

Youth Culture Lesson
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Mean Girls

Reality Television Skews Viewers' Impressions of Womanhood

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What Happened:

Is Snooki of “Jersey Shore” a role model? Do teens aspire to be a Real Housewife? The answer, according to a new survey by the Girl Scouts, is a resounding no, but that doesn’t mean these and other reality television stars don’t alter the way viewers look at reality.

The Girl Scout Research Institute conducted a study of more than 1,000 girls between the ages of 11 and 17 and found that almost everyone felt that most reality shows glorified bad behavior. About 86 percent said female-centric reality shows pitted women against each other to make the shows more exciting, and 70 percent said such shows encouraged folks to treat each other badly.

Although these girls believe reality shows promote bad behavior, many apparently still are influenced by them: About 37 percent of regular reality-show viewers say, “You have to lie to get what you want.” Only 24 percent of non-reality-show fans feel the same way.

A few other interesting tidbits from the survey: About 37 percent of viewers believe, “Being men earns more respect than being nice (compared to 25 percent of non viewers); and 28 percent of viewers think, “You have to be mean to others to get what you want” (compared to 18 percent of non-viewers).

Reality TV fans are far more likely to spend time fretting about their appearance, too; 28 percent say they’d rather be judged on their outward attractiveness than their inner beauty.

“Girls today are bombarded with media—reality TV and otherwise—that more frequently portrays girls and women in competition with one another rather than in support or collaboration,” said Andrea Bastiani Archibald, a developmental psychologist with the Girl Scouts of the USA. “This perpetuates a mean girl stereotype and normalizes this behavior among girls.”

Talk About It:

What's your favorite reality show? Why do you like it? What do you think the show tells you about the world or teaches you about human nature?

Although everyone knows reality stars aren't great role models, they can still influence how we think and act—at least if we believe this study. Why? Is it possible that we can be affected by outside influences even when we don't want to be or mean to be?

Who or what influences you? Parents? Friends? Television? Music? Your faith? What sorts of influences in your life are positive? Do you have negative influencers, too? If so, what are they? How do you keep those bad influences from affecting how you think and act?

What the Bible Says:

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example” (2 Thess. 3:6-7).

“The idols of the nations are silver and gold made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them” (Ps. 135:15-18).

“He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm” (Prov. 13:20).

“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong” (Ex. 23:2).