

# Challenging the Media is Everyone's Responsibility

And the people who developed the action program entitled *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media* want the excuses to end, the finger-pointing to cease. Instead, they want to introduce everyone to the skills of media literacy which can dramatically change our response to media violence.

They are the **Center for Media Literacy** and for over 17 years they have been developing innovative techniques for mitigating the influence and impact of violence in entertainment, as well as analyzing advertising, countering racism and sexism, recognizing bias in the news and exploring many other media issues.

You can support the critical work of this non-profit organization with a modest annual membership. It will bring you valuable publications and significant discounts on a wide range of media education materials for parents, teachers, religious and community leaders.

FILL OUT THE COUPON BELOW AND MAIL IT TODAY!  
OR CALL TOLL-FREE: **1-800-226-9494**.

The Work of the Center for Media Literacy



- Producing and distributing more media literacy materials than any other source in North America.
- Pioneering new methods for teaching critical thinking about media.
- Providing leadership training for educators, parent/teacher organizations, as well as religious and community groups.

**YES, I'M COMMITTED TO CHALLENGING VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA.**

Enroll me as an individual member of the **Center for Media Literacy** and send my first issue of the quarterly publication, *Connect*, immediately! I'll also receive a discount of 10% on any resources I purchase in the coming year.

Enclosed is my contribution\* of  \$35  \$50  \$100  \$250

Send me information on how my school or non-profit organization can enroll as an Institutional member of the **Center for Media Literacy** and receive 20% off all media literacy teaching resources.

Send me details on how my business or company can participate in the Center's gift certificate program for my local schools and receive a 20% discount on all materials as well.

Send me the latest free catalog of media literacy resources.

Check enclosed

Charge to my credit card  Visa  MasterCard  Discover

Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*The Center for Media Literacy is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. All contributions above \$35 are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Area code/Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

In Canada: convert total and mail direct to 3250 Bloor St. W. #300, Etobicoke, Ontario, M8X 2Y4.

**CENTER FOR MEDIA LITERACY**  
1962 South Shenandoah Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90034  
**1-800-226-9494**

## *Title*

Living in a Media Culture:  
...for better or for worse...

## *Purpose/Goal*

“Participants will recognize & create opportunities which can support the Media Literacy Movement in their own spheres-of-influence; engaging others in public conversation to shape our current & future cultural environments.”

## *Concepts/Issues Covered*

- What everyone should know about Media -  
(Five core concepts of Media Literacy)
- Breaking the Circle of Blame -  
(Imagine a Media of meaning)
- Media Literacy & Advocacy in Action -  
(Challenging the Media is everyone's responsibility)

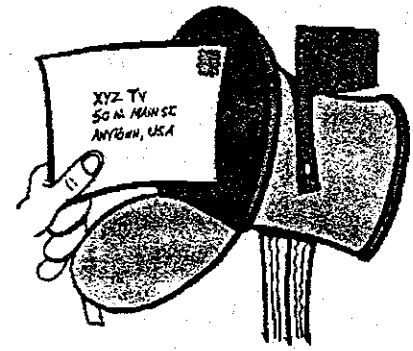
## *Format - (55 minutes)*

Designed to be experiential; the facilitator/trainer will use demonstration, activities & storytelling as presentation methods for information delivery.

## *Facilitator/Trainer Biography - (Cathy Finck)*

A Prevention Specialist with expertise in family education, community mobilization, and training in evaluation & strategic planning. Currently an independent contractor providing services to several clients, such as Cobb Safe & Drug-free Schools Prevention Intervention Center. She has enjoyed responsive audiences when using community education materials from the Center for Media Literacy with a variety of groups in the metro Atlanta area, and has become committed to the Media Literacy/Advocacy Movement. She exhibits the following personal strengths in her work: personal warmth, good cognitive organizational & presentation skills, successful integration of adult learning theory in practice, knowledge of human growth & development & the technology of prevention, genuine enthusiasm for work & life's opportunities.

# Where to Write to Express Your Views



## BROADCAST NETWORKS

**Capital Cities/ABC, Inc.**  
Mr. Robert Iger, Pres.  
77 West 66th Street  
New York, NY 10023

**CBS Television**  
Mr. Howard Stringer, Pres.  
51 West 52nd Street  
New York, NY 10019

**NBC Television**  
Mr. Robert Wright, Pres.  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, NY 19112

**Fox Television Network**  
Mr. Mitchell Stern, Pres.  
5746 Sunset Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90028

**PBS (Public Broadcasting)**  
Mr. Erwin Duggan, Pres.  
1320 Braddock Place  
Alexandria, VA 22314

## NEWS BUREAUS

**ABC News**  
47 W. 66th St.  
New York, NY 10023

**CBS News**  
524 W. 57th St.  
New York, NY 10019

**NBC News**  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, NY 10112

**CNN (Cable News Network)**  
1 CNN Center  
Atlanta, GA 30348-5466

## MOVIE STUDIOS

**MCA/Universal**  
100 Universal City Plaza  
Universal City, CA 91608

**Paramount Pictures**  
5555 Melrose Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA 90038

**Sony Pictures Corp/  
Tri-Star Pictures**  
10202 W. Washington Blvd.  
Culver City, CA 90232

**20th Century Fox**  
P.O. Box 900  
Beverly Hills, CA 90213

**The Walt Disney Co.**  
500 S. Buena Vista  
Burbank, CA 91521

**Warner Bros. Pictures**  
4000 Warner Blvd.  
Burbank, CA 91522

## CABLE TV SYSTEMS

**TCI**  
Dr. John Malone  
Terrace Tower II,  
5619 DTC Parkway  
Englewood, CO 80111

**Time Warner Cable**  
Mr. Joseph J. Collins  
300 First Stamford Place  
Stamford, CT 06902

**Cox Cable**  
Mr. James O. Robbins  
1400 Lake Hearn Drive  
Atlanta, GA 30319

**Continental Cablevision**  
Mr. Amos B. Hostetter, Jr.  
Pilot House  
Lewis Wharf  
Boston, MA 20006

## CABLE TV CHANNELS

**A&E**  
P.O. Box 1610  
Grand Central Station  
New York, NY 10163

**BET (Black Entertainment  
Television)**  
170 N. Moore St., Ste. 2200  
Rosslyn, VA 22201

**Discovery Channel/  
Learning Channel**  
7700 Wisconsin Ave.  
Bethesda, MD 20814-3522

**The Family Channel**  
1000 Centerville Turnpike  
Virginia Beach, VA 23463

**HBO/Cinemax**  
1100 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10036

**Lifetime**  
3612 35th Avenue  
Astoria, NY 11106

**The Movie Channel/  
Showtime**  
1633 Broadway  
New York, NY 10019

**MTV/Nickelodeon**  
1515 Broadway  
New York, NY 10036

**USA Network**  
1230 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10020

**Faith and Values Channel**  
74 Trinity Place, 8th Fl.  
New York, NY 10006

## VIDEO-GAME MANUFACTURERS

**Nintendo**  
Nintendo America  
P.O. Box 957  
Redmond, WA 98073

**Sega/Genesis**  
Sega America, Inc.  
P.O. Box 2167  
San Francisco, CA 94080

## NATIONAL MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

**FCC - Federal Communi-  
cations Commission**  
1919 M Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

**NCTA - National Cable  
Television Association**  
1724 Massachusetts Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036

**NAB - National Associa-  
tion of Broadcasters**  
1771 N Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036

**MPAA - Motion Picture  
Association of America**  
1600 Eye Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006

**American Advertising  
Federation**  
251 Post Street, Suite 302  
San Francisco, CA 94108

## IN CANADA

**CRTC - Canadian Radio-  
Television and Telecom-  
munications Commission**  
Broadcast Coordination  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0N2

**Canadian Advertising  
Foundation**  
350 Bloor Street East, Ste. 402  
Toronto, ON M4W 1H5

**Canadian Association of  
Broadcasters**  
165 Sparks Street, 8th Floor  
Ottawa, ON K1P 5S2

**Canadian Broadcasting  
Corporation**  
P.O. Box 8478  
Ottawa, ON K1G 3J5

**CTV Television Network**  
42 Charles Street East  
Toronto, ON M4Y 1T5

# Eight Steps to Success: How To Write to the Media



Do you ever feel assaulted by the violence in a movie, video or TV show? Are you offended by the insensitive portrayal of minorities on a new dramatic series? Or were you impressed by a pilot program that you think would make a fantastic regular TV series? Well, the entertainment industry wants to hear from you.

Writing a letter or postcard is a great way to let the industry know what you think of their efforts. For every letter a producer or advertising agency receives, they assume there are at least 10,000 others who feel the same way, but didn't take the time to write. That's a lot of voices representing one letter.

What most people don't realize is that all media organizations have complex systems to read, file, computer-code, itemize and report on the letters they receive. Audience feedback represents the pulse of the public. *Remember, it's important to write to give praise for what you like, as well as criticism for what you object to.*

Here are some tips on writing effectively to the media:

1. Be clear and concise. Use specific examples of what you do or do not like. Describe the material and what you feel is good or bad about it. Avoid the "I-just-don't-like-it" response because this can be dismissed as a "creative difference."
2. Be civilized. Be firm in your criticism, but don't rant. Use good grammar and appropriate language: don't threaten or accuse. Otherwise, your letter might not be taken as seriously as it is intended.
3. If you're writing to complain, focus on how offensive material negatively affects your regard for the station, publication or product. The loss of a customer or audience member means lost money to the company to which you write. On the other hand, explaining how the positive material *increases your regard* indicates to the company that you may be "spreading the word" or taking more interest in its other products or programs.

4. Offer suggestions for changes to offensive material. It's easy to criticize, but harder to create. Giving examples of other options also removes the element of finger-pointing.
5. Send copies of your letter to the editor and the advertising director of a magazine; the producers, directors and executives of TV and radio programs; or the sponsors of broadcast programs. For letters about TV or radio, you may want to send a duplicate copy to the Federal Communications Commission. (In Canada, send to the Canadian Radio, Television and Telecommunications Commission.)
6. Get others to write, too. Encourage friends, family, community groups, etc., to send their own letters. However, avoid form letters or mass signature petitions. They carry less weight than personalized, individual letters.
7. Make sure to provide a legible name and return address. Unsigned letters look as though the author did not feel strongly enough about his/her position to be identified with it. If you're not sure of your opinion, the reader won't be either.
8. Always keep a few stamped postcards handy so you can jot down your thoughts right away.

On the other side of this handout is a list of addresses of the major media companies and organizations in the U.S. and Canada, but you may have to further research specific contacts. TV listings, such as *TV Guide*, often publish media addresses. Your public library can provide additional addresses of corporate advertisers and magazine publishers, as well as your local newspapers, television and radio stations. And don't forget elected officials!

## What About Firing Off a FAX?

*While more and more of us are using facsimile machines everyday, we don't recommend them yet for expressing your personal point of view to the media. Fax and phone numbers change frequently in media organizations. Your rate of delivery is best assured with a first-class stamp.*

# Siete consejos para ver TV en casa



- 1** **Decida por cuánto tiempo verá la TV su familia.**  
Fije un límite al número de horas semanales que su familia verá la TV y hágalo cumplir.
- 2** **Prepare un plan para ver la TV.**  
Promueva una actitud en la familia de que la televisión se debe encender solamente para ver un programa específico, no para “ver qué hay.” Escoja sus programas por adelantado, usando una guía semanal de programas.
- 3** **Establezca pautas para escoger programas.**  
Asegúrese de conversar sobre los valores que usted considera importantes y las razones para su selección. Revise las listas de programas, incluyendo los de cable, y tome nota de comentarios sobre programas con temas y materias que se ajusten a estas pautas familiares. Busque programas y videos que ofrezcan puntos de vista diferentes y que ayuden a la educación de sus hijos.
- 4** **Haga del ver la televisión un evento de participación familiar.**  
La televisión no tiene que acabar con la conversación y la interacción entre la familia. Véanla juntos, y utilice cada oportunidad para hablar sobre lo que ven y escuchan. Use los diálogos o los personajes para estimular la conversación sobre temas que pueden ser difíciles de tratar: las relaciones interfamiliares, los sentimientos, la conducta sexual apropiada, el divorcio o la muerte. Pruebe el “pensar en voz alta” como una forma no intimidante de dejar que sus hijos escuchen sus valores morales y solicite sus respuestas.
- 5** **Dialogue con su televisor.**  
Cuando sea apropiado, exprese sus opiniones hablándole directamente al televisor mientras lo ve. Responda al sexismo, racismo y la violencia innecesaria, pero también señale las representaciones positivas. No se olvide de contradecir los anuncios comerciales y la forma en que tratan de vendernos no solamente productos, sino actitudes y estilos de vida.
- 6** **Permita que la TV amplíe su horizonte.**  
Busque libros y artículos de revistas en la biblioteca pública que estén relacionados con ideas recibidas de la TV y organice excursiones con su familia aplicando esas ideas. Mantenga un atlas o mapamundi cerca de su televisor y busque los lugares mencionados en las noticias.
- 7** **Sea positivo sobre la contribución de la TV a nuestro mundo.**  
La televisión es la fuerza dominante en nuestra cultura de medios de comunicación, y una parte importante en la vida de los niños. Se la debe evaluar con justicia, no denigrarla.

El Centro para Alfabetización en los Medios de Comunicación está creando una visión más amplia de la alfabetización al ayudar al público a comprender cómo analizar y evaluar dichos medios. El Centro cree que la educación alfabetizadora de los medios es la alternativa sensata a la censura.

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# Seven Tips for TV Viewing in the Home

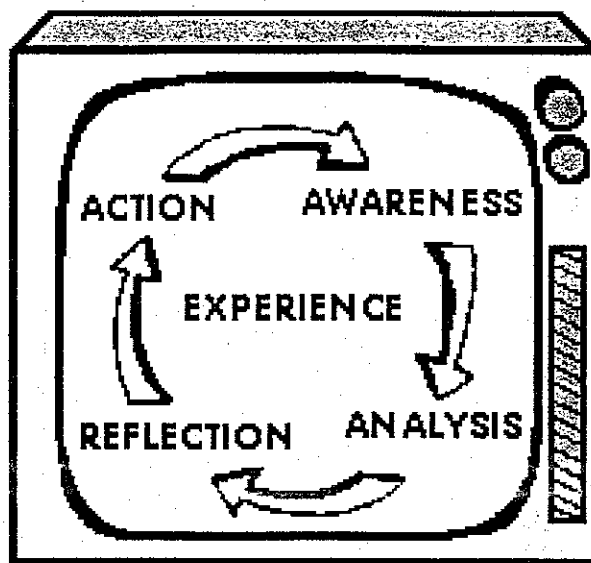


- 1** **Decide how much TV your family will watch.**  
Set limits on the number of hours you and your family will watch each week and stick to it!
- 2** **Plan your TV viewing.**  
Encourage a family attitude that television should be turned on only to watch a specific show, not just to “see what’s on.” Choose your shows ahead of time, using a weekly television program guide.
- 3** **Develop family guidelines for selecting programs.**  
Be sure to discuss values you believe are important and the reasons for your choices. Check channel listings, including cable, and note reviews of programs with themes and subjects that match your family guidelines. Look for shows and videos that offer different viewpoints and help in your child’s education.
- 4** **Make TV watching an interactive family event.**  
Television doesn’t have to end family discussion and interaction. Watch it together, and use every opportunity to talk about what you are seeing and hearing. Use storylines or characters to stimulate conversation on topics that can be difficult to discuss: family relationships, feelings, appropriate sexual behavior, divorce or death. Try “thinking out loud” as a non-threatening way to let your children hear your values and prompt their response.
- 5** **Talk back to your TV.**  
When appropriate, express your opinions by “talking” directly to the TV as you watch. Respond to sexism, racism and unnecessary violence, but point out positive portrayals as well. Don’t forget to challenge commercials and the way they try to sell us not only products, but attitudes and lifestyles.
- 6** **Let TV expand and enlarge your world.**  
Find related books and magazine articles at your public library, and go on family outings based on ideas you’ve seen on TV. Keep an atlas or globe next to your television and find places mentioned in the news.
- 7** **Be positive about TV’s contribution to our world.**  
Television is the dominant force in our media culture and an important part of children’s lives. It should be evaluated fairly, not denigrated.

The Center for Media Literacy is creating a broader view of literacy by helping people understand, analyze, and evaluate the media. The Center believes media literacy education is the sensible alternative to censorship.

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## Empowerment Spiral



The overall goal of *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media* is to break the circle of blame about violence in the media by engaging millions of people in an empowerment process that leads from awareness to action on key issues in the media violence debate.

This approach, developed by the Center for Media Literacy, is based upon the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Although the process evolves in a continuing spiral of learning, we can identify four key steps: *Awareness*, *Analysis*, *Reflection* and *Action*.

### **Awareness**

First, discover and articulate your own experiences and insights about violence in the media. This encourages you to think about your daily interactions with media that you may never have stopped to think about.

### **Analysis**

Second, question the political, economic, social or cultural causes that make the media the way they are. This step is especially crucial in the

issue of media violence because of the many interrelated aspects of the problem: the economics of the media industry, First Amendment concerns, the cultural breakdown of many family systems, etc. Without a clear grasp of how things got to be the way they are, we can't plan effective action for making changes for the future.

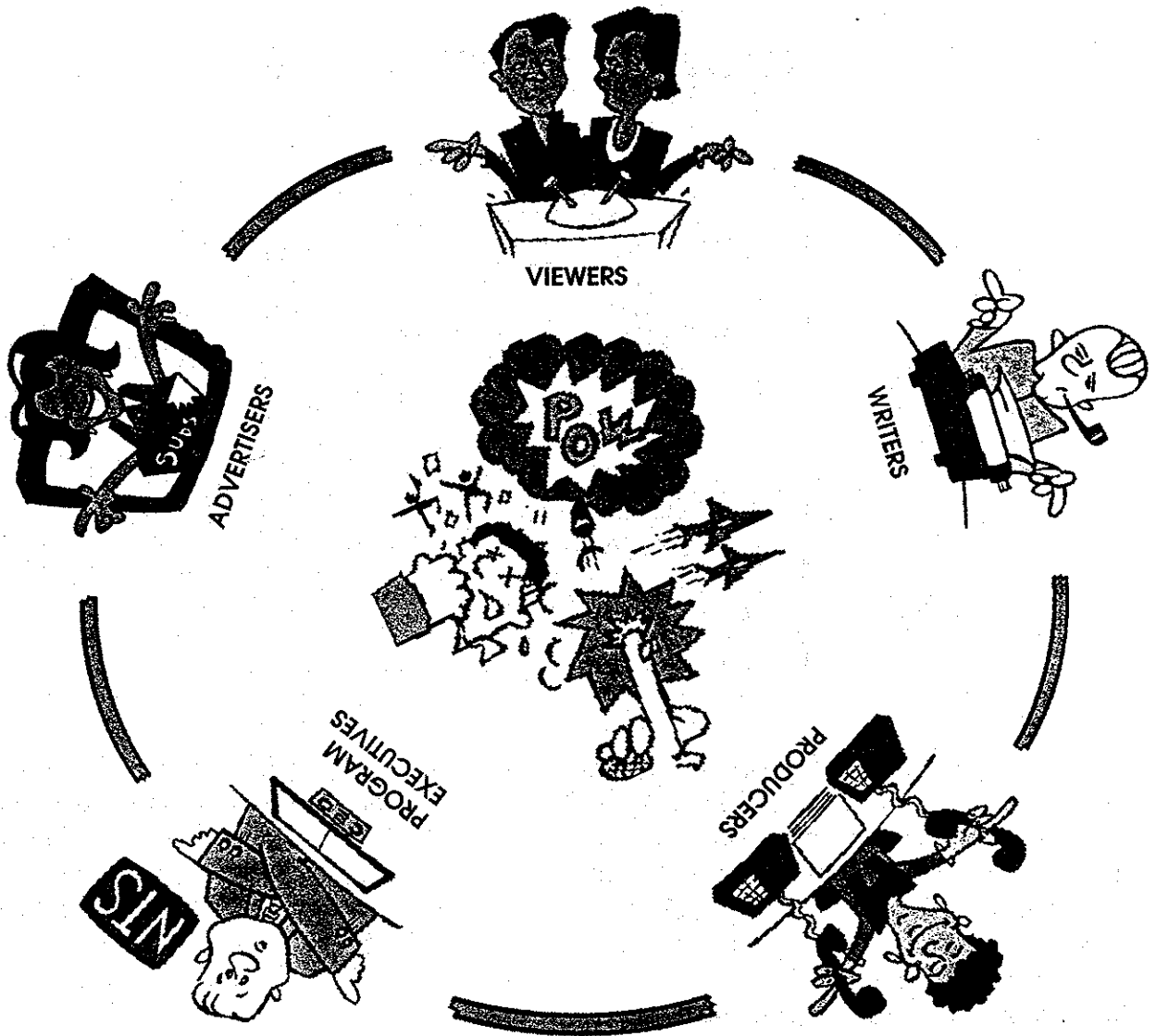
### **Reflection**

Third, move beyond *the way media are* to *how we want them to be*. This requires considering media within the context of the philosophical tenets, ethical values and democratic principles that we accept as guides for our lives, both individually and collectively.

### **Action**

Finally, formulate constructive action ideas — ideas that will lead to personal changes in your own media choices and viewing habits, as well as working for change locally, nationally or globally. Every Action, of course, leads to new Awareness... and the spiral of learning continues.

# The Circle of Blame



No responsible person maintains that violence on TV is desirable for individuals or for society. How then, does it happen that the media continue to be filled with increasing amounts of violent imagery?

Through examining the "circle of blame," we can better understand how a complicated web of ratings and economics combine to create a system in which each party feels powerless because "somebody else" creates the problem:

- Viewers blame those who write and create the shows;

- Writers/directors say the producers require violence in programs in order to get them financed;
- Producers blame program executives for demanding "action" in order to get ratings.
- Program executives say competition is brutal; and blame the advertisers for pulling out unless a show gets high ratings;
- Advertisers say it's all up to the viewers!

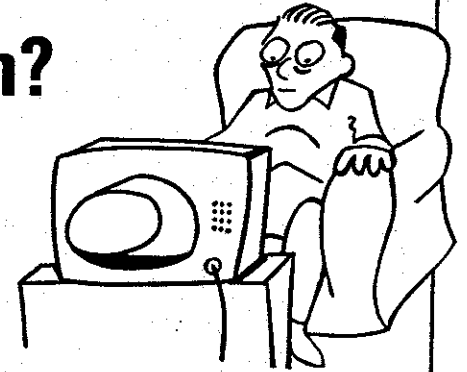
It's time to stop the circle of blame and recognize we all share responsibility for the culture we are creating and passing on to our children.

Thanks to Mary Megee, producer of *On Television: The Violence Factor* for the original idea of the "circle of blame."

#2 ARE ADS AND TV A NEW RELIGION?

## Are Advertising and TV Our New Religion?

In *The Codes of Advertising* author Sut Jhally claims that television-watching is a compelled activity—that is, we are drawn to it; we don't always watch just because we want to—we watch because we *have* to. This suggests that television-watching has a religious dimension: perhaps it fulfills important needs in us—needs that we are not even aware of.

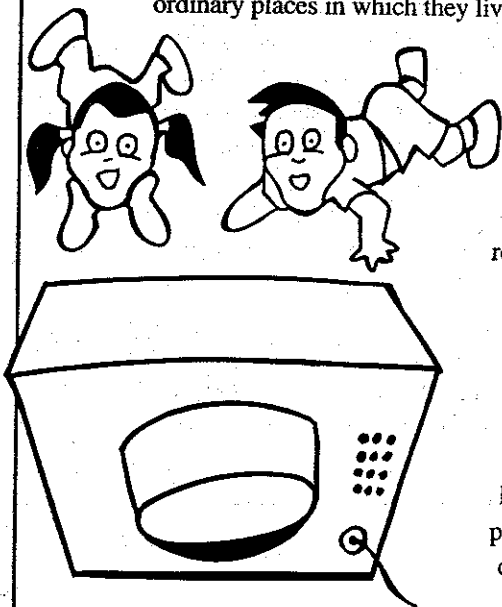


Jhally suggests that the most important need that TV meets is our desire to know where things come from. In the days before the industrial revolution, for example, our shoes were made by the cobbler down the street and our shirts may have been made by our mother. Thus, these objects had value to us: We appreciated them because we knew who made them and we were thus connected intimately with both the things and the people.

Today, however, the only way we know anything about most objects is through advertising. Advertising teaches us to want Bugle Boy jeans just because they have an “in” image. We don't really know anything else about them. Nor do we feel we need to. We buy them just because of the Bugle Boy image.

**Says Jhally:**

“Advertising has increasingly come to provide answers to those same questions that religion often raises. How does the world work? Where do I fit in? What is a moral life? But, I don't think advertising is a religion in the same way that Catholicism or Islam are religions. You can be a Christian and at the same time practice the religion of advertising, because they operate at two different levels. The religion of advertising really operates at the level of the everyday. It's close to the kind of religious practice called fetishism in West Africa, in which people believe in God but also worship magical spirits that populate the ordinary places in which they live.”



“Those spirits can influence, not the big problems, but the small problems. They can influence the questions about how to get better, how to heal yourself and how to enhance your sexual, romantic and family lives. That's where advertising fits in. It creates a world in which goods come to play all kinds of magical roles in our daily interactions. The religion of advertising is based upon a magic in which goods instantly cure us of all kinds of ailments...instantly make you attractive or act as a love potion that will attract the opposite sex to you. Buying the right good can act as a sort of passport into a magical world of consumption, a magical world of style. It's really a strange world in which very attractive promises are made of the most elaborate sort to do with tomorrow. They're not promises to do with later on down the road, or next year, but now. Advertising promises that products can do all kinds of magical things, and then it uses the magic of communication to make us believe this other magic.”

# What Everyone Should Know About Media

## • Five Core Concepts of Media Literacy •

### 1. All media are constructions.

Media are carefully manufactured cultural products. They create an emotional experience that *looks* like reality, but of course is not — because it is all made up by one person — or many people — who select this picture and edit out those words or include this scene while another 20 versions land on the cutting room floor. Media are not “real” but they affect people in real ways because we take and make meaning for ourselves out of what we see, hear and read.



### 2. Media use unique “languages.”



Media language is unique to each form of communication — whether newspapers, TV game shows or horror movies. The language works because it is used over and over as a shorthand for conveying intended meanings: scary music heightens fear, camera angles convey relationships, headlines signal significance. Understanding the grammar, syntax and metaphor system of media language heightens our appreciation and enjoyment of media experiences, as well as helps us to be less susceptible to manipulation. The best way to understand how media is put together is to do just that. *Media production* and *media analysis* are the two sides of the media literacy coin.

### 3. Audiences “negotiate meaning.”

No two people see the same movie or hear the same song on the radio; even parents and children do not see the same TV! Skillful readers and viewers examine different stylistic features of a media product and pay careful attention to the context in which the message occurs. This concept turns the tables on the idea of TV viewers as just passive “couch potatoes.” We may not be conscious of it but we are constantly trying to “make sense” of what we see, hear or read. The fundamental skills of media literacy allow us to be *conscious* and *deliberate* about what we experience and, more important, how we interpret media experiences in our lives.



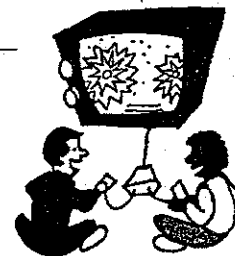
### 4. Media have commercial interests.



Media are ad-driven businesses. Newspapers lay out ads on their pages first. The space remaining is devoted to news. Likewise, TV programs don’t exist simply to entertain us. They are there to ensure that a certain number of viewers will be watching when a commercial comes on. Corporate sponsors pay TV stations based on the number of people they expect to be watching. Advertisers want specific kinds of viewers (for example, children) who have the ability to spend their money on the advertisers’ products (toys). TV programs are designed so that the right people will watch when the commercials come on. Maybe it’s not the way it ought to be — but, in truth, most media are provided to us, as researcher George Gerbner says, by private corporations with something to *sell* rather than by the family, church or school with something to *tell*.

### 5. Media have embedded values and points of view.

Media, by their very nature *being* constructed, carry a subtext of who and what is important — at least to the person or persons doing the constructing. There are no value-free media and never will be. This presents a challenge for all of us to learn to “read” the media critically in order to uncover the value messages that are embedded in them. Only then can we judge whether to accept or reject these messages as we negotiate our way each day through our mediated environment.



FOR A FREE CATALOG OF MEDIA LITERACY TEACHING RESOURCES, CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-226-9494