

***Place Perception, Cognitive Maps, and
Mass Media:***

***The Interrelationship Between Visual Popular Culture
and Regional Mental Mapping***

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(ABSTRACT)

There can be little dispute that today's society makes extensive use of mass media. Movies, television, and radio are far more prominent today than ten years ago, both locally and globally. We rely on these forms of communication for news and information and entertainment and recreation. New technologies increase our access and our dependence on mass media. In fact, in the U.S. the average person spends 40 percent of their time attending to television at some level (Adams, 1992). Adams then goes on to say that culture and television are clearly involved in reciprocal relations: television affects culture, but culture also affects television (Adams, 1992). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that generational differences in recreation are far more prominent today than they were twenty years ago. Indeed, we are a passive society dependent upon technology and the creativity of others for pleasure. The Internet and television of today have replaced the bicycle and board games of yesterday in terms of babysitting the young for hours on end. Almost all major types of entertainment come from the viewing of some sort of screen or monitor, with children spending vast amounts of time engaging in these passive activities. By the age of sixteen, a contemporary child has probably spent more time watching television than he/she has attending school or doing chores.

However, entertainment is only one use for mass media. For example, the term "Information Age" refers to much more than recreation. Large quantities of information can be acquired through these forms of transmission. Unfortunately, false representations are sometimes the goal of those who produce these data media.

In addition to the deliberate distortion of truths, those who consume mass media obtain many falsities inadvertently. A perfect example of this is stereotyping. All too often, one's only exposure to certain regions and/or peoples is obtained through television and movies. Instead of becoming familiar with specific facts about cultures, conclusions are drawn based upon viewing and hearing popular culture material.

Stereotypes of cultural groups create myths about their respective geographic regions and vice-versa. We are well aware of these myths (for example, the idea that all Southerners are dumb) but what is their link to place perception? How are *mental constructs of regions* related to *cultural stereotypes*? How have *popular culture* and mass media affected stereotypes?