Breaking News: Breaking People

The media is a powerful force all the way from the eastern world to western. If one thing is for sure, it is that people are defined by what others see from them. Identity is a complex thing, and with news, information, and opinions being spread globally, it is almost impossible to truly understand someone from the media alone. **Therefore, how does the media affect our identity?** Hasan Minhaj of *Homecoming King* is an Indo-American comedian, writer, producer, political commentator, and actor, with *King* being his first comedy special telling his story of being an immigrant to socially and politically rampant America. Alex Dang of “What Kind of Asian Are You?” tells his story in a slam poem of a slightly less millennial and Facebook-based view of American, about how stereotypes on his culture have affected and shaped his individuality of being Vietnamese. **The identity of both these people representing their cultures in “Asian?” and *King* respectively, are greatly influenced by the media. While Alex feels like identity and individualism has been lost through the portrayal of generalization of his race in pop culture, conversely, Hasan feels like an outsider because of the influence of social media. Because both of them feel the effects of political media, ultimately the two show how little control they have over the influence of the media on their culture, but in the end, take control of it to share their unseen identities to the world.**

 Despite similarities of pop culture influence on identity, “Asian?” shows how it can tangle with the perception of a culture. America, although having an extremely diverse cultural spectrum, is its own culture and like all, often expect some level of adaptation. This is why immigrants are expected to speak English, have a job and pay taxes. As Alex Dang attempts to show in his spoken word, however, he is very passionate of the grim and more personal meanings to his culture: “Let me tell you all the things you don’t want to know.” (Dang, 50-51). Pop culture may be one of the top grossing and simplest ways for patriotic westerners to get a glimpse at other cultures. Although very traditional eastern pop culture such as anime and trading cards have made their appearances, these are not the type to birth stereotypes. Dang uses the more appreciated and goofy character of Short Round from the Indiana Jones series, the only prominent Asian character in the story, to characterize himself with the stereotype of being wild and crazy. Pop culture has influenced him so that he is automatically assumed to enjoy Chinese sports and be a silent and deceiving martial arts expert who never makes a mistake. Immediately after, portrays stereotypes of only making mistakes when it comes to more common skills such as driving: “I’ve played many a Far East stereotype:… cold and calculated Kung-Fu expert, assistant to ‘Dr. Jones, you crazy!’ You want me to drive? How so? I can give you Tokyo drift,… and blinker left on for about half a mile.” (Dang, 7-17).

 While pop culture has affected Dang’s identity through the portrayal of unrealistic stereotypes in movies, games, and others, social Minhaj of King has been affected by social media. Even though social media affects every culture’s view, Minhaj shows how it personally changes his identity and how he uses it to change himself. Like how pop culture affects Alex Dang by not showing the full picture and only what people want to see, social media affects Minhaj in a similar way by not showing every aspect of people’s lives: “As immigrants, we always have to put out press releases to prove our patriotism.” (Storer). Being forced to prove you are loyal to the United States shows how social media has banded together to create an automatic box on Muslim people and immigrants of all types. On the contrary, it is not similar to how pop culture affects Dang, wherein on social media, people hide behind a wall and are not afraid to share the things about a culture people do not want to hear; stereotype or not “Hasan whatever you do, do not tell people you are Muslim or talk about politics.” (Storer). Social media has affected his identity because religion is a big part of who he, and most people are. Therefore, being forced to hide his religion or talk about anything to do with the country that he belongs and lives in makes him feel like less than people in a supposedly equal country. Since Hasan has been unwilfully affected by social media, he decides to use it to his advantage. Although he may not be able to change people’s perception of his culture as a whole, he is able to use social media to boost his career and change his identity of someone who will go to school and become a successful doctor, into what he really wants for himself “I want to be a comedian… I got on Facebook, I got super cocky… I’ve got to drop the greatest status update.” (Storer).

 Although Alex Dang’s identity has been affected by pop culture, and Hasan Minhaj’s identity has been affected by social media, both of theirs has been affected by politics. Political media is meant to be appealing to the broadest and widest group of people as possible, and like all politics, attracts the largest group. Therefore, it is with no doubt that the term ‘minority’ in the US has applied to almost all immigrants. “My dad’s from that generation where he feels like if you come to this country, you pay the American dream tax… But for me, I was born here.” (Storer). Although Hasan was born in America like many children of many immigrants, he and others still feel as though the struggle of immigration is passing down generation by generation. The US has a very politically sensitive zone especially during times of war. Acts of war or terrorism are often gratuitously portrayed on television, news, and online because of their unlikeliness. The media portrays only what is new, such as the 9-11 attack. “Because when it happened, everyone in America felt like their country was under attack… You can hear me, right? You fucking dune coon. Where’s Osama?” “Hey, 2631 Regatta Lane, that’s where you live, right? I’m going to fucking kill you.” (Storer). While the terrorist attack of 9-11 enacted a multi-year war, and had indeed caused an aura of fear in the residents of the US, fear was brought much further across the world as well. Despite the tragedy of people who lost their lives in the attack, many more lives of innocent Muslim, immigrant, and other people of the middle eastern's lives were taken or under threat from this widespread political coverage. As well, Alex of “Asian?” alludes to a Buddhist monk of Vietnam who had set himself aflame to protest acts of the Vietnam War. Shame was brought to Alex’s culture and shaped his identity over the course of the war from being the villain of American culture and part of the group that brought fear and communism, to strong and emotional from the coverage of the pious symbolic burning. “And I still feel the shame of being Asian, the heat and pious dedication of June 11th, 1963.” (Dang, 50-52).

 In conclusion, the evidence from Alex Dang’s “What Kind of Asian Are You?” and Hasan Minhaj’s Homecoming King shows that their identities have been both been greatly shaped by the media. The loss of any of Alex’s individuality and self-pride has been from the result of pop culture portrayal of a generalized Asian culture, and a sense of characterization from events of the historical war. Conversely, Hasan has been unwilling shaped to feel like an outsider from social media’s portrayal of his culture and from devastating acts of terrorism and uses social media to prove himself. Whether it’s a film about a culture, a game everyone assumes you love, racist twitter posts, or terrorist attacks, one thing is common between them all, and allows us to answer finally how media does affect our identity. Identity and media to a certain extent is something everyone has control over; however, media is a vast and expansive world that goes far beyond our capabilities of will. People don’t choose to be from the same culture as the Tokyo Drift driving games, don’t choose to have been attacked on social media, or burn a monk alive, these events happen, and the media portrays them in a way that assumes everyone from that culture together for simplicity stake. No problem can go unfixed, however, and Hasan and Alex have learned to use the very thing that is disintegrating their identities to build them back up again by sharing the news themselves and telling the media their real identity.

References

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