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English 101-003

February 17, 2017

Essay #4, Word Count: 1766

Our Lives are Being Shaped in Many Ways by the Media

Every day we are bombarded with different types of media information because it is all around us. From online news sites, TV shows, and music media is shaping our lives in a way we could not have imagined. An increasing number of researchers not only focus on how the media shapes a child but also teens. Teens and children are both mentally in different stages of growth. For children, by not having fully developed brains, it restrains their control of what information goes in. Even though children retain this information from the media, there is more concern that the media is doing more harm than good. Not until the age of 21-23 according to research teens, on the other hand, can censor what they should and should not believe from the media. The development of a teens brain affects this. By sitting for countless number of hours reading online posts to magazines, teens do not realize that the media is desensitizing them. Teens are believing more and questioning who they are as people. Both teens and children are being told to believe unrealistic ideas and actions that are accepted in our society.

The media is everywhere in our society today and shows itself in many different forms. By having media so close to us, it is easy to see how it can and will shape us. Before the internet came about, the media was most predominant in magazines. The magazine articles were geared towards giving advice to teen girls on how they should act around males. There was also the notion that if you did not have a boyfriend, you would not be successful. Jean Chow author of

“Adolescents’ perception of popular teen magazines” studied the effects the media, through magazines, affected a teen’s, mainly girls, health.

In the magazines, women are depicted as being extremely thin while promoting an unrealistic world women are expected to live in. At the beginning of her essay, Chow states, “On a daily basis, people are exposed to an endless proliferation of media messages in the form of advertisements, images, and texts...it becomes the reader’s environment,” (132). In the article, Chow explains, “In addition, Stice & Shaw (1994, p. 288) reported that exposure to thin models in magazines induced ‘depression, stress, shame, insecurity, and body dissatisfaction,’” (135). Would it not be better to see in the media a female who can reach her full potential? By seeing these images of what our society calls beauty and perfection, it makes us feel worse about ourselves. This would seem easy to do and widely agreed upon by many, but our media is distorting what images should be. In Chow’s article, she states, “An adolescent woman is expected to modify her behavior in a socially desirable manner in order to be ‘a great date’ for a male,” (136). Our society and the media are both putting expectations on females that should not even be thought of. A woman should not have to change who she is to please this one man who is in her life.

Not a day that goes by when I do not see a child without an iPhone, tablet, or some type of media device grabbing their attention. With the technology glued to their faces they are experiencing a bombardment of information that is becoming harder for children to decipher. Disney, a huge corporation, can give ideas to children that can be controversial to what their families taught them. Their shows do have a sense of mystery, awe, wonder, and amazement, but some of the morals that are being conveyed are not practical in the real world. It is becoming harder for kids to be able to distinguish between what is fantasy and what is reality. It might not

be important now, but the long-term effects of watching these shows can be costly. Deborah Ross author of “Escape from Wonderland: Disney and the Female Imagination,” looks in depth on how Disney shows are shaping the lives of young girls.

In our world, girls are being given unrealistic fantasies to live by. Ross’s article takes the story of *The Little Mermaid* to show her audience, and my point, that Disney is shaping the lives of young girls. In the story of *The Little Mermaid*, the idea of giving up everything for just one guy is conveyed. In the article, Ross explains, “In pursuit of this desire Andersen’s mermaid is willing to spend all she has: her voice, her health, and eventually her life,” (Ross 476). In the original story, Ariel decides to kill herself to let her prince live instead of killing him or dying of natural cause to become one with the sea to live forever. Ariel gave up her voice, tongue, family, and life for this one man. In Disney’s version, having the main character not only have her tongue cut off, but also die at the end would not make the best children’s movie. Ariel sacrificed everything for this one guy and many girls are doing the same thing. I did for a time believe this idea, but soon found out this is not a moral to live by. We should be selfless and help others in any way we can, but we should not lose ourselves in the process. As popular as Disney shows are in our world, there is something else that is shaping the lives of children. With how fast and wide the media is, teens can receive large amounts of information.

Once a teen receives information from the media, the information becomes a part of them. In the article, “Teenage Sexuality and Media Practice: Factoring in the Influences of Family, Friends, and School,” the author states, “It was with the embodied knowledge acquired through ‘lived through experience,’ Steele and Brown (1995) reasoned, that teens ‘build on and transform the shared sociocultural knowledge available through the media,’” (Steele 331). Throughout Jeanne Rogge Steele’s article, she states how the media is influencing teens. These

influential ideas that are being given to make teens believe that the different actions they take are okay to do. Steele explains, “The study complements two mass communication research streams: content analyses of sexual content in the mass media and media effects research focusing on teenagers,” (331). Teens used to receive all their information from their parents and friends. With technology being faster and more convenient they are relying more on technology than family. This information is contradicting what teens were taught growing up. With having contradicting ideas being put onto teens, they are unable to see what is real or fake information

The media online is being used to put harm towards one another. Janie M. Zweig, Meredith Dank, Jennifer Yahner, and Pamela Lachman looked in depth at how the media is putting harm towards others. They specifically considered how online cyber bullying and dating violence is related. In the article, “The Rate of Cyber Dating Abuse Among Teens and How It Relates to Other Forms of Teen Dating Violence,” the authors state, “Recent advancements in technology (e.g., social networking, texting on a cellular phone) have created new ways for people to relate to one another socially, and tools for those involved in dating violence to harass control, and abuse their partners,” (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, and Lachman 1063). The authors completed intense and extensive research to be able to have a better understanding of how a teen’s life, dating violence, cyber violence, and the media, is affected. In the authors’ article, they explain, “Further, the ability to be in constant contact with a dating partner via these relatively new technologies may contribute to someone’s ability to stalk, control, harass, and abuse their partners,” (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, and Lachman 1064). Some people are using the media to almost manipulate each other into doing what they want.

As our world grows, our views of what is right and wrong changes. Today, an increasing number of violent media is coming into our homes in many ways. From watching Robin Hood to

rated R movies, children are witnessing a large variety of different types of violence. This violence is at their fingertips because of the amount of technology that we have. It might not seem like a huge impact, but it is. A child's behavioral patterns are dramatically being shaped by the amount of violence they watch.

The media is harmful to children and teens in our society and is increasingly affecting them. First, Jean Chow and Deborah Ross both stated how the media is being used to give girls unrealistic worlds to live in. Next, Jeanne Rogge Steele explained how teens are receiving more information from the media, than their families. Finally, Janie M. Zweig, Meredith Dank, Jennifer Yahner, and Pamela Lachman considered how online violence through dating and real world dating went together. If there is nothing done to reverse this process, then our society will keep on going through a downward spiral. This downward spiral will be made up of children and teens believing in unrealistic ideas that can lead to questionable behavior. This downward spiral will create generation of teens and kids growing up with unrealistic ideas and behaviors that should not be approved by society. These ideas and behaviors can get children and teens into a situation they do not want to be in.

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