

“MERCHANTS OF COOL” WRITING ASSIGNMENT

The filmmakers refer to what they call “a feedback loop,” wherein media outlets watch teens and reflect them in programming; and teens in turn watch the media and imitate the media image of teens. What do you make of this? Have you observed the media imitating teens? Or teens imitating media? Or both? Why do you think the media does this? Why do teens? Draw on examples in the documentary and/or your own personal experience. You may also want to watch MTV, the WB, or other teen-targeted programming and discuss what you see there. (Does it reflect the filmmakers’ argument? Explain.)

Or

All TV shows, to one extent or another, reflect the biases of the producers or filmmakers. What was the documentary’s argument? What perspective are the filmmakers coming from? What is their slant? Is this film from the point-of-view of the music business, concerned parents/social critics, or teens themselves? (Hint: *Merchants of Cool* originally appeared on the PBS show *Frontline*.) What scenes or statements in the video clue you in to this fact? Do you think the documentary would have been different if it was produced by teens themselves? Or by MTV? Or by parents/social critics? How? (Remember, you don’t need to answer every question.)

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