

**CONSIDER THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL
IDENTITY. CRITICALLY DISCUSS HOW IMAGES OF THE “OTHER” ARE
CONSTRUCTED AND REPRESENTED IN VARIOUS FORMS OF MASS MEDIA.
WHAT IMPACT DO THESE REPRESENTATIONS HAVE ON SUCH PHENOMENA
AS STEREOTYPING AND OTHERIZATION?**

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**INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNICATION**

SPRING, 2006

AALBORG UNIVERSITY

AALBORG, DENMARK

7-DAY ASSIGNMENT

IIC, SPRING 2006

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CONSIDER THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY. CRITICALLY DISCUSS HOW IMAGES OF THE “OTHER” ARE CONSTRUCTED AND REPRESENTED IN VARIOUS FORMS OF MASS MEDIA. WHAT IMPACT DO THESE REPRESENTATIONS HAVE ON SUCH PHENOMENA AS STEREOTYPING AND OTHERIZATION?

“If we were to wake up some morning and find that everyone was the same race, creed and color, we would find some other cause for prejudice by noon”.

George Aiken

The mass media and the Internet have a great power influencing people, and the way these means show the people is the way children and the rest of the world are going to accept them. The masculinity, the manhood, the role of the women, the minorities, etc are concept learned from the media, which has a big impact in today’s international and intercultural communication.

For many years people have been looking for the meaning of culture, they have been trying to answer the question of what culture is and how it does affect our behavior. There are many definitions and many contradictions between one to another affirmation. For this paper we will accept one of those, wrote for the 2005 New Zealand’s social report:

Culture refers to the customs, practices, languages, values and world views that define social groups such as those based on nationality, ethnicity, region or common interests. Cultural identity

is important for people's sense of self and how they relate to others. A strong cultural identity can contribute to people's overall wellbeing.

Every person has its own background and believes, no matter his environment, everything will be different, and that is what everybody should understand. The grouping of the people is an easy way to deal with the differences and cultures, if somebody wants to negotiate with any person around the world, but at the same time, it would be the main reason for relation's failures.

Today, the world has been changing due to the globalization. The globalization has been adding new aspects to the local culture, the internet and the mass media are giving the opportunity to know new thing from other countries and from other cultures. However, at the same time, the globalization is giving us an image from every culture, and if people do not hesitate of this information, it will become in stereotypes and otherization.

In 1922, the Journalist Walter Lippmann said that stereotypes were "pictures in our head", or mental reproductions of reality, and from there, the term gradually came to mean generalizations about the members of a group. As with prejudice, these generalizations can at times be positive, but for the most part, they tend to be negative and resistant to change (*Understanding Prejudice and Discrimination*, Scott Plous). Often a stereotype is a negative caricature or inversion of some positive characteristic possessed by members of a group, exaggerated to the point where it becomes repulsive or ridiculous. Stereotypes are seen by many as undesirable beliefs which can be altered through education or familiarization.

Sometimes stereotypes are infected by prejudice, this leads people to the otherization, which can be seen as reducing the foreign other to less than what they are. A prejudice as the word implies, is the process of forming a judgment without direct experience, and the mass media and internet play a big role in the formation of this.

The aim of this paper is to explore the role of the media, its power, and its influence in the phenomena of stereotyping and otherizing.

This paper proceeds as follow. First, it makes an exploration of the representation of the stereotypes. Secondly, it explores the power of media. Thirdly, it shows the different images in media in North America and their Impact.

Representation

The stereotypes are used to represent people, one way of representation is the prototype model, which is perhaps the most widely cited, people carry around neither a set of defining features that constitute the stereotype nor much information about individual group members. Instead, perceivers store abstracted representations of a group's typical features and judge individual group members based on similarity comparisons between the individual and the prototype (Cantor & Mischel 1978). In other words, the prototype representation is an "averaged" representation of the category across many attributes, with no set of group attributes seen as defining. Moreover, the prototype model assumes that knowledge about the stereotype is organized hierarchically (Devine & Baker 1991, Johnston & Hewstone 1992). Thus, it is possible to talk about "base level" categories and "subtypes." Indeed, one implication of the prototype model is that stereotype change is accomplished through the creation of subtypes. A second implication of the prototype model is that it predicts that perceivers will often fail to apply stereotypes to individual group members. Because reactions to individual group members are based on a comparison between the prototype and the individual, any features, even no diagnostic ones, that reduce the similarity between the individual and the prototype should decrease reliance on the stereotype.

The stereotype of African-Americans as athletic, for example, is thought to be stored in the form of specific individuals. Exemplar models place considerable emphasis on the role that goals and context play in determining which stereotypes are activated and applied (Smith & Zárate 1992). The stereotypes can be viewed as base rates (Beckett & Park 1995, Judd & Park 1993, Nelson 1990, Hilton 1996), and there are two way to use these base rates. If there is information about the subject the stereotype would be ignored or change, but if the experience with the person who is stereotyped allow us to get a strongest base rate, people will keep thinking in the same way about the other's behavior.

To change the stereotypes there are four different models, which are:

- The *bookkeeping* model (Rothbart 1981) posits that stereotypes are updated incrementally. Each inconsistency that is processed leads to a small change in the stereotype.
- The *conversion* model (Rothbart 1981) posits that stereotype change occurs in a dramatic fashion, but only after some critical level of inconsistency has been encountered.
- The *subtyping* model (Brewer et al 1981) posits that inconsistent information is simply recategorized under a new subsidiary classification.
- The *exemplar-based* models assume that stereotypes consist of representations of specific individuals (Smith & Zárate 1992).

People cannot avoid stereotype the “other”, it is part of getting knowledge of different cultures and people, but it is important to keep the stereotyping as the first step in the intercultural and international communication, and be aware of the information we receive, filter it and get new ideas about the “other”.

Power of Media

There are two kinds of media, the mass media and the non-mass media. For this paper the non-mass media will not be studied because the effect of this one in the culture identity is not the same as the effect of the mass media. Wikipedia (2006) defines mass media as a term used to denote, as a class, that section of the media specifically conceived and designed to reach a very large audience. The mass-media audience has been viewed by some commentators as forming a mass society with special characteristics, notably atomization or lack of social connections, which render it especially susceptible to the influence of modern mass-media techniques such as

advertising and propaganda. It is also gaining popularity in the blogosphere when referring to the mainstream media.

For long time, the mass media has been playing a main role in communication, its purposes can be defined as advocacy, for business and social concerns; enrichment and education; entertainment; journalism; and public service announcements. Each one of this purposes is defined to help people to communicate with others, and to know other's culture.

Today's technology such as satellite television, broadband, DSL, cable television, etc., have opened the boundaries of each country. Somebody in China can be watching Spanish news; an Australian can easily know what happened in Colombia, and so on.

The problem with the mass media stars when the people in charge do not care about the value of the information they are presenting. When without any kind of investigation, they present shows, movies or documentaries of any region or culture. Then, this wrong information is creating the images of the people around the world.

The power of the media is gigantic. The amount of people who can be watching the same program at the same time is amazing. The next table is the 15 most viewed programs in 2004, which explain the importance of media, and how the new technology helps everybody to watch anything around the world.

1. Football: Euro 2004 final 153 million
2. Olympic Games: opening ceremony 127 million
3. Olympic Games: closing ceremony 96 million
4. American football: Super Bowl 95 million
5. Olympic Games: men's 100m 87 million
6. Olympic Games: men's 200m freestyle swimming 66 million
7. Formula one: Monaco grand prix 59 million
8. Football: Champions League final 56 million
9. Basketball: NBA finals 25 million

10. Tennis: Wimbledon women's singles final 21 million
10. Tennis: Wimbledon men's singles final 21 million
12. Cycling: Tour de France final stage 16 million
13. Football: FA Cup final 9 million
13. Horseracing: Grand National 9 million
15. Rowing: University Boat Race 5 million

Initiative collected data from 57 major TV markets, accounting for over 90% of TV households globally by the Media Guardian on Dec 23, 2004, titled "Euro final tops TV sports league". However, the World Cup is the most widely viewed and followed sporting event in the world. The accumulative audience of the World Cup 2002 event is estimated to be 28.8 billion viewers. 1.1 billion Individuals have watched the final match of this tournament. 300 million viewers have watched the World Cup 2006 draw, which decided the distribution of teams into groups (answer.com).

The number of people viewing an event as the final match of the world cup shows the target of the media, and its possible influence. However, when more than 1 million people are getting the wrong information or not the complete information of something, the impact is very dangerous, and there is when the mass media can be a problem.

For example, the movie Mr. and Mrs. Smith (2005) show in its first scene a little war in Bogota, Colombia, they show the city as a war field. The major of the city and the Colombia's president sent a letter to the producers because Bogota is not longer the city as they are trying to show. Even the New York Times on February 12, 2006 described Bogota as a worth place to visit, and the world travel guide "Lonely planet" put Colombia as the ninth tourist destiny of 2006. However, the scene was already showed to the world, 146 millions dollar in box office show the big amount of people who watched the movie. That was only one example of the power of the mass media, after the movie was release many people around the world were thinking that Bogota is how the movie shows, and thinking that the people living there are dangerous.

Role of Media in the Construction of Cultural Identity. Impact on Stereotyping and Otherization

As the quote says, “With great power comes great responsibility” (Spider-Man, 2002), so the mass media and the internet are the main means to share information, and this is the best way to start knowing other’s culture.

Images in Media in North America and their Impact

In my context, as Latin American representative, the images in North American media are the images that we are used to use: movies, video game, internet, etc., are the mass media we watch everyday. This is the main reason to work with their media images.

The Media Awareness Network in Canada is working to help people to understand the stereotypes presented in the mass media. Here, it explains some examples of images.

Ethnic and Visible Minorities

Anyone who examines North American entertainment and news media will notice that members of ethnic and visible minorities are inadequately represented in entertainment and news media, and that portrayals of minorities are often stereotypical and demeaning (Media Awareness Network).

A 1994 study by Magali Dupont and Fo Niemi found that minorities in dramas were cast in secondary roles, usually in poorly paid occupations and unstable domestic situations, and non-white men tended to be less heroic and virile than their white counterparts.

The video games has got a big important role in the education of the children, the kids today expend more time playing the video games than the children used to do the last years. And in these games people can find many stereotypes and inequalities, a 2001 study by the U.S. organization Children Now describes the images in the video games as follow:

- Most protagonists (86 per cent) were white males

- Non-white males were portrayed in stereotypical ways—seven out of ten Asian characters as fighters, and eight out of ten African-Americans as sports competitors
- Nearly nine out of ten African-American females were victims of violence (twice the rate of white females)
- 79 per cent of African-American males were shown as verbally and physically aggressive, compared to 57 per cent of white males

The Latin American people are also being stereotyped in movies, and according to Hollywood, then, beneath every Latino is a savage, a Latin lover, or both, and at heart every Latina is a Jezebel. (Charles Ramirez 2002)

1. *El Bandido* is dirty and unkempt, usually displaying an unshaven face, missing teeth, and unshaved, oily hair. Scars and scowls complete the easily recognizable image. He is vicious, cruel, treacherous, shifty, and dishonest; psychologically, he is irrational, overly emotional, and quick to resort to violence. His inability to speak English or his speaking English with a heavy Spanish accent is Hollywood's way of signaling his feeble intellect, a lack of brainpower that makes it impossible for him to plan or strategize successfully. The modern Bandido is the Latin American gangster/drug runner. He is slicker, of course, and he has traded in his black hat for a white suit, his tired horse for a glitzy car, but he still ruthlessly pursues his vulgar cravings and routinely employs vicious and illegal means to obtain them. A second Bandido variant, is the inner-city gang member seen in numerous urban thrillers and crime dramas. If the story takes place in NYC, he is the volatile Puerto Rican; if in the Southern California, he is the East L.A. homeboy.
2. *The Harlot*. The female stereotype corresponding to El Bandido is a stock figure in the American Cinema, particularly in Westerns. Like the Bandido, she is a secondary character, lusty and hot-tempered. Since the Harlot is a slave to her passions, her conduct is simplistically attributed to her inherent nymphomania. In true stereotypical fashion we are never provided with any deeper motivation for her actions, she is basically a sex machine innately lusting for a white man.
3. *The Male Buffoon*. He is simpleminded, he cannot master standard English, and he childishly regresses into emotionality. It is simply Hollywood making an old stereotype fresh again by making him a comic version of classic screen Bandidos.
4. *The female clown*. She is the comic counterpart of the Latino male buffoon and, like the harlot, exemplifies a common device that the Hollywood narrative employs to neutralize the screen Latina's sexuality. The Latina's sexual allure must somehow be negated. Generally, her character is sullied or ridiculed.

5. *The Latin Lover*. He has the combination of characteristics such as: eroticism, exoticism, tenderness tinged with violence and danger, all adding up to the romantic promise that, sexually, things could very well get out of control. Dancing is one important part of this stereotype.
6. *The Dark Lady*. The female Latin lover is virginal, inscrutable, aristocratic, and erotically appealing precisely because of these characteristics. Her cool distance is what makes her fascinating to Anglo males.

The impact of the use of these images is disastrous, the media is explaining to the people who is important and who is not in society. Temple University professor George Gerbner is concerned that portrayals of minority characters in entertainment media affect the ways children see themselves and others. (*A Different World: Children's Perceptions of Race and Class in Media*, Children Now 1998)

Their research found that children associate white characters with various attributes: having lots of money, being well educated, being a leader, doing well in school, and being intelligent. Conversely, they associate minority characters with breaking the law, having a hard time financially, being lazy, and acting goofy. (Children Now Foundation 1998)

Men and Masculinity

The media has been constructing, informing and reinforcing prevalent ideas about men and masculinity. The ideas of being brave, lacking of emotions and feelings. Violence is part of the life of every male

Here are some stereotypes of the male role in the screen.

1. *The Joker* is a very popular character with boys, perhaps because laughter is part of their own "mask of masculinity." A potential negative consequence of this stereotype is the assumption that boys and men should not be serious or emotional. However, researchers have also argued that humorous roles can be used to expand definitions of masculinity.
2. *The Jock* is always willing to "compromise his own long-term health; he must fight other men when necessary; he must avoid being soft; and he must be aggressive." By

demonstrating his power and strength, the jock wins the approval of other men and the adoration of women.

3. *The Strong Silent Type* focuses on "being in charge, acting decisively, containing emotion, and succeeding with women." This stereotype reinforces the assumption that men and boys should always be in control, and that talking about one's feelings is a sign of weakness.

4. *The Big Shot* is defined by his professional status. He is the "epitome of success, embodying the characteristics and acquiring the possessions that society deems valuable." This stereotype suggests that a real man must be economically powerful and socially successful.

5. *The Action Hero* is "strong, but not necessarily silent. He is often angry. Above all, he is aggressive in the extreme and, increasingly over the past several decades, he engages in violent behavior."

6. *The Buffoon* commonly appears as a bungling father figure in TV ads and sitcoms. Usually well intentioned and light-hearted, these characters range from slightly inept to completely hopeless when it comes to parenting their children or dealing with domestic (or workplace) issues.

However, the male image is not only portrayed in movies and television, magazines, such as Playboy and Maxim, define what a real man should look like, see and behave. Recent studies show that men in North America are expected to behave as the magazines say it would be the best way.

The impact of the use of these images is the formation of the idea of being a real man in society. Children understand that a man can be aggressive and violent, and must be financial independent and physical appealed.

The media keeps claiming that the role of the man is out of the house, which lets the women's role as housekeepers. The masculinity is represented by power, dominance and control, which teach the way the society's order.

No one can affirm that the violence is due to the media, but the media is playing an important role when it is saying that it is accepted for men to resolve problems using physical force and violence (Jackson Katz & Jeremy Earp).

In 1999, Children Now Foundation, made the following list of the perception of the children about the men role in media:

- On television, most men and boys usually keep their attention focused mostly just on women and girls
- Many males on TV are violent and angry
- Men are generally leaders and problem-solvers
- Males are funny, confident, successful and athletic
- It is rare to see men or boys crying or otherwise showing vulnerability
- Male characters on TV could not be described as "sensitive"
- Male characters are mostly shown in the workplace, and only rarely at home
- More than a third of the boys had never seen a man on TV doing domestic chores

Girls and Women

For long time, the women have been seen as a product of and for the media, with the excuse "the sex sells." The images and stereotypes are changing, but at the same time are creating a big confusion in children and girls.

The image of beauty and how a woman should look like is having a big impact in the way people think about them. The American research group Anorexia Nervosa & Related Eating Disorders, Inc. says that one out of every four college-aged women uses unhealthy methods of weight control. In addition, the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute warns that weight control measures are being taken by girls as young as nine. American statistics are similar. In 2003, Teen magazine reported that 35 per cent of girls 6 to 12 years old have been on at least one diet, and that 50 to 70 per cent of normal weight girls believe they are overweight.

The prejudices about not being thin are changing the mentality of the women, but it gets worse when it is changing the mentality of the little girls.

One of the most famous images of the perfect woman is the well-known doll: Barbie. The Media Awareness Network

“Researchers generating a computer model of a woman with Barbie-doll proportions, for example, found that her back would be too weak to support the weight of her upper body, and her body would be too narrow to contain more than half a liver and a few centimeters of bowel. A real woman built that way would suffer from chronic diarrhea and eventually die from malnutrition.”

These results show that is unattainable to be the perfect woman, but no matter this, three quarters of female characters in television are underweight. Two out of three girls affirm that they wanted to look like a character on television (Children Now). Researches from Flinders University (South Australia 2002) found that the stereotype presented in the media makes that girls lost self-confidence.

There are many images of women in mass media, as the femme fatale, the supermom, the sex kitten, the nasty corporate climber, desperately thin, etc. (Media Awareness Network). These images are having a big impact when the advertising in media has titles like: "Get the Body You Really Want" beside "How to Get Your Husband to Really Listen," and "Stay Skinny" paired with "What Men Really Want.”

This image is not only affecting the women’s health, it is also transforming the women in sexual objects. Nicole Krassas, in her study of Cosmopolitan and Playboy magazines, they found that women should primarily concern themselves with attracting and sexually satisfying men.

The parents and schools are suppose to guide the sexuality of children, but two-thirds of young people turn to media when they want to learn about sex, which is the same percentage of kids who ask their mothers for information and advice (Buckingham & Bragg 2003). This means that children are learning from media images, and they are taking the stereotypes as the true.

This beauty and sexual stereotype is also used in sports, business and politics. This stereotype is understating the role of the women in society.

The media statistics are breathtaking:

“The statistics are startling. The average North American girl will watch 5,000 hours of television, including 80,000 ads, before she starts kindergarten. In the United States, Saturday morning cartoons alone come with 33 commercials per hour. Commercials aimed at kids spend 55 per cent of their time showing boys building, fixing toys, or fighting. They show girls, on the other hand, spending 77 per cent of their time laughing, talking, or observing others. And while boys in commercials are shown out of the house 85 per cent of the time, more than half of the commercials featuring girls place them in the home.”

More images

When people are talking about the Gays and Lesbian images, people can referred to Larry Gross and George Gerbner affirmation about it:

The media participate in the "symbolic annihilation" of gays and lesbians by negatively stereotyping them (often consigning them to the margins of entertainment media, playing either "colorful" and "flamboyant" characters or dangerous psychopaths), by rarely portraying them realistically, or by not portraying them at all.

Some films and television shows with gay and lesbian characters have had big success, but the topic is still used with caution by specialists and producers. The relationship between a gay and a straight woman has been used as the new romantic relation, the best friend and companion is the gay friend.

Some countries have permitted the gay and lesbian weddings, but there are few gay and/or lesbian couples in the mass media, because it is still a controversial matter.

The impact in people of the manage the media do with gays and lesbians can be seeing when children and people in general do not tolerate gays (men and women) or people just think the gays are the friendly character from the screen. Gays are people as anyone, people who work, enjoy almost the same thing that the non-gays enjoy, but people just discriminated them because their sexuality.

Other media image that is having a big impact on people is the Aboriginal people. Somebody around the globe can easily think that “these” people do not longer exist, and they are part of the Wild West stories. The concept is the cowboy fighting with the aborigine, and this one fighting against the cows and animals to eat.

There are few real images of aborigines in media, and as Children Now Foundation analyzed “the presence of Native American children on TV in 1999, and conducted focus groups with children from 20 tribes. Furthermore, they contend, those children have learned to associate positive attributes with white television characters, and negative attributes with non-white characters.” This is one of the reasons to lose the aboriginal manners, traditions, habits, etc.

Conclusions

No body can deny the power of the media. The number of people watching an sport event or paying to watch a movie is gigantic, when you compare these with the number of people of twenty years ago. The growth of the internet access and the satellite television have helped the media to get to new places and new people, and also to reinforce their presence in other places.

This power can be used to guide and teach people, to share information, and to gain profits for the companies selling around the world.

A good example of sharing information using media is the Mohammed Cartoons problem. In a little country as Denmark (5,450,661 people) a local newspaper printed the cartoons, and in less than six months everybody around the world knew about it.

Role of Media in the Construction of Cultural Identity. Impact on Stereotyping and Otherization

However, the media is used to reinforce old stereotypes and to create new ones. The role of the women keeps nearly in the same position as ten years or even twenty years ago; and the men and the masculinity are one of the main issues in the media.

People cannot avoid the use of stereotypes, but it is important to get information about the other's culture and behavior, and this way people can reinvent each other opinion every time.

The media is a dangerous weapon when people abuse of it, and when people do not care about the values they are showing. Relations, health, communication, friendship, etc, can be spoilt because the bad use of the media.

Researches have made a point when they affirm that media is improving the world communication, the globalization could be a good way to know other's culture. The way people can get information, the way people can interact with others, the way people can solve problems is easy today because the use of technology, but at the same time is making some local problems become global.

Technology and Media can be good allies or the worse enemies, depends how people use them.

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