The Effect of Targeted Advertisement in the Media and on the Internet on High school Students' Lifestyle Choices (Part II)

Cosmin SIMA
"Andrei Mureşanu" National College, Bistrița (Romania)
cosmin_sima@yahoo.com

Résumé: Si l'éducation joue un rôle fondamental pour la compréhension de la façon dont la télévision, les revues et la publicité influencent notre perception sur le «corps parfait» et sur la manière d'être sexy, il l'est encore plus à comprendre comment les médias peuvent influencer quoi penser et comment réfléchir à ces questions.
Mots-clés: discours**,** publicité, stéréotypes, communication de masse, médias.

1. Types of Mass-Media Advertisement Targeted Towards Teenagers

1.1. Agenda Setting and Framing and the Effect of Media on Teenage Thinking

If education is crucial in understanding the way television, magazines, and advertising influence the way we perceive the "perfect body", and how to behave to be sexy, it is even more so in understanding how the media can influence what to think about, and how to think about these issues.

Mass communication theory basis its theories on a few concepts and theories, among which, we can find three very important ones: the framing theory, agenda-setting, second-order agenda-setting, and priming. The framing theory is based on the observation that when people try to understand the world, especially from a social point of view, they do so in accordance to certain expectations. Media do not only count on these expectations, but also condition them, will offer a background for such ex-

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

pectations. Agenda setting refers to the fact that the media provide "subjects" to talk about, they launch public themes, they launch discussions, and suggest that those topics are of great interest, even if up to that moment nobody really expressed any concern in relation to those issues. A second-order agenda is even more harmful, as it refers not only to the public agenda of topics, but also to 'how to think about those topics'. This theory was developed by McCombs.

...He calls his new theory second-order agenda-setting. McCombs argues that agenda-setting operates at two levels, or orders – the object level and the attribute level. Conventional agenda-setting research has focused at the object level and has assessed how media coverage could influence the priority assigned to objects (e.g. issued, candidates, events, and problems). In doing this, media told us "*what* to think about". But media can also tell us "*how* To think about" some objects. Media do this by influencing second-order "attribute agendas". They tell us which object attributes are important and which ones are not[1].

Agenda-setting goes hand in hand with priming, that is, with the methods that media use to draw attention on certain aspects of life or reality, in the detriment of others. There were many movies on what makes 'prime-time' news and what does not, and the entire technology and psychological training necessary for making up prime news. Baran and Davis show how these theories work in the case of political issues and how they make the news, but they can be noticed and interpreted whenever media is concerned, even in the way they make up stories about celebrities, in the way they present certain aspects of youth culture on the music channels, in how they write in youth magazines and what appears on the cover, what is on the front page, which images come after what information. All these will 'help' teenagers think that they have informed opinions, when, in fact, they do nothing but repeat what they have seen and learned without even being conscious of such conditioning.

The "what" and the "how" to think, though, are not only induced by the news, and by youth magazines, but also by the cinema, by movies, by the entire youth culture. Hollywood movies are responsible for many ideas that teenagers have, as to how they should look like and behave. Movies are made to sell, and to bring profit to their authors, and this is why they need to be compelling, they need to bring young people in the cinema halls, especially as it is known that they are the main "moviegoers".

[1] Baran, Stanley J. & Davis, Dennis K., *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*, Fifth Edition, Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009, p. 282.

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

Hollywood's appeal to youth is essentially for profit, since young people constitute such a high portion of the movie going audience. Yet the stories of youth after childhood are quite compelling, since the coming-of-age process is familiar to all cultures and classes of people. Films made in the global marketplace illustrate this abundantly: adolescence and puberty are common subjects in many movies[2].

If in the 50's the 'rebel without a cause'-hero represented the real state of mind of a generation, oversaturated with war and the American institutional schizophrenic anti-communist, anti-feminist, and racist propaganda, today the "rebel" hero has almost nothing to rebel against, his causes are invented by the producers, who try to sell the products of their "sponsors" and financers. Therefore, movies and shows on TV are produced on this purpose of programming the minds of the youth into mimicking a certain type of hero and heroine, and on pressuring their parents until they get the products they think they need in order to get the look they are after.

Priming and framing can be damaging not only because they induce the wish to buy certain products; they are mainly damaging because they replace the fundamental need of teenagers to filter and judge information for themselves, to learn how to deduce and induce meaning, to notice similarities and dissimilarities between fact, in a word, to develop logical thinking, and feel responsible for the choices they make.

Nevertheless, there are also a few TV programs and series, as well as movies and videos, magazines and ads that speak of social issues, that bring forth to public knowledge important aspects of the life of youth all over the world. Such programmes, such movies and serial movies, such magazines and ads will form the basis for a new self-image, and for a new thinking. Teachers and educators, parents and public figures have to get involved in the promoting and supporting of such alternatives to the "body-sex-violent"- mall-addicted hero/ine.

1.2. Media and Its Main Focus: Individualism

The concept of individualism has been commented on for a few decades now, as a consequence of capitalism, of commercialism, of the changes in society and family values. Individualism has replaced collectivism, especially as families did not need to stick together in order to be able to take care of their elderly and babies, since there have appeared institutions that take care of those categories. Everything is about who "I"

[2] Shary, Timothy, "Introduction. Youth Culture Shock", *Youth Culture in Global Cinema*, Edited by Timothy Shary and Alexandra Seibel, Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2007, p. 8.

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

am, what "I" want, and what "My" life is about. The general idea is that we can do anything we want, that we are able to do anything we want as long as we set our goal straight and do "whatever it takes". Literally, for many people, if "whatever it takes" means that they can step over other people, neglect any kind of moral commandments, do without any kind of restraint, it is all right, as long as they raise above other, as long as they make their mark.

For teenagers, individualism very often means that they need to be "entertained" all the time, they get bored very easily if things are not about themselves, and that they think they are entitled to have everything they want. Becoming an Idol (music, dancing, cooking, acting) is one of the things that is very popular among teenagers and young people, generally. They stay in long lines to wait to enlist in a talent competition, for instance, sometimes just for the sake of being on television for a few seconds. They just want to be famous, to become idols, to be on the scene, and think they can do that if they try long enough. Very seldom do they speak about talent, work, discipline, etc.

"Anyone can become what they want to be", says sixteen-year-old Brooke. "If it doesn't happen, you can't give up, you gotta keep going." [...] Everyone I speak to says exactly the same thing, regardless of age, ethnicity, what part of Ontario they have trekked from or how many hours they have been standing in the crowd. All of them think that they have a good chance, that they have what it takes to be famous, and that singing is their dream. When I ask what makes them different form the ten thousand people patiently waiting beside them, they simply reiterate that they want it more because it is their dream and passion. When I ask them how they might feel if they are summarily dismissed by the judges, they are ready for that too. The kids in line are so steeped in the myth of instant stardom that they are already figuring out how even rejection will benefit their bid[3].

The Canadian critic of culture, Hal Niedzviecki, in his extremely serious, yet so funny, book, *Hello, I'm Special. How Individuality Became the New Conformity*, analyses Popular Culture from the point of view of individualism, and shows how teens are led to believe that nothing matters if they want to do something. They are encouraged to "go for it", and "Just do it": In her song "Vogue", Madonna tells us we are all superstars. Nike exhorts us to "Just do it". These are catchy summations of the grand pop-culture theme that bombards us every day. Each and every manifestation of pop culture purports to be telling the story of how the individual

[3] Niedzviecki, Hal, *Hello! I'm Special. How Individuality Became the New Conformity*, Penguin, Canada, 2006, p. 67.

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

transcends obstacles and the masses to earn recognition, success, happiness. Though the plot may be about a sultry maid from the wrong side of the tracks working for a repressed rich guy (nineties sitcom *The Nanny*, or Jennifer Lopez's feature *Maid in Manhattan*), the story is really concerned with how all of us ordinary people can transcend our limitations; the story is really how *you* feel, work, live, love (*idem*, p. 68).

We have reproduced this quotation as it is very suggestive of what our teenage students feel like, and how difficult it is for them to just conform to regulations, to 'normal' school work, to being part of 'normal' families, to be 'average', and not to become stars and superstars. They consider their 'screen friends' closer than members of their own families, sometimes, as they want to emulate that spirit, they want to feel special, and everything is about themselves, their feelings, their ideas and wishes. This is normal for teenage and has been for centuries. The adolescent today is not very different from adolescents a hundred years ago, from the point of view of physical and mental development. Nevertheless, if for the one-hundred-years-ago teenager this period meant that they had to know their capabilities, their talents and limitations, to find idols in their families, or from among teachers, or historical and literary figures, today's teenagers have no patience to take one step at a time, they are in permanent rush to 'have fun', as life is short and they want to do something with their lives (even if that means to lead a self-deceitful, thoughtless, and meaningless life). The important thing is to have the right look, the right attitude, and then you can do whatever you want, as life is about you and nobody else. Everything is possible as long as you do not 'settle' for the normal and average. These are the narratives of popular culture, as the Canadian critic defines them: The message of pop culture is one of transcending ordinary life by combining adventure, heightened excitement, and, inevitably, success (fast-food combo order of everlasting love, luxury, and life purpose). Every pop-culture narrative tells us that, despite ordinariness, you too can be special, super, noticed, discovered, successful. You too can alter the narrative of your life, make a dramatic U-turn, become a better person, become more you. The message of pop culture is always that of the triumph of the ordinary person who, in the process of following his or her heart, bucks the system and becomes the exception, a larger-than-life but still completely regular it-could-happen-to-you hero (*idem*, p. 69).

This model of American individuality is further commented by Niedzviecky, showing that there is a great paradox between the pretended freedom of the individual to do whatever they please, and the structured, institutionalized system that regulates American society. He also refers to a description of American society, written by De Tocqueville a hundred

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

years ago, showing how things started to turn to individualism even since those times, as if this was the condition to be able to live in that country. If nothing else, the Americans are compelled to live on their own, alone, in their separate shells, because they can do everything they want.

As he [De Tocqueville] saw it, freedom American style was forcing everyone into their shells, with their social framework reduced to immediate family and friends, and their only interest personal success. De Tocqueville wrote of an "innumerable multitude of men all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest" (*idem*, p. 167).

Romania still has a model of life in families, in communities, especially in the rural area and in smaller towns (not so much in Bucharest or in other cities). Still, the influence of American individualism through media is extremely powerful, teenagers are inclined to just copy behaviors, although they do not have the experience, the tradition, or the understanding of capitalist individualism; for instance, observing laws and regulations is something that goes without saying in America, but is less than a reality in our country. The combination of individualism and anarchic inclinations lead to a total lack of common sense in the long run. This tendency needs to be corrected, prevented if that is possible, and the help of educators and teachers is absolutely necessary. Especially as there are other tendencies in Western Europe and America, anti-individualistic ones, that do not get to your youth through the media they are exposed to daily, but that can be shown and presented to them, as the latest fashion, as the 'coolest' thing to do. A newly found search for humanity is very important these days, and in the chapter *Revolution Redux*, Niedzviecki gives a very suggestive example. He speaks about Jane Rule, a retired novel writer, who wanted to have peace and quiet on one of the hundreds of islands among the Gulf Islands. She wanted to lead a solitary life, thinking only about her books, keeping to herself. Nevertheless, in time, she had to mix with the locals, and in time she started participating in the life of the community.

Our youth do not need to start over, as they have their lives ahead of them, but we need to open their eyes as to the advantages and the disadvantages of the developed countries, and help them decide for a more natural way of life, that does not involve as much self-assertion at any cost, but a real developing of one's inclinations and talents. They need to be able to read advertisements correctly, even when they are presented in the most attractive form (in complex ads like TV channels and programs, theme parks, etc.). If they can see what these commercials do, and if they

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

can discern the real marketing bit, and even enjoy the artistic part of ads, they will be able to decide if they need a product or not, and they will decide what kind of person they would like to become, and just copy and mimic everything they see on TV, and in glossy magazines.

1.3. The Effect of Media on Teenagers' Language

In a learned and profound study entitled "Language, Inequality and Interculturality", C. Thurlow refers to teens metalanguage, and how it is used and misused, represented and misrepresented in the media. The misrepresentation of the language of the teens, is, in fact, as the author argues, a misrepresentation of the teens themselves.

It is widely known that most teenagers are using all kinds of technological devices, the most frequent, though, being the cell phone and the computer. They text, they write messages, they are active on social sites, they have blogs and vlogs (or, at least they follow and read other peoples' blogs and vlogs). In order that more meaning and words be added to their messages, as well as more stylistic personal marks, they also use a lot of graphics, colours, mimes, abbreviations, etc. Many educators, linguists, and journalists drew the attention of the public on this special usage of the language (especially English language) in the cyberspace, and accused young people of 'spoiling' the language.

....Young people [are] continually lumped together as "the keyboard generation", "Generation IM", "the gen-txt community", "Generation Text", "mobile generation", "the thumb generation", "gen.txtrs", and "GNR8N TXT". This entire generation of wired whizzes was, on the other hand, just as likely to be caricatured as techno-slaves: their use of communication technologies depicted as a "craze", "mania", "youth obsession", or of having "cult Status" (*idem*, p. 237).

The generation gap grew wider as most of the teenagers today did not live in a 'pre-technological' era in communication, and just do not understand what the problem is. The problem for the older generation, especially for those who do not have access to technology, is that they think that this kind of post-human body, as postmodernists call it, prevents the youth from actually being literate, using the 'correct' English language, and, especially from reading “real books”.

In so far as all these are true, it is also true that the generation gap deepens even more if we look from the other side of the precipice, that is, from the teens towards their parents, especially those who do not use technology. They are right to consider that their parents are illiterate, as well. Computer illiteracy (and communication technology illiteracy) is as serious a problem as the 'normal' literacy for this world. Nevertheless,

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

what happens is that the older generation have more possibilities to express their dissatisfaction with the young generation than the other way round. Older journalists, teachers, parents consider that the manner in which teenagers and young people use the language is absolutely intolerable, and they identify their usage of the language in certain conditions (when texting or messaging) as the only linguistic code these young people master.

The truth is that most young people master both the technologically-friendly metalanguage, and the 'normal' code, while the older generation only master one code. If we think about the recent history (after WWI), teenagers and young people have always had a certain code (linguistic, dress, behaviour), and it is normal for them to try and be creative with language, and express their creativity in various ways. The older generation who frowns at these youngsters do not remember the hairstyle they had when they were young (think about the big hair of women in the 80's, for instance, or of the skinny pants/long hair combination of the men). This misunderstanding led to various accusations on the part of the older generation, who, especially referring to text messages, consider that the youth are ..."destroying", "harming", "limiting", "damaging", "ruining", "threatening", "massacring", "corrupting", or "eroding" Standard English. This apparent onslaught was epitomized with references to formal markers of received practice and canonical standards of literature, as with this comment: "The text messaging craze is... systematically destroying grammar, syntax and even spelling"[4].

Thurlow argues that it is mainly the fault of those who are looking as these differences, and only speak of differences, as if teenagers were from another planet. Many articles in newspapers and magazines, journals, in all kinds of conferences and parent meetings, young people's "new media language" is seen as impossible to comprehend, as if youngsters were trying to keep their codes secret from their parents and want to use all kinds of bizarre words, acronyms, abbreviations, just to confuse the adults who are not initiated in this kind of language. The critic read many such articles, and listened to many representatives of the 'baffled' generation, and found that they referred to this language in the following terms: ...a mysterious lexicon, hieroglyphics, technobabble, cryptic chat, a bizarre activity, hodgepodge communication, secret code, language soup, jumble, impenetrable, ramblings, cryptograms, garbled, encoded messages, gobbledegook, gibberish, argle-barlge, cypher, exclusive, a secret

[4] Thurlow, Crispin, "Language, Inequality and Interculturality", in *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication*, Edited by Thomas K. Nakayama, and Rona Tamiko Halualani, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 237.

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

language, code language, obscure, effective code against POS ["parent over shoulder"] (*idem*, p. 238).

This reaction of the parents and their generation is, in fact, as Thurlow argues, a reflex of a mentality according to which it is the teenagers who have to learn to speak the language of the adults, and if they are not understood it is their fault. In a way, it is the same situation with the powerful group in a country, who ask the ethnic minority to just learn the language quicker, and if they make mistakes, or are more difficult to understand, they are seen as being at fault all the time. They just do not admit that they are slow in learning the new technology, and that the youth use this kind of language because they adapted to technology, and they created a new style of the language, a new metalanguage, to suit the new reality they live in. With a little effort and interest on the part of the older generation, and with a little patience on the part of the youth, this difference of using the common code can be diminished, and things could be quite clear on both ends.

The problem is, from the point of view of mass media and its influence on teenagers, that all kinds of serial movie writers, authors of lyrics for music, as well as movie script writers and advertising specialists, started using this metalanguage in other situations, as well, in order to attract teenagers and make them watch their shows. The overuse of this kind of language, taken out of its 'normal' context and usage, led to a kind of permanent misunderstanding of the youth from the part of the older generation, who express their perplexity ironically, but also try to suggest that young people only speak in this manner.

Not only, therefore, does public metalanguage about young people's new-media language work to sustain the technology that is adolescence itself and to service the identificational needs of adults, this same metalanguage technologizes young people by rendering them as uniformly and universally wired or hooked. In more sinister terms, however, language, and new-media language in particular, are thereby also exploited as resources by which adults may not only demonize but also commodify youth (cf. Miles, 2000). We therefore find journalists and marketers working together to exaggerate the separateness – the difference – of youth in order to distinguish young people as a profitable market (*idem*, p. 238).

This ample analysis of the way young people's technologically influenced metalanguage is misrepresented in mass media, can also be taken as a very good starting point of how media influences the mis-usage of language by teenagers, how they consider that taboo words are not only 'normal' in usage, but desirable – in fact their favourite celebrities use such words in most movies, videos, and music. It is media who teaches teen-

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

agers to use fowl language – not only media, of course, but in a way they just 'make it ok'. In fact, as the study shows, they are just trying to sell their products, and consider that by using such words, and such language, they come closer to their target group, identifying them as 'different' from adults, as having 'special tastes', as needing special products to satisfy these tastes (for intense living, risk-taking, indulging on every whim, over-eating, over-drinking, creating a perfect body, abusing alcohol, sex, and – why not? – language. How sensitive teenagers are to such efforts on the part of mass media, remains to be discovered. However, parents, teachers, educators of all kinds should make the effort to try and understand the interests of their teenagers, and learn more of their codes, and then, it is possible that they might prevent the latter from exaggerations, and get them use the other codes of the language appropriately.

We are going to speak more about the influence of media on how young people speak, but, our interest in this study is focused on the Romanian learner of English, who is exposed to television, music, and ads in English, and both benefits from them – as their proficiency in using the language increases, even if in a limited way – and is also misled by them – in the sense that they consider swear words as a 'normal' manner of expressing themselves. In fact, they can hear heroes on the silver screen speaking like that, and they cannot tell the difference between movie-talk and everyday normal talking. Many teachers of English had to explain to foreign visitors why our teenagers spoke rudely to them – and how they cannot see how rude it is if they use certain words in English, and how seldom such words are actually used by the average person in the English-speaking countries.

Another problem is that if they infer the idea that it is “cool” to keep parents in the dark when it comes to the language they use, they will do that even if they do not need to (it is known that teenagers need to have secrets – our grandmothers had their locked diaries, why should our teenager children unlock their thoughts for us?). The danger consists in their not being able to discern when such language can be used, and when it is inappropriate. Nevertheless, there are many possibilities to show another face of the coin, and select serial movies, stand-up comedies, cartoons, music, and ads that might convince our students that not all young people speak that way, and not in any circumstance. This very much depends on the selection the teacher can make of materials that are both attractive and convincing.

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

1.4. The Influence of Celebrities and Stars on Teenagers

In a comprehensive study of celebrities, published in 2009, and entitled *The Cult of Celebrity*, the famous radio host, and expert of fame, Cooper Lawrence, considers that celebrities have almost all attributes of deities, of gods. The subtitle of this book directly refers not to the celebrities themselves, but to how they influence us, their fans – *What Our fascination with the Stars Reveals About Us* – and to why we invest these people with so many attributes. Let us follow Lawrence's argumentation that demonstrates how people take nowadays celebrities as gods.

a. *They are present all around and all the time* . There is virtually no place on earth where we can go and not see posters with them, read articles about them in magazines, see television shows and interviews with them, hear other people refer to them, give them as examples, quote them, there is no product we can buy and not have the reference of such celebrities... Some such celebrities are long lasting, they are with us for generations (like Elvis Presley or Marylin Monroe, for instance); some appear and dies like falling stars. This is not very important, though, as the important thing is that the very idea of celebrity is present in almost all moments of our lives.

b. *They seem to be powerful* . We all have certain ideas about politics, about environment issues, about world poverty and inequality, but not all of us can address the United Nations Assembly, and tell them our opinion. Celebrities can. We all might have our problems with the law (we drive too fast, we trespass somebody's property, we are too noisy one evening, etc.), but we cannot get away with these acts, and the police punishes us. They can. We would all like to have certain facilities when in need, we would like our hotel rooms to be clean, at least, and the service nice and ready to help. They tell hotels what kind of room they want to have, how many strawberry cases, or Champaign bottles, or what colour their bedspread should be. They are all powerful, like deities. They get things done for them, and they only need to express their wishes. They have private planes taking them places if this is what they want, and they seem to give account to nobody at all for these privileges.

c. *They have influence* which spreads "beyond their field of expertise", as Lawrence puts it. Some of their influence can be caused by the most selfless impulses: they try to take a stand and draw the world's attention on world hunger, or child abuse, or bullying (Oprah's fight with bully children and teenagers is noteworthy). They try to raise funds and call other celebrities on stage in performances that are meant to help people all over the world. They sometimes get involved in social actions themselves, they go where natural disasters happen and try to help.

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

In other instances, they are driven by more "self-serving" ambitions, as Lawrence calls them, they try to get more money and 'milk' their statute of celebrities. They sell the rights of publication to certain companies and magazines, they appear on all kinds of shows and performances just to consolidate their status, they participate in all kinds of events to be seen and noticed, and they get paid to go places, do things, wear 'stuff'. The most 'lucrative' usage of their image is, of course, in the marketing industry, as most companies that sell goods try to use celebrities in selling their products. Celebrities are paid exorbitant sums of money 'by these companies' to just borrow their faces (and bodies) to their advertising campaigns. We are ironic with the idea that the companies pay these fees, because it is obvious that we, consumers, pay these enormous sums of money, and if such very expensive advertisement were not made, we would pay much less for each product.

d. *They are "all-knowing"* (Lawrence's term). They seem to know everything about everything else, and have opinions on all topics. From cooking tips to child care, from house designs to fashion tips, from birth control to surgery and cures for various diseases, these people are asked to give their opinions on everything and anything. And their opinions count, they are taken seriously, they seem to be right.

e. *They are superior to us*. They are superior in both their material life and in their spiritual life. They have more of everything: more money, more houses, more ships and diamonds; they are rich and resplendent. They have more beauty, more cars and more searvants. They have more food, more drink, and more possibilities to travel and see places, to have various experiences[5]. They have more friends. They have empires.

Spiritually speaking, they have more freedom, more love, more fun, more glamour. Wherever they go they are welcomed with joy and surprise, they get better reactions from everybody: service people, taxi drivers, pilots, directors, hotel managers, company managers, etc., etc.

f. *They are perfect in everything they do* . The idea of perfection is absolutely necessary for our lives. We need to think that perfection exists, and historically perfection was always attributed to deities. Well, celebrities nowadays have perfect faces, perfect bodies, they are perfect at their jobs, they have perfect lives, perfect houses, they live the dream of perfection. They can change their careers (movie stars start singing, singers get parts in movies, some actors and singers become writers, they can also cook, they can direct, dance, paint, design clothes, create new fragrances, etc.). They are perfect.

[5] L. Cooper, *The Cult of Celebrity. What Our Fascination with the Stars Reveals About Us*, Guilford: skirt, 2009, p. 30.

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

g. *They are perfect topics for conversation*. We follow their lives, watch them perform, read about them, they are news, so they are always present in our conversations. We spend time speaking about them, quoting them, siding with their ideas or contradicting them, as if they were gods, we spend our time and money to worship them and to convince others to adhere to the cult.

h. *They are our role-models* . We think they are perfect, we think their lives are extremely interesting, we listen to each and every word they say, we admire their work, their looks, their ideas, their lives, we want to become like them. We would give anything to meet them in person, we are asking for the miracle to happen, we want to wear those clothes, look like them (the cases with people undergoing serious plastic surgery to look like their favourite stars is dramatic).

i. *We call them by their first name*. Many celebrities are referred by just one name, like gods are. We will not only use their agent-given-names, or company-given-names, but they will not have two names, but one (like Madonna, Cher, Adele, Inna, etc.).

All the above arguments in favour of the idea that celebrities are considered deities of our modern world, seem to get us to the conclusion that they have almost replaced any other beliefs we had in superior or transcendental beings. Lawrence makes his point very powerfully, and whether we accept this argumentation or not, it is obvious that people have a cult for celebrities, which does not depend very much on what they do, but on our wish that they exist as we see them. They are closer to many people than their own friends, and television and marketing policy try to enforce this idea of celebrities being our friends. Thus, people love them, hate them, emulate them, just as they love and hate their friends.

They are mistaken for who they are on the screen. There were many cases in which an actor who played the role of a doctor in a serial movie was actually asked for medical advice. Sometimes people identify the character of a fictional hero with the character of the actor himself. The notorious case of the 80s was J.R. Ewing, and Larry Hagman had to deal with a lot of public display of animosity, as people thought he was mean and deceitful, etc.

Another aspect Lawrence refers to is that people are inclined to consume their celebrities' lives: they want to know everything about them, to get as close as possible to them, to know what they like, what they feel, who they love, they want to know every little detail. This desire of the public is exploited by glossy magazines, which profess to know more and let the public get closer to their idols, by television channels,

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

which give 'exclusive' information, get 'exclusive' interviews', have celebrities in their shows and performances all the time.

Marketers of all kinds exploit another 'ideal' of the public, of the fans, the wish to belong to the group their favourite stars belong to: to wear the same clothes, the same make-up, to get distinguished in a group as a fan. To substantiate this idea, Lawrence quoted Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner (*idem*, p. 32), who in their *Social Identity Theory* studied this need of identifying with the idols.

Having in view all of the above, the conclusion springs out with great clarity: our lives are very much influenced by this industry of celebrity-making. How luring their image is for all people. Adults see in them and their lives the ideal lives they would like to live, especially as they feel the burden of so many responsibilities they have. Some stars are over 40, but they still seem to be having fun, they seem to be able to play, to go out as they wish, and even when they have families, they do not seem to be bothered by them. Their wives/husbands do not look 40 or 50, either, they are all in shape, all happy...

The life of celebrities is even more luring and influential for the teenagers, or the "emerging adults" as Lawrence calls them.

The emerging adults see celebrities their age, and older, living in a kind of suspended adolescence, not having to deal with all the boring stuff in life – getting up at the same time every day when the alarm goes off, commuting down a congested highway, remembering to pay the cell phone bill. Instead, they see images of celebrities studded with jewels at red-carpet events, hanging out at clubs midweek, and playing with their toys (luxury cars, pedigree lapdogs, class a drugs, etc.) in the schoolyards.

Celebrities look very different from many of the teenagers' sordid lives, in poor material and/or spiritual conditions; they seem to be surrounded by friends, they seem to be loved, important, and this is something that many young people are looking for. It is not only the fortune, the jewelry and the fame itself, neither is beauty so important, as the fact that these famous people are always in the center of attention, somehow without any effort.

Bibliography

Brown, Jane D. & Witherspoon, Elizabeth M., 2001, "The Mass Media and the Health of Adolescents in the United States", in *Sex, Violence, and Drugs in The Global Village*, edited by Yahya R. Kamalipour and Kuldip R. Rampal, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Brumberg, Joan Jacobs, 1997, *The Body Project: an intimate history of American Girls*, New York: Random House.

Conway, Celeste, 2013, *Body Image and the Media*, Minneapolis: ABDO Publishing.

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)

Cope-Farrar, Kirstie M. & Kunkel, Dale, 2008, "Sexual Messages in Teens' Favorite Prime-Time Television Programs", in *Sexual Teens, Sexual Media. Investigating Media's Influence on Adolescent Sexuality*, edited by Jane D. Brown, Jeanne R. Steele, and Kim Walsh-Childers, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.

Ehorn, Elizabeth, 2008, *Comparison of Parent, Peer, and Media Influence on Body Image of Adolescent Males and Females*, *Department* of Animal Science, Food and Nutrition in the Graduate School, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Palad, Thea, 2009, *Mixed Messages. Interpreting Body Image & Social Norms*, Minnesota: ABDO Publishing.

Sanders, Erica Laurén, *The Influence of Media Marketing on Adolescent Girls*, http://www.kon.org/urc/v8/sanders.html.

BDD-A17682 © 2014 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:07 UTC)