

How does the media influence young people in today's society?

Our society still seems confused about what to think about children and young people. It seems to be gripped with a fear of children, blaming them for much of society's ills: crime, vandalism, drugs, drink, sex, teenage pregnancy. The list goes on. But if these theories are true, where do these rebellious attitudes stem from?

The obvious answer would be from the upbringing of children, but in my opinion the media also plays a substantial role in the attitudes, behaviour and physical aspects of youth today, in particularly that of young women.

We are constantly being bombarded with advertising, opinions, images and stories which appear to be forcing us to conform to a specific image of how we are supposed to be, whether it be thinner, more intelligent or prettier, and no matter how much we try to persuade ourselves that we are in no way affected by such marketing ploys and television programmes, everyone is in some way influenced by the media.

These days we cannot escape the constant media attack, whether it be from television, radio, magazines, newspapers or the Internet. Two of the biggest manipulative mediums are television and magazines.

With the huge the market for 'teen mags', it seems that the choice is endless. Yet they all have the same role, which is to sell to teenagers. Not just products but these magazines are also selling us the "perfect" figure, the "perfect" man and the "perfect" life.

Many use their control over young people to promote the awareness of issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancies and bullying and countless magazines boast that they encourage their readers to be individuals, that "size doesn't matter" and you don't have to be in with the cool crowd to be happy. But to what extent are these claims true?

The most common cry from magazines is that everyone is different sizes and we should be happy with who we are and steer away from dieting, yet many still use skinny models to model the latest fashions. Constant exposure to these very thin models and celebrities, for example Victoria Beckham and Geri Halliwell, are thought to encourage a desire to be thin in even the youngest of children. This can lead to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia.

"A study, carried out by psychologists at Surrey University and Melbourne University, Australia, provides alarming evidence that poor body image – a factor in harmful dieting – begins well before puberty." (B.Marsh, Daily Mail, June 02)

'Girls can be whatever they want to be as long as they are beautiful when they grow up' This is the message the popular 'Barbie' doll has been pushing on to youth since 1959.

When Barbie first hit the market, the creator, Ruth Handler, stated that she wanted to make the perfect role model for her children, Barbie and Ken. Parents everywhere ripped open their wallets and stampeded into shops, eating up the concept. Today although the general idea behind Barbie dolls has changed, the influence still remains. Barbie was unleashed to the world in a revealing swimming costume, wearing make up and fully accessorized. With her ruby red lips, plucked eyebrows and pretty ponytail, she became the icon to many young girls.

It is a proven fact that her proportions could never be humanly possible to achieve. If she were the actual life size, she would stand an incredible seven feet tall, with body measurements of a 37inch bust, 20inch waist, and 25inch hips. If she could stand, despite her huge, heavy bust, Barbie could not play sport or even walk. She is supposed to be a young teenage girl but does her exaggerated measurements and perfect features portray the right image to impressionable seven year old girls?

Another major factor in today's society is violence. It seems that everywhere we look violence attacks us. We see it in the streets, back alleys, schools, and even at home. The last of these is a major source of violence. In many peoples living rooms there sits an outlet for violence that often goes unnoticed. It is the television, and the children who view it are often pulled into its realistic world of violence with devastating effects.

Much research has gone into showing why children are so mesmerized by this glowing box and the action that takes place within it. Research carried out by both universities in North America and the U.K. show that it is definitely a major source of violent behaviour in children. The research proves time and time again that aggression and television viewing go hand in hand.

The truth about television violence and children has been shown. Some are trying to fight this problem. Others are ignoring it and hoping it will go away. Still others don't even seem to care. However, the facts are undeniable. The studies have been carried out and all results point to one conclusion: Television violence causes children to be violent and the effects can be life-long.

The information can't be ignored. Violent television does affect children. In California, a seven year old boy sprinkled ground up glass in the meal his family was to eat for dinner. When asked why he did it he replied that he wanted to see if the results would be the same in real life as they were on television. This is certainly a startling example of how television can affect a child's mind.

In yet another piece of research, children who watch a lot of violent television were compared to children who don't. The results were that the children who watched more violent television were more likely to agree that it's acceptable to hit someone if you're mad at them for a good reason. The other group learned that problems can be solved passively, through discussion.

Fixing these problems is not easy. There are many factors that have to be considered and people convinced. These problems will, no doubt, never go away and continue to get worse as the years go by. However, there are measures that can be taken to

prevent the children from ever being exposed to such things. After all, what will the world be like when today's youth is running the world?