attitudes, while offering “ miracle,” and body-altering “ cures. The body that does not conform to a sexy, sleek stereotype becomes a thing to be hated, improved upon, and generally tortured into submission. Again, in the video we watched, media activist Jean Kilbourne concludes that, “ Women are sold to the diet industry by the magazines we read and the television programs we watch, almost all of which make us feel anxious about our weight.

” Ultimately, the unachievable presentation of the human body in the media leads to many outlets that can harm/distort the average human being’s perception of themselves. The changes a person must make in order to become what the media considers to be beautiful leads to many problems such as: disordered eating, including anorexia, bulimia, over-exercising, excessive dieting, and over-anxiety over food (just to name a few.) While most of the population recovering from disordered eating is still predominately composed of women, the number of men with disordered and dangerous

eating habits as well as distorted body images is reportedly on the rise. In addition to inevitable physical damage, intangible psychological harm results from body image problems to which the media contributes greatly and regularly. The perception that a single, narrow range of body types is acceptable and healthy for men and women is not only in error, but contributes to widespread social discontent. Instead of celebrating the diversity and beauty of the human form, the media stifles our desire to feel comfortable with ourselves.