

Media Socialization

Week 1: Welcome and Introduction

Man, Media, and Motive: The Power of Social Influence **Dr. Lisa Dunne**

I'm Dr. Lisa Dunne, a professor, author, pastor's wife, and homeschooling mom. I'm looking forward to our time together here on SchoolhouseTeachers.com!

Maybe you've heard someone say, in defense of a musical selection, "I don't listen to the words; I just like the beat." Or, perhaps you've overheard someone in line at the grocery store, skimming the headlines of modern pop culture, explain, "I just like looking at these fashion magazines; I don't believe what they say." Does our social environment influence the way we think, feel, or behave?

As Christians, we want to be keenly aware of the subtle (and not-so-subtle) influences bombarding us daily. We live in a generation where we are confronted with hundreds and sometimes thousands of persuasive appeals each day—messages that are designed to sell us a belief, a behavior, or a worldview. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average American spends 7 hours and 38 minutes a day in front of a screen. These "virtual" influencers can be quite powerful, especially at the "consumption" rate of 40 hours a week—the equivalent of a full-time job.

However, even if you unplug the screen, turn off the music, and shield your eyes when passing roadside billboards, it is difficult to escape the realm of mass media influence entirely, especially when companies are spending billions of dollars a year trying to influence our behavior.

In his first letter to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:33), Paul writes, "Don't be deceived: Bad company corrupts good character." As we will see throughout our time together, the company we keep, whether physical or virtual, bears an impact on our beliefs and our behavior.

This course is designed to help you become media literate—to help you understand, interpret, analyze, and respond appropriately to the millions of media messages you are likely confronted with over the course of the year. My hope is that you will learn to become not simply a consumer of culture, but a producer of it.

Over the course of this class, we will analyze the impact of the social system on the individual, recognizing that the social context is much wider and more powerful than we may have once believed. By the end of the 16 weeks, students will be better equipped to evaluate the influence of mass media and its collective spiritual, psychological, and sociological impact on the church, the family, and the culture. Most importantly, students will learn how to apply the findings of media literacy and "walk with the wise."

We will draw from current research as well as segments of two books I will provide summaries of through online links, *Making Social Worlds* (written by one of my favorite Ph.D. professors)

and *Emerge: Cracking the Cocoon of Media Socialization* (which I wrote with Teen Mania/Acquire the Fire speaker Joel Johnson).

As a teacher for over 17 years, I have found that the deepest transformational learning takes place when students actively and practically engage in the subject matter. Thus, each lesson will be followed by a reflective activity that will help you make practical sense of the information that has been presented. These will include some reflective journals, hands-on “lab” activities, and discussion prompts for family dinner conversation.

In the first chapter of the book of Romans, Paul tells the believers in Rome that they can change their behavior by changing their belief: “Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2). This concept of renewing the mind is a fascinating one from a neuroscientific sense, and we’ll talk more about that in a later lesson. For now, suffice it to say that the more we understand about science, the more clearly we see the fingerprints of God in the design of our hearts and minds. May these revelations enable us to act wisely in the opportunities presented to us each day within our realm of influence.

Reflective Activity

Journal 1: All around the world this week, kids are begging their parents for a new iPhone®. Why is the appeal so vast and vigorous? What was the last purchase you made (or tried to convince your parents to make for you)? Reflect on the factors that influenced this purchase and whether you think, in retrospect, it was a purchase worthy of your (or your parents’) hard-earned dollar.