

# Media Literacy

## Coursebook



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# Introduction

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Does what you think, what you believe, how you act, and what you want out of life all come from you? Were you the driving force behind the formation of who you are and what you believe? Without giving it much thought, you might answer this question with a resounding “Yes, of course!” Or you might acknowledge the powerful role your parents, family, and friends play in shaping your life. And yet, consider the amount of time we all spend browsing the internet; watching TV, videos, and movies; texting; and listening to music. You might wonder just how much influence these sources of information have. Could it even be said that these media are so pervasive that they play a primary role in shaping who we are? Is there even a *you* in you? That is a compelling question to keep in mind as you engage in this course.

Media literacy is about learning how to critically engage in and make sense of the media that we are inundated with nonstop. In addition to introducing you to the history and use of media, this course will help you develop analytical tools that you can use to examine media’s content, intent, context, and subtext. In a media studies context, the word *text* includes not only written words but also visual or audio messages; it includes everything from books, magazines, and newspapers to the TV we watch, to the logos on our clothes, to the songs we hear, and to the pop-ups we see when viewing a YouTube video.

Media literacy, or media education, is also a global movement to make better, more critical sense of media. In this course, we will be focusing on what and how we learn from media. How and why do media texts target young people? How do media fit into our lives? How do media shape our perceptions in regard to race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, and education? As you explore how media operates in society, you will gain the tools of media literacy, allowing you to make more informed choices as an active audience.

Finally, media literacy is about social activism—it is inherently an activist method of study. When we study media critically, we are compelled to make change. That change may be within ourselves, as our personal viewing, reading, and listening habits may change once we begin paying closer attention to media. The change may be within our family and community, fueled by our discussions with family and friends. Or the change may be within the context of the wider world as we support media that carries a proactive message and boycott media that spreads negative, overly violent, or otherwise harmful messages. By learning to be critical scholars, we can develop a sense of objectivity about media and become more active audiences and independent thinkers.

# Key Foundation Concepts of Media Literacy

David Buckingham (*Media Education: Literacy, Learning, and Contemporary Culture*, 2003), a global leader in media literacy, identifies four key concepts that will serve as the foundation of this course:

**Production:** All media texts are consciously manufactured.

**Language:** All media texts use a combination of languages to communicate meaning. Languages are the codes and conventions familiar to us that help us make sense of media texts.

**Representation:** Media production involves selecting and combining moments to make stories and create characters. Representation invites us to see the world in particular ways.

**Audiences:** All media texts are made for an audience. To study the audience is to study our role as media producers and consumers.

We will explore each of these concepts and unpack how each works and what each means.

## Course Materials

This coursebook contains all the instructions and assignments for this course. In addition to this coursebook, the following textbook is used in this course:

*Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences* by David Croteau and William Hoynes (Sage Publications, 2019)

This is an excellent, comprehensive book. Although we will only be reading selected passages, you are encouraged to read further, choosing any sections or topics that are of particular interest to you.

## How the Course Is Set Up

In this single-semester course, there are 18 lessons, each designed to be completed in one week. When completing your assignments, try to be concise and answer any questions completely, using full sentences. If you are expected to write more than one or two sentences, it will be specified in the assignment. Make sure to address all the elements of an assignment. Many assignments pose multiple questions or require you to follow several steps.

In some of the lessons, you will find creative projects. Even if you don't think you're very creative, these activities are an important part of the course. You will not be marked down for "bad" artwork or poetry. Working creatively with the material lets you express yourself while demonstrating your awareness of significant elements of media literacy and how they are interrelated.

Each lesson begins with a short introduction that gives you necessary background information on the topic. You are encouraged to read the entire lesson—the introduction and all the assignments—before you begin work. This gives you a sense of what you will be accomplishing and helps you organize your time more effectively.

In each lesson, you will find sections to guide your studies and enhance your understanding of the material:

An **Assignment Summary** is included at the beginning of each lesson so that you can see all your assignments at a glance, and check off assignments as you complete each one. Assignments are fully explained in the lesson.

**Lesson Objectives** outline the main goals of the lesson and give an idea of what to expect.

**Viewing** and **Reading** sections list the films you will watch and outline your reading assignments. These films and readings will inform your written work.

**Writing Assignments** are designed to help you solidify key concepts and knowledge. They often encourage you to think deeper about the material and to make important connections by applying your knowledge and your reasoning skills. Responses may vary from short answers to full-length essays and reports. In the appendix of this coursebook, you will find writing instructions regarding the different types of assignments you will come across in this course.

**Activities** provide a wide range of hands-on ways to explore the topics you are studying. Each lesson includes instructions for one or more activities.

**Think About It** includes questions for you to ponder and discuss with your parents and friends. By discussing issues, expressing your opinion, and listening to the opinions of others, you will come to a clearer and more in-depth comprehension of the topics in each lesson.

A section called **For Enrolled Students** is found at the end of most lessons. This section provides reminders and information for students who are enrolled in Oak Meadow School and are submitting work to their Oak Meadow teacher.

The **appendix** contains important material that you will be expected to read and incorporate into your work throughout the semester. Take some time to familiarize yourself with the information in the appendix. You will find Oak Meadow's academic expectations, original work guidelines, information about how to avoid accidental plagiarism, and details on citing sources and images. You will also find writing instruction to which you will be directed throughout the course.

It is assumed that you will be working with an adult who assesses and supports your learning whether you are enrolled in Oak Meadow School or are using this course independently. Consult your teacher (a parent, tutor, or Oak Meadow teacher) if you have questions about your assignments or this course.

## Online Resources

This course uses technology and the vast resources found online. **Internet access is required for this course.**

Throughout the semester, you will view an extensive array of award-winning films from Kanopy, formerly called Media Education Foundation (MEF). Whether you are enrolled in Oak Meadow School or you are using this course independently, the Oak Meadow office will provide a private access link to

Kanopy. By clicking on the link and entering your OM email address as your Library Card Number, you will gain immediate access to the films for this course. Independent students (those not enrolled in Oak Meadow School) will be sent an OM email address in order to access the films.

You'll have plenty of opportunities to do online research, and you are encouraged to find videos, images, and articles about any of the topics you find interesting. The best way to learn is to follow your interests in any given subject. Of course, you'll also find valuable resources in print at your local library. Several assignments focus on magazines, and the library is an excellent place to view a wide variety of publications.

## Academic Expectations for Enrolled Students

- If you are enrolled in Oak Meadow School, you'll find a reminder at the end of every other lesson that instructs you to submit your work to your Oak Meadow teacher. Continue working on your next lesson while you are waiting for your teacher to send lesson comments. At the end of the course, you will receive a final evaluation and grade, which will be recorded on your Oak Meadow School transcript.
- Please follow the assignments in order and, whenever possible, place your responses to the assignments in the Google Drive course doc provided by your teacher. Your teacher will give you feedback on your work in this shared Google doc, so the more work that can be put there, the better. Activities and projects that are completed by hand can often be photographed or scanned and linked to your course doc. This is the preferred method so that all your work and your teacher's comments stay in one place.
- If you prefer to submit your work through the mail, see your *Oak Meadow Student Handbook* for information. Whenever the Google course doc is mentioned in your lessons, you can disregard these instructions and submit the work in your preferred manner. If you have questions about how to work around any Google-related instructions, ask your teacher.
- You are expected to perform your work with integrity and engagement. Your work should be original and give an authentic sense of your thoughts and opinions rather than what you think the teacher who is reviewing your work wants to hear. When you use other sources, you are required to cite them accurately. Plagiarism, whether accidental or intentional, is a serious matter.
- The appendix of this coursebook includes complete details about Oak Meadow's academic expectations and original-work guidelines. It is your responsibility to make sure you understand these requirements and abide by them.
- Please remember to stay in touch with your Oak Meadow teacher and share your comments, ideas, questions, and challenges. Your teacher is eager to help you.

Media literacy is a vital skill for today's global citizens. We wish you a challenging and insightful experience in this course!



## Lesson

# 1

# Making Sense of Mass Media

## Learning Objectives

- Become familiar with the scope and technology of media
- Explore how mass media affects family life
- Gain a better understanding of the self through media-use analysis

Media messages are all designed to communicate something to someone: information, opinions, propaganda, misinformation, advertisements, facts, promotional material, stories, and more fall under the umbrella of media communication. Mass media is concerned with relaying messages to a large number of people.

The word *media* can refer to the **structure** or form the message takes: print (books, online articles, billboards), audio (radio, music, broadcast commentators at a sports game), or visual (video, film, art). The word *media* can also refer to the **technology** used to deliver the message: publishing (newspapers, magazines, books), digital sound recordings (CDs, mp3s, audio books), video recording (television, commercials, music videos), or the internet (blogs, websites, search engines). The word *media* also can refer to the **content** of any of these forms or technologies. *Media* is a fluid word and a fluid concept.

The study of media in the early twenty-first century is marked by change. The media-saturated world you live in is dramatically

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Fill out the Media Literacy Pre-Course Survey.
- ☐ Read pages 2–14 in *Media/Society*.
- ☐ View *Remote Control: Children, Media Consumption and the Changing American Family*.
- ☐ Identify a real-life example that illustrates the concept of media.
- ☐ Give an opinion on the quantity versus quality of media.
- ☐ Write about yourself in a one-page freewrite.
- ☐ Activity A: Media-Free Zone
- ☐ Activity B: Counting on Media

*Media* is the plural of *medium*, and while the word *media* is often used in the singular form (referring to media as a single entity), in this course you'll often see it used in the plural form, such as "Media teach us a great deal about our social world." Think of it as meaning "media outlets" or "media sources" and that will help the plural form make sense.

different from the media world of your parents and is a foreign language compared to the media world of your grandparents. Yet, despite the quantity and quality of change, for the most part, we continue to do the same thing with our media that past generations did: we are audiences, absorbing the messages of the media.

The twentieth century marked a monumental shift in the quantity and quality of media, bolstered by an immense growth in technology. Within a relatively short period of time, media began entering our homes, workplaces, and public spaces in unprecedented quantities. Traditionally, families, schools, businesses, and religious organizations helped define who we were as individuals and members of society. Suddenly, media became important—and highly influential—socializing agents as well.

Some forms of media are so familiar to us and so intimately a part of our daily lives that they can go almost unnoticed. We take them for granted. They are always available, and always there. But noticed or not, media messages are still bombarding us for most of our waking hours. What is their immediate and cumulative effect on us as individuals and as a culture? How much of what we think and do has been influenced by media?

One of the goals of this course is to recognize how much we take media for granted and to closely examine why that is and the effect this automatic acceptance of media has on our lives. Have you ever stopped to think about how your media experience has been carefully constructed by someone else? What might be the goals and motivations of those who are behind your media experience?

## **STOP HERE**

### **and Take the Media Literacy Pre-Course Survey**

Before you read any further, complete the Media Literacy Pre-Course Survey. You'll find it at the back of this coursebook. You can write directly in the book or copy the survey and fill it out. You'll need to refer to your survey at the end of the course, so if you make a copy to fill out, be sure to keep track of it.

## **Assignments**

### **Reading**

In *Media/Society* (Croteau and Hoynes), read pages 2–14, which includes the following sections:

- Introduction to chapter 1, “Media/Society in a Digital World”
- The Importance of Media
- Models of Communication Media
  - ◆ Interpersonal and “Mass” Communication
  - ◆ Variable Boundaries and Active Users
  - ◆ Communication Today: A First Look

- A Sociology of Media
  - ◆ The Sociological Perspective
  - ◆ Structural Constraint and Human Agency
    - Structure
    - Agency
  - ◆ Structure and Agency in the Media

Pay particular attention to the charts, which show important data.

## Viewing

Watch the short film *Remote Control: Children, Media Consumption and the Changing American Family* (Media Education Foundation, 2007). (Follow the instructions in the introduction of this coursebook to access this and other Kanopy/Media Education Foundation films.) This film explores the quantity of media young people and families consume and raises concerns about the content as well. (Film length: 38 minutes)



### Think About It

The film *Remote Control: Children, Media Consumption and the Changing American Family* references a 2005 Kaiser Family Foundation study that found young people spend an average of 6 hours and 45 minutes a day with media, 7 days a week (Rideout et al. 2005). By 2010, studies showed that young people spent nearly 11 hours a day with media, which they packed into 7 hours and 45 minutes through media multitasking (using more than one medium at a time) (Rideout et al. 2010). While watching the film *Remote Control*, think about your own media use. How much time do you spend on media per day? Do you media multitask? Does your family? Do an informal poll and ask your friends and family members to estimate how many hours a day they spend with media. Challenge them to actually keep track of their media use for 24 hours—they may be surprised by what they find.



Times Square in New York City is a media assault on the senses: print ads, video, music, news, and more. (Image credit: Francisco Diez)

## Written Assignments

1. Throughout the course, you will be using media to define media literacy concepts. For this assignment, find a real-life example that illustrates the concept of *media*. The example can be a photograph or drawing, an advertisement, a graphic image, etc., or you can write a description. Make sure the example clearly shows the meaning of the word. Be creative! Feel free to combine media in your example. Cite all your sources (refer to the appendix of this coursebook for details about proper citation).

### Make the Connection

Watch the following video clip to get a quick overview of media.

"A Brief History of Media—Dan Gillmor" (YouTube)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWOBRKx38fo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWOBRKx38fo)

2. Do you think it is important to monitor the quantity of time spent with media or the quality of the content watched? Is either quantity or quality of concern to you? Why or why not? Explain your answer and give specific examples to support your ideas.
3. Write about yourself in a one-page freewrite. A freewrite is a writing technique where you write down anything that comes to mind, without worrying about grammar, complete sentences, or

anything else. (For more information on how to do a freewrite, see “Prewriting Exercises” in the appendix of this coursebook.) Don’t try to edit or analyze what you are writing; just write about yourself for at least 15 minutes: your age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity/race, community, family, friendships, career goals, interests, hobbies, fears, likes/dislikes, values, politics, dreams, etc.—anything you believe frames or defines who you are. Your writing might take the form of notes, disjointed phrases and words, art, bullet points, poetry, free verse, or an essay. It’s up to you. Set a timer for 15 minutes so you don’t have to keep checking the time. As you explore the question of “Who am I?” you might also ask yourself, “What do I have in common with other people? How are we different from one another?” You will not be judged or graded on the content of your freewrite but rather on your participation in the process of reflecting on your identity.

## Activities

Complete both of the following activities.

### Activity A: Media-Free Zone

Challenge yourself to see how long you can go without media. You might find it easier to start by setting a goal of four hours, for instance, or perhaps one day. You might want to challenge yourself further to go as long as possible past your goal. There will be no judgment on how long you can go without media. This exercise is designed to raise your awareness of how prevalent media is in your life. For the purpose of this challenge, media includes intentionally viewing any form of communication or information—books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, videos, the internet, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and any other form of mass communication. A personal letter or email doesn’t count (that’s personal communication), but a blog post or an email sent to dozens of people at once does (mass communication). Of course, you can’t help it if you pass a billboard or if you see a magazine lying open on the table, but that’s not intentional viewing on your part so those instances don’t count. Once you have finished your media-free experiment, write a short reflection. How long did you go without media? What media/medium broke your “fast”? What was the lure, if any?

### Activity B: Counting on Media

For 24 hours, document **all** media you are exposed to, both by choice and by happenstance. As with the previous assignment, there is no judgment. Just document your exposure as objectively as possible. What media sources were you exposed to? What was the content? How much of your attention and energy did the media require? How much time did you spend on each type of media? You may find it easiest to create a simple chart to record this data. Afterward, write a brief summary of your exposure and your thoughts about the experiment. Were there any surprises?

## FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

You are encouraged to submit your work digitally using the Google Drive course doc provided by your teacher. You can begin using your course doc right away, putting each assignment under the lesson 1



heading. Work can be typed directly into the course doc or typed in another application and copied into the course doc. Make sure to number each assignment carefully.

If you are submitting work through the mail, use 8½" × 11" paper, and print only on one side. Please format your typed documents with a standard font (such as Times New Roman), and use a font size, paragraph spacing, and margin setting that will make it easy for your teacher to read your work and provide comments. If you handwrite your work, please do so legibly, using only one side of the paper. Neatness counts! Make sure that your work is well organized and easy to read. Smudges, tears, and wrinkles detract from the legibility of your handwritten work, and they do not make a very good impression.

You will submit this work to your teacher along with lesson 2 (at the end of the next lesson). Feel free to contact your teacher at any time with questions about this or any other assignment.

## Lesson

# 2

# Meta Media: Media's Mirror

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## Learning Objectives

- Analyze how one medium addresses the content and meaning of another
- Collect and analyze anecdotal data on meta media
- Explore the self and your relationship with media

Much media content spends time, energy, and attention referring to, dissecting, and critiquing other media. Meta blogs—blogs devoted to compiling the best articles and posts from other websites and blogs—are very popular and often turn up in internet searches. Magazines like *People* often focus on television or film, while others, like the *New Yorker*, often critique media. In the 1984 film *Splash*, Madison learns English by watching a television in the electronics department of a New York City department store. In the 1994–2004 television series *Friends*, the characters watch as Joey plays a doctor on a television soap opera. In the 1976 film *Network*, television news anchor Howard Beale has a breakdown live on the air, which ironically increases the ratings of his failing network. The 2006–2013 television program *30 Rock* is about a live television show. All these examples show how the media represents itself and comments on other media. How do we learn about media? What sense can we make of one medium through the lens and language of another? In what ways do we learn about who we are (and who we want to be) through media?

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read pages 67–78 in *Media/Society*.
- ☐ Provide an example of meta media.
- ☐ Keep track of instances of one media referencing another.
- ☐ Activity: Media Production of a “Self Map”

# Assignments

## Reading

In *Media/Society*, read pages 67–78, which includes the following sections:

- Changing Patterns of Ownership
  - ◆ Concentration of Ownership
    - Products
    - Platforms
    - Pipes
  - ◆ Conglomeration and Integration

## Written Assignments

1. Find a real-life media example of *meta media*. The example can be a blog or video link, photo, advertisement, television show, film, etc., or you can write a description. Make sure the example clearly shows the meaning of the word. Be creative, and feel free to combine media in your example. Cite all your sources (refer to the appendix for details about proper citation).
2. As you spend time with media this week, make note of any time one medium references another. For example, do TV characters comment on what is in the news? Do newspaper articles make reference to what is reported on TV news, film, or the internet? How many times does an ad or a name-brand product show up in a film? How many times do you see a blog refer to something that appeared in a film, YouTube video, television show, or another blog? Keep a notebook with you throughout the day and jot down all instances that come to your attention. At the end of the week, review your notes and see if you notice a pattern. Does one medium promote or blame another medium? Do certain types of media seem to “get along”? Write a brief summary of your findings, citing specific examples from your data.

## Activity

Complete the following activity.

### Media Production of a “Self Map”

Gather images, mementos, and/or messages that reflect your sense of self, and then gather images, mementos, and/or messages from the media about the concept of self. Using these images, create a collage, diorama, poster, or computer-based slideshow presentation based on the theme “Me and the Media.” Take special note of where there are overlaps between your concept of self and the media’s messages about self. Where are there disconnects? What does this show you about yourself, the media, and the relationship between the two? Make sure to include your responses to these questions either visually or by incorporating explanatory text. Note: The mementos, images, and messages will



be cut up, glued, and manipulated, so make sure to copy any originals and use the copy for your project.

We will return to this activity and expand on it later in the course, so make sure to keep it intact. Take a photo of it now to document its original form.

### **FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS**

When you have completed lesson 2, please add your work to your course doc. Remember to take a photo of your self map and include it.

When your work is ready for review, let your teacher know by using the “Email collaborators” function (found under the File menu). Include a note letting your teacher know which lessons are ready for review. Whether you are submitting lessons online using your course doc or sending them through the mail, make sure that each assignment is clearly numbered and complete. If you have any questions about any of the assignments in the lessons, contact your teacher before submitting your work. As soon as you have submitted lessons 1 and 2, proceed to lesson 3. Your teacher will provide you with lesson feedback promptly, but in the meantime, keep working on your next lessons.

## Lesson

# 6

# A Culture of Consumption: Advertisement Analysis

## Learning Objectives

- Become familiar with the basics of advertising
- Examine ways in which advertising is directly connected to youth and consumption
- Conduct an advertisement analysis

What is advertising? Advertising's single most important goal is to get people to buy more stuff. Advertising is most successful in an affluent, plentiful society. When societies struggle or economies fail, so, too, does advertising.

Advertising generates the bulk of revenue in mass media. Advertising pays the bills. However, advertisers don't just want to reach more people with their message, they want to reach the right people: their target audience. For example, newspapers and magazines may look for ways to decrease circulation as a way to make more money. If newspapers and magazines can guarantee to advertisers that their publication will reach a more desirable or appropriate audience, the publisher stands to make more money. Advertisers want an audience who is eager and able to purchase their product, so they are willing to pay more for that, and publishers end up spending less on producing and shipping their content once they've weeded out the less desirable audiences.

Although advertisements give us the illusion of choice and thorough information, they actually only give us one side of the story—their side. In so doing, advertisers work to persuade us. They don't want consumers to choose a competitor's product, so they strongly convey the message that we must choose *their* product. To choose anything else would be a mistake—at least, that's their side of the story.

Advertisements are literally everywhere and in every possible text we can find, from the clothing on our bodies, to billboards, to product placement within TV and movies, to the internet, to the previews

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read pages 98–105 and 216–224 in *Media/Society*.
- ☐ View *Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood*.
- ☐ View *Advertising and the End of the World*.
- ☐ Find examples of positive and negative marketing.
- ☐ Identify the assumptions made about a target audience.
- ☐ Choose an assignment related to targeted marketing.
- ☐ Complete an advertisement analysis.
- ☐ Activity: Retell the Story of Stuff

before a movie. The list goes on and on. We are constantly surrounded by advertisements that are carefully and deliberately planned and placed in front of us.

Advertising is constantly employing new techniques and exploiting new areas, but the foundation remains the same: persuade us to buy something, repeatedly. Because of their herculean efforts to get our attention, we don't just buy the product—we buy the image, the lifestyle, and the desire associated with the product.

## Assignments

### Reading

In *Media/Society*, read pages 98–105, which includes the following sections:

- The Impact of Advertising
  - ◆ The Advertising-Content Connection
  - ◆ Advertising and the Press in the 19th Century
    - The British Press
    - The U.S. Press
  - ◆ Advertising and the Contemporary News Media

Also read pages 216–224, which includes the following sections:

- Advertising and Consumer Culture
  - ◆ Selling Consumerism in the Early 20th Century
  - ◆ Women's Magazines as Advertisements
- Advertising and the Globalization of Culture
- Internet Ideology

### Viewing

Watch both of the following films:

*Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood* (Media Education Foundation, 2008)

Taking a hard look at the multibillion dollar marketing industry aimed at children, this film illuminates the industry's tactics and its effects on children's health and well-being. (Film length: 67 minutes)

*Advertising and the End of the World* (Media Education Foundation, 1997)

This visual presentation focuses on the culture of consumption and how individuals willingly feed into it to the detriment of humanity's and Earth's long-term collective good. (Film length: 46 minutes)



### Think About It

Based on what you learned from watching the film *Consuming Kids*, how do you feel about marketing directed at children? Should there be an age limit for child-directed marketing? Should there be limits on the quantity, content, or availability of child-directed messages? Discuss this topic with someone who has a young child.

### Written Assignments

1. Find a media example of a positive message about self and a negative message about self. These messages can be aimed at any target audience (athletes, parents, women, the elderly, adolescent boys, etc.), but find both a positive and negative message for one single target group. Explain which message is likely to be more effective to that target group and why.
2. Give a specific example of how a marketing campaign makes assumptions about its target audience. Choose an ad and try to determine what assumptions the media producers made about the audience. Identify the target audience and list the underlying assumptions, and then give your opinion about how effective this marketing strategy is and why. Make sure to include or give a description of the ad.
3. Choose one of the following assignments related to targeted marketing:
  - a. If there is a mall or shopping center near you, visit it and make a list of five to ten stores. Then, identify the target audience of each based on the window displays and media messages. Note whether or not you fall into this target audience, and if so, give specific examples of how the store(s) reached out to you. Indicate whether or not this marketing was successful (did you want to go inside and buy something?).
  - b. Do a simple review of social media sites on the internet and describe the different tactics used to reach audiences of different ages. Give specific examples of how media messages are altered to reach children, teens, young adults, and older adults.

### Make the Connection

Read this short article about the ad campaign against cigarette smoking:

“Combination of Positively and Negatively Framed Warnings about Tobacco May Motivate Young People to Quit” by Rebecca Nakles (SciGuru Science News)

[www.sciguru.org/newsitem/17605/combination-positively-and-negatively-framed-warnings-about-tobacco-may-motivate-young-people-quit](http://www.sciguru.org/newsitem/17605/combination-positively-and-negatively-framed-warnings-about-tobacco-may-motivate-young-people-quit)

4. Choose one advertisement that appears in each of these media: newspaper, magazine, radio, TV, and the internet. Analyze them using the questions below. You are encouraged to choose the same product advertisement across media and analyze the similarities and differences. For instance, you might choose a Levi's ad and look at how the product is marketed for different media outlets. Write a brief description of each type of ad, and then answer the following:
  - a. Language meaning: How is language used differently according to the medium? Does changing the language change the meaning?
  - b. Language conventions: Does the language include any familiar or generally accepted forms, such as slang, pop culture references, or terminology known only by those in the target audience? What effect does this have on the audience?
  - c. Representation of the truth: How does each medium put forth the "truth"? How does each try to seem authentic?
  - d. Target audience: How does each medium appeal to the target audience? How does the target audience differ across the media channels?

## Activity

Complete the following activity.

### Retell the Story of Stuff

Watch the following 21-minute video:

"The Story of Stuff" (*The Story of Stuff Project*, 2007)

Choose one of the following options to complete for this activity:

- a. Create a visual summary of the video using your own original words and images to tell the story. You can design a poster, create a drawing, make an online graphic or flowchart, etc.
- b. Choose one of the sustainable solutions mentioned at the end of the video and find three companies or businesses that exemplify it. Write a brief description of how each sustainable solution plays out in real life.
- c. Write a children's book that explains the topics covered in the video in a simple way that will help children be empowered to be part of the solution. You can illustrate the book or use graphics and/or photos.
- d. Compose a poem or song that summarizes "The Story of Stuff." Record the song or poem.

## FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

When you have completed lesson 6, submit it to your teacher along with lesson 5.

## Lesson

# 9

# Babe or Bro: Constructions of Gender

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## Learning Objectives

- Explore the portrayal of gender in media, especially visual media
- Recognize harmful media constructions of gender
- Identify how gender identity is supported in positive ways in media

All bodies possess gender, which we most easily (though incompletely) divide into male and female. A more sophisticated analysis of gender acknowledges male, female, transgender, cisgender (identifying with the sex assigned at birth), and nonconforming. In the twenty-first century, gender definitions and identities have become fluid and flexible.

While women are not the only gender marginalized in media, in this lesson we'll focus on the portrayal of women. Because a lot of media are focused on the family, women have had a regular presence in mass media. However, since control and creation of media is largely the domain of men, women have been relegated to unsupported, powerless positions. Women have a narrow role range and little control of production. Consequently, women have suffered both in front of and behind the camera.

Women are less likely to be cast as main characters and have fewer speaking lines than men. Women in media have lower-status jobs than their male counterparts, both in real life and in media's portrayal of life. In media of all types, women are often shown in the home in domestic roles. In film and television, women are given limited roles, often playing mothers, homemakers, or sexual objects. Even when women are given more complex roles, patriarchal ideol-

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read pages 246–251 in *Media/Society*.
- ☐ View one film related to gender identity.
- ☐ Identify ways to change how media portrays gender.
- ☐ Identify a positive example of gender portrayal in media.
- ☐ List types of individuals who are not represented in mainstream media.
- ☐ Write a comparative essay.
- ☐ Activity A: Revisit Your Self Map
- ☐ Activity B: Speak Out for Gender Identity

ogy systematically and subtly reinforces the idea that what women really want is to be wives, mothers, and sexual objects.

Behind the scenes, things aren't much different. There is little that is controlled by women. For example, in the film industry, James Cameron is known as a director, but Kathryn Bigelow is known as a *female* director. Despite the fact that she was the first woman to win an Academy Award for Best Director (in 2009, for the hypermasculine war film *Hurt Locker*), Bigelow's fame is more attached to her gender than her accomplishments.

Now that we are halfway through this course, let's take another look at David Buckingham's framework from his book *Media Education: Literacy, Learning, and Contemporary Culture* and see how our understanding of the four key concepts of media literacy has developed.

**Production:** All media texts are consciously manufactured. Using the lens of gender identity, how does it feel to know that these media texts are intentionally, carefully manufactured? It's not an accidental or subconscious act that creates these representations.

**Language:** All media texts use a combination of languages to communicate meaning. Languages are the codes and conventions familiar to us that help us make sense of media texts. Think of the kinds of language used in media aimed at women and how that differs from media aimed at men.

**Representation:** Media production involves selecting and combining moments to make stories and create characters. Representation invites us to see the world in particular ways. What is the story of female gender identity? What is the story of male gender identity? What is the story for someone who doesn't fit neatly into one of these two options?

**Audiences:** All media texts are made for an audience. To study the audience is to study our role as media producers and consumers. What is our role in attributing meaning to gender identity?

## Assignments

### Reading

In *Media/Society*, read pages 246–251, which includes the following sections:

- Gender and Media Content
  - ◆ Women: Presence and Control in the Media
  - ◆ Changing Media Roles for Women . . . and Men
  - ◆ The Case of Women's Sports



## Viewing

Choose one of the following films to watch. Each explores harmful media constructions of gender. (Feel free to watch more than one.)

- *The Illusionists: The Globalization of Beauty* (Media Education Foundation, 2015) looks at how global corporations and advertising influence how people define beauty and see themselves. (53 minutes)
- *Slim Hopes: Advertising and the Obsession with Thinness* (Media Education Foundation, 1995) explores how body image issues, skewed by the obsession for thinness and beauty in media and in our culture, affect women's mental and physical health. (Film length: 32 minutes)
- *The Bro Code: How Contemporary Culture Creates Sexist Men* (Media Education Foundation, 2011) examines how boys and men are inculcated into a rigid culture of masculinity that perpetuates and normalizes behavior that is dehumanizing and disrespectful to both men and women. (Film length: 58 minutes)
- *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture* (Media Education Foundation, 2009) takes a look at gender representations in media, focusing on how gender identity is based on a pattern of media messages rather than emerging as a natural expression of self. (Film length: 72 minutes)
- *Generation M: Misogyny in Media and Culture* (Media Education Foundation, 2008) tracks negative definitions of femininity and expressions of hate and violence toward women in pop culture, exposing the ways in which these attitudes both reflect and encourage a dangerous reality. (Film length: 60 minutes)



### Think About It

It can be hard to watch a film (such as the ones above) that clearly demonstrates how widespread negative gender messages are in media and in our culture. How does this knowledge make you feel? How do you feel about young children growing up with these images, as you have?

## Written Assignments

1. If you could change one thing about the way media portray gender, what would it be? Discuss your ideas with a group of your peers, and listen to their ideas. Identify three (or more) concrete actions that could be taken to effect change. At least one action should focus on what an individual can do (you!) and at least one action should focus on a change that could be made on a structural level (at the production level).



2. Find an example in media where gender identity is portrayed in a positive way. Describe what the message is and how this positive message is conveyed. Explain who will benefit from this supportive representation.
3. List at least five different types of individuals who are not represented in mainstream media. Who speaks, and who is silenced?
4. Do three searches on YouTube using the following terms:
  - Motivational videos
  - Motivational videos men
  - Motivational videos women

Watch a few videos from each search. (Most of the videos are just a few minutes long.) Write an essay that compares and contrasts the treatment of gender in the videos. Are the motivational words and images different when you type in “men” or “women”? Would you have noticed these differences and similarities if you weren’t intentionally looking for them? Would you notice a pattern with just one or two videos? (See “Comparative Essay” in the appendix of this coursebook for detailed writing instruction on this essay format.)

## Activities

Complete both of the following activities.

### Activity A: Revisit Your Self Map

Go back to your self map and add mementos focused on gender identity. Since this self map is a personal reflection, feel free to express yourself in any way. Make sure to include images and mementos that reflect your own sense of self as well as those that reflect media’s image of gender identity.

### Activity B: Speak Out for Gender Identity

Choose one of the films you viewed in this lesson and write about the issues it raised that were of the greatest concern to you personally. Your writing can take many possible forms: a letter to your future son or daughter; a blog post about the issues raised in the film and what can be done about them; a complaint lodged in the form of a fake lawsuit against an advertising company that promotes negative images related to gender; a song or poem expressing your feelings about one of the issues raised. Whatever form your writing takes, make sure to specifically reference the film you watched and provide media examples that show the problem and/or show positive, productive ways to portray gender.

## Lesson

# 17

# Meta Media Analysis

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## Learning Objectives

- Conduct a meta media analysis
- Apply media literacy concepts and terminology
- Reflect on the learning process

You've learned a lot since we first explored meta media in lesson 2, so it's time to take another look. As we wrap up our study of media literacy, you'll work on your final project. By now, you should have completed the reading of your chosen work of fiction (from the books listed in lesson 12). You should also have some substantial notes on how media are presented in this text and your thoughts on the method of presentation. This week, you will choose a film to watch and continue your analysis of how one medium represents another.

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ View one of the films.
- ☐ Write a comparative essay.
- ☐ Write a reflective essay.
- ☐ Activity A: Media Mirror
- ☐ Activity B: Video Interview

## Assignments

### Viewing

Choose *one* of the following films to view. (You may find them for purchase or streaming online, or at your local library.)

#### ***The Truman Show (1998)***

The story of Truman Burbank, an insurance salesman who discovers his entire life is actually a television show.

#### ***EDtv (1999)***

Ed, a video store clerk, agrees to have his entire life filmed as a television show, but he soon finds out that fame and constant publicity make living a real life impossible.

#### ***The Joneses (2009)***

The Jones family moves into a new home and makes fast friends with the neighbors, but it's soon discovered they are not a real family but rather marketers/advertisers who live within the products they sell.

## Written Assignments

1. Write a comparative essay based on the novel you read and the film you watched. Use the following questions to help frame your essay:
  - How are media presented in these two texts?
  - What are the different techniques used for critiquing media?
  - The works of fiction are dystopian and futuristic while the films are (ostensibly) in the present day and humorous. Which method do you find more effective for getting the point across? Why?
  - What can be learned from these texts through their genre as well as their subject matter?
  - Considering that these works of fiction present a negative view of media, is there a more objective way to present a critical view of media?

Using the information learned in this course and the questions above, create an outline for your comparative essay. (See the appendix for a reminder on how to format a comparative essay.) Refer to the four key concepts of media literacy that we've been using to frame this course (Buckingham, *Media Education: Literacy, Learning, and Contemporary Culture*, 2003):

**Production:** All media texts are consciously manufactured.

**Language:** All media texts use a combination of languages to communicate meaning. Languages are the codes and conventions familiar to us that help us make sense of media texts.

**Representation:** Media production involves selecting and combining moments to make stories and create characters. Representation invites us to see the world in particular ways.

**Audiences:** All media texts are made for an audience. To study the audience is to study our role as media producers and consumers.

Use the terminology above as you compose your essay, showing how each concept plays a role in the stories presented in the novel and the film. How do production, language, representation, and audiences show up in the plot? How do production, language, representation, and audiences motivate or influence the characters? Refer back to the notes you took while reading your novel, and incorporate specific examples from the book and the film. You have two weeks to complete this project.

2. Write a short (one-page) reflective essay about the impact this course has had on you personally. Consider the following:
  - Do you have a different, more complex understanding of self than you did at the beginning of the course?
  - Do you see how you (in all your complexity) “fit” into mainstream media?

- Have you decided your position within the structure versus agency debate? (Refer to lesson 3, assignment #3, for a refresher on structure versus agency.)
- Do you approach your media choices differently from the way you did before this course?
- As a critical scholar, have you made changes in how you view yourself? On how you view your family or community? On how you view the larger society in which you live?

## Activities

Complete one option from activity A, and then complete activity B.

### Activity A: Media Mirror

Choose one of the following activities to complete.

1. Create a curriculum project or assignment for a media literacy course. Choose any topic covered in this course or one that you feel should be included in a media literacy course. Create a project that includes viewing (films, videos, books, articles, etc.), doing (creating, field trip, polling, etc.), and both analytical and reflective writing.
2. Choose three of the themes in this course (gender, family, social class, politics, environment, etc.) and find media examples that you feel are excellent representations of the topic. Include at least two different types of media for each of your three themes.

### Activity B: Video Interview

Have someone interview you about what you learned this semester. Record your interview in video format. (Your interviewer should be off-screen.) Without reading the interview questions (which are found in the appendix), give them to your interviewer. For this exercise, it's best to not know ahead of time what is going to be asked of you, so don't peek! You can prepare for your interview by reflecting on what you've learned in this course and considering what message you'd like to convey about the importance of media literacy. Some of the questions will mirror those in assignment #2 above, so writing your reflective essay is good preparation for your interview.

Treat the interview seriously, as though you were invited to speak at a media literacy forum. Prepare mentally and dress the part! Record your interview in one continuous segment, if possible. Even if you laugh or want a do-over, just keep the video rolling and have the interviewer pose the question again.

## FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

If you are unsure how to share your video interview, contact your teacher. The video should not be edited or cleaned up; just submit it as it was recorded. If you are unable to make a video, talk to your teacher about alternatives, which may include an audio or phone interview.



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Name \_\_\_\_\_

# Media Literacy Pre-Course Survey

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## Part I: Media Relationships

What effect, if any, do you think media has on you? Overall, is that effect positive or negative? Please explain.

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What is your favorite medium (film, video, music, books, newspapers, magazines, etc.)? Why?

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Do you see representations of people who look like you in the media? Why or why not?

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What is your definition of media literacy? (Don't worry if the answer is "I don't know.")

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## Media Literacy

### Pre-Course Survey—Part I: Media Relationships

What do you think of when you think of the media?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

# Media Literacy Pre-Course Survey

## Part II: Media in Your Home

What media do you use on a daily basis?

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What activities, if any, are you involved in outside of school?

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What are your family's rules around media use?

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Do you watch, read, or listen to media with your family? If so, do you discuss what you are watching, reading, or listening to?

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What media technology do you have at home? Please circle all that apply:

- |                  |                                 |             |
|------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| TV               | Cable/satellite TV              | DVD/DVR     |
| Private computer | Cell phone                      | iPad/tablet |
| Family computer  | Wi-Fi/broadband internet access |             |



## Media Literacy


### Pre-Course Survey—Part II: Media in Your Home

How much time do you spend on the following media? (Estimates are fine.)

Medium/technology	Per day	Per week
TV shows (on television)	_____	_____
TV shows (via the internet)	_____	_____
Watching movies	_____	_____
Listening to music	_____	_____
Playing video games	_____	_____
Reading the newspaper	_____	_____
Reading books	_____	_____
Reading magazines	_____	_____
On social media	_____	_____
Producing social media	_____	_____
On cell phone/smartphone	_____	_____

How much time does your family spend on the following media? Estimate the total hours of all family members together.

Medium/technology	Per day	Per week
TV shows (on television)	_____	_____
TV shows (via the internet)	_____	_____
Watching movies	_____	_____
Listening to music	_____	_____
Playing video games	_____	_____
Reading the newspaper	_____	_____
Reading books	_____	_____
Reading magazines	_____	_____
On social media	_____	_____
Producing social media	_____	_____
On cell phone/smartphone	_____	_____



# Media Literacy Interview Questions

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1. What did you know about the techniques and influences of media before you took the media literacy course?
2. What are the most important things you've learned about media?
3. How did you learn these things? What were the most effective means of learning?
4. How has this new knowledge affected you? Have you changed because of it? In what way?
5. What do you think is the most harmful effect of media?
6. If you were in charge of educating children about media, what would you want them to learn? What would be on your agenda?
7. This interview is a form of media. How does it feel to be part of that and to have to try to express meaningful, complex thoughts in small sound bites?
8. How you dress and present yourself for an interview makes a difference in how your message is perceived. What does the way you've presented yourself for this interview say about you? How do you think it will impact your message?
9. If you could change one thing about mass media, what would it be?