Grey’s Anatomy’s Influence on Perception of Doctors

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Over time, many studies have indicated the media has an influence on people’s perceptions of people, issues, and things. No matter what method social media takes, we receive the opinions and ideas of those delivering the message. Specifically, television shows are very convincing to their audience. This is more than likely due to the fact that television shows usually run for multiple seasons, which gives their audience the opportunity to connect to the show and its storyline. The most fascinating part about this study is that most of the time we do not even realize the influential role the media is playing on our thoughts, actions, and opinions. For example, Grey’s Anatomy, a show that many admit to having parasocial relationships with the characters, has a strong fan base and has been deemed credible by these people. Through Grey’s Anatomy the public has changed their general perceptions of patient satisfaction, public image of physicians, and medical concepts.

In “The Effects of Viewing Grey’s Anatomy on Perceptions of Doctors and Patient Satisfaction” Brian Quick used the cultivation theory to explain the role of watching Grey’s Anatomy on patients’ predispositions. Quick argues that Grey’s Anatomy distorts perceptions about certain ideas, opinions, and etcetera. Quick observed Grey’s Anatomy viewing and specified it as a single-item observed variable, and while it perceived credibility, doctor courageousness, and patient satisfaction, they were merely just latent composite variables. “The portrayal of doctors on television has shifted significantly during the past 60 years” (Quick, 2009, p. 39). Due to the rapidly maturing medical dramas on television, the public’s opinion of doctors has become more in depth and much more relatable compared to dramas in the past. Past doctor shows such as ER or Scrubs were much more invested in the doctor’s lives outside of the hospital and
focused on the romantic aspect, and while Grey’s Anatomy embodies romance, it focuses on the life of a doctor and how they approach and react to patients (Quick, 2009). The fact that Shonda Rhimes, the executive producer and head writer of Grey’s Anatomy, concentrates heavily on the reality of working in a hospital while making these characters easily to relate to is the main reason people’s perceptions are greatly manipulated (Quick, 2009). For instance, Meredith Grey, the main character on the show, goes through many hardships, happy times, and difficult experiences, which makes it extremely easy to identify with because everyone goes through each of these things (Quick, 2009). The way they portray the fact that she is a doctor and can do remarkable things in others’ lives but nonetheless is still just a normal human being makes the audience believe that all other doctors are like this. “ABC’s Grey’s Anatomy continues in this tradition [to show] both positive and negative characteristics of medical doctors” (Quick, 2009). The negative characteristics include that they “do not always succeed. In fact, often their patients die” (Quick, 2009, p. 40). Although Grey’s Anatomy is a fictional show with actors pretending to be doctors, the drama exposes the reality of what being a surgeon is like. Not every patient lives and not every surgery goes well, and that is a result of the fact that doctors are just human too. Using the cultivation hypothesis to examine Grey’s Anatomy, research found that “heavy viewing of this program would likely impact perceptions of real-world doctors among heavy viewers of this medical drama” (Quick, 2009, p. 42).

Bethany Crandell Goodier and Elena Strauman explain in “Not Your Grandmother’s Doctor Show: A Review on Grey’s Anatomy, House, and Nip/Tuck” that there is a correlation between medical dramas and perceived views on real-world doctors. This article acknowledges the fact that many people believe there is no influence, but
proves this to be untrue. Goodier and Strauman also argue that there is a “shift in television portrayals of doctors” (Goodier, Strauman, 2008, p. 128). In previous medical television shows, doctors demonstrated “near perfect medical skills, supreme devotion to patients, and quick, effective decision-making” in (Goodier, Strauman, 2008, p. 128). Nowadays, there is a dose of realism, in medical dramas. They are not the perfect doctors, and in general they do not obtain every single skill. “The new doctors shows also focus to a greater extent on the internal and private world of fictional physicians” (Goodier, Strauman, 2008, p. 128). The old persona doctors had would perceive people to have exceptionally high standards for all doctors, because they view the perfection in the work of fictional characters which influences people to believe that all doctors are capable of saving every single patient. The new doctors make mistakes, are uncertain at times, which brings reality to into the perceptions of Grey’s Anatomy viewers. The new doctors are much more relatable and instead of the old persona, which made them to seem that they are perfect super heroes who can always save the day (Goodier, Strauman, 2008).

“Grey’s Anatomy Viewing and Organ Donation Attitude Formation” is a study which shows a comprehensive model linking Grey’s Anatomy viewing and perceived realism of this program with medical concepts such as organ donation. “Grey’s Anatomy offers viewers with a behind-the-scenes look, albeit an unrealistic portrayal, into the day-to-day decisions that come with being a medical doctor at a teaching hospital (Quick, Morgan, La Voie, Bosch, 2013, p. 691). The authors of this article feel that the medical concepts in this medical drama are extremely unrealistic and skew the perceptions of its audience. Research shows that individuals’ reasons for not joining an organ donation
registry are frequently grounded in the myths presented on television (Quick, Morgan, La Voie, Bosch, 2013, p. 691). Due to the actions presented on Grey’s Anatomy and other medical dramas, not only do they effect the perceptions of doctors, but also the perceptions about medical concepts, such as organ donation.

Through Grey’s Anatomy the public has changed their general perceptions of patient satisfaction, public image of physicians, and medical concepts. Media’s influence over its viewers is very powerful, especially fictional television shows. People become easily attached to characters due to commonalities, which allows them to be easily persuaded. The three articles each defend with research evidence the idea that Grey’s Anatomy influences its audience’s perceptions on physicians.

References
