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Theme: Responding to Racism and Stereotypes in Media

According to a 2008 survey by the Pew and MacArthur foundations, of the 97% of teens who play video games, 21% play Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs). Some commentators argue that these group game environments encourage players to shed offline identities and socialize with players of widely varying backgrounds. If there is any conflict in the game space, the expectation is that it will take the form of friendly competition. Such assumptions reflect a utopian vision of new media technologies. In fact, players do not leave their values, attitudes and beliefs at home, but take them into game spaces with them. Harmonious intergroup relationships are not guaranteed, and media literacy education is needed to help youth develop greater awareness of the social dimensions of their participation in such games.

An instructive case in point is the response of North American players to the entry of Korean players in Blizzard Entertainment's sword and sorcery game "Diablo II" (2000). To ensure that the game could not be hacked or modified by players to give them an unfair advantage, Blizzard designers created a client/server model, in which all the important information and valuable assets—such as player inventory, gold, skills and player levels—would be stored on Blizzard servers, while other game-play data would be run on the player's machine. In addition, players were required to choose one of four "realms," closed servers which stored and secured data for each player. Players could interact with other players on their realms, but not with players on other realms. The realms were designated geographically—U.S. West, U.S. East, Asia and Europe—and intended to accommodate player interaction based on time zone.

"Diablo II," like most multiplayer games, had its own economic system. Players traded valuable items, exchanged gold and loot, and even developed a system of currency built around a game item called the "Stone of Jordan." Early on in the game, U.S. West players gained a reputation for highly competitive gaming, signaling that these were the players likely to have the best items for trade. As a result, the economy of U.S. West eventually grew at a greater rate than other realms.

"Diablo II" was popular enough to generate a black market, and the most highly prized items on the realms were traded for real money on eBay. In 2001, Blizzard released "Diablo II" in Korea, and, in addition to gaining a reputation for "serious" gaming, Korean players conducted a significant portion of black market transactions. A primary market soon emerged in which Korean traders sold virtual items to U.S. buyers. Not surprisingly, the development of the black market resulted in a dramatic increase in players on the U.S. West server. The number of players on the U.S. West realm became a source of tension as the server began to overload on a frequent basis. Excessive "lag" interfered with game-play, caused players' avatars to die, and even caused players to lose items or equipment.

In response, U.S. players began a campaign against Korean players, both inside the game space and outside on web sites and forums. Using tropes of national borders and boundaries, they began joining games with Korean players with the sole intention of disrupting gameplay and chasing Korean players off the server. Some adopted racist or anti-Korean character names.

In “KPK, Inc.: Race, Nation and Emergent Culture in Online Games,” USC Annenberg School of Communication professor Douglas Thomas focuses his analysis on the Korean Player Killers, Inc., one of several groups devoted to driving Korean players off the U.S. West server. On the KPK website, Korean players were de-humanized with references to food such as “FoK” (Forces of Kimchi) and “CEA” (Cabbage Eaters Anonymous). Korean players’ limited proficiency in English, and the inscrutability of some of their online utterances led to the designation “WOA” (Way Out of Area).

The KPK website pilloried the game play of Korean players: “As all Diablo II players know all too well, they are famous for trying to ransom items that you accidentally drop, filling up the screen with repeated calls for ‘Item plz!’ or ‘Gold!!!’” (168). With such stereotypical depictions, KPK members cast themselves as a representative group of decent, civilized players with the moral authority to mark Korean players as savage and uncivilized.

In the final analysis, the label “WOA” is the most significant. KPK members principally objected to the fact that Korean players were on the server. Presence itself constituted ‘bad behavior’ which ruined the game experience for self-described “innocent Western players” (167). The implications of KPK’s actions and rhetoric are far-reaching. Thomas comments, “The question at stake is one of manifest destiny: not only who owns the space, but who owns the *rights* to the space. KPK, Inc, embodies a kind of American exceptionalism that its members use to justify their extremism” (168). Thomas argues further that the aggressiveness of their campaign is characteristic of ‘race patriotism,’ the theory that more ‘civilized’ cultures have a right to expand, and that race often serves as a marker of ‘political fitness.’ (ibid.).

One can imagine the reaction of some U.S. teens and ‘tweens’ and as they enter a game such as this one. On the one hand, the demands of a group like the KPK might seem reasonable. Too many players from ‘outside of area’ have clogged the server, and it appears that most of these are Korean players. What’s the harm in giving them an incentive to leave? On the other hand, struggles against racism might seem like a thing of the past to them, occupying the pages of textbooks and illumined by grainy black-and-white archival images. While they may be familiar with personal conflicts in online spaces, especially social media, they may have more difficulty recognizing that an online conflict between self-described ‘civilized’ insiders and uncouth outsiders can echo historical struggles between dominant and subordinate groups, and may even be rooted in current conflicts in the outside world. Students need to develop skills in social and cultural analysis as they participate in the globalized media environment of the 21st century, and media literacy education is a primary avenue for teaching these skills.

In this issue of *Connections*, we examine the ways in which stereotypes and prejudice surface in media, and highlight the way in which media literate students, educators and citizens can become agents for positive social change. In our first research article, we explore dehumanizing representations of the Other in media, from animal metaphors in mainstream newspapers to the fear of “disease” used to justify genocide. In our next article, we investigate the use of stereotypes in television news, and argue that local television news programming tends to deplete the social capital of the communities they are pledged to serve. We have some great resources to recommend, and in our MediaLit Moment, your middle and high school students will have a chance to ‘strike back’ at annoying tweets and posts which exhort them to support a cause by conceptualizing an engaging message of their own.

Research Highlights

Responding to the Dehumanization of the “Other” in Media

In both times of war and peace, we construct images of strangers and adversaries as “Others,” and, as Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills argue, dehumanization has been the most persistent mechanism for systematically constructing an image of those we consider to be entirely different from ourselves. In verbal and visual metaphoric systems, the Other is linked to objects, animals, dirt and germs. Even in a post-civil rights era, images circulate through our media which mark groups such as immigrants and racial or ethnic communities as less than human. In news stories, for example, illegal immigrants may be described as being “hunted down,” “baited,” “lured,” or “ferreted out” (“The Dangers of Dehumanization,” 49).

The dehumanizing image of the Other is a frequent—if not necessary--precursor to violence.

Shortly before the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the Hutu newspaper *Kangura* asserted that “A cockroach gives birth to another cockroach,” just as the “evil of the Tutsis will reproduce itself for as long as Tutsis exist” (quoted p. 50).

In an American context, seven years of research into the relationships between media coverage, anti-black violence and judicial inequities led UCLA social psychologist Phillip Goff to conclude that dehumanizing images indeed have material consequences: “Words and pictures, far from harmless, can be the very instruments of dehumanization necessary for collective violence—regardless of how innocently they are intended” (quoted p. 47).

From the vitriolic epithets on hate sites to headlines such as “Ridding Islam of the Cancer Within,” the tide of dehumanizing representation sometimes appears to be unstoppable. How does one respond? In general, the First Amendment guarantees a right to speech, even if it offends, and judicial precedent enforces a clear distinction between words and violent actions. The available avenue for action is to “counter” representations of the Other. As a result, education and advocacy become indispensable tools for a civil society, and media literacy becomes an essential skill for social change.

Media organizations have few legal responsibilities regarding harmful speech, but they do have moral obligations to address it. Take, for example, Canadian media coverage of the 1984 trial of Ernst Zuendel, who had been arrested for distribution of hate literature. Zuendel denied the existence of the Holocaust, and had published his views across multiple media to a large body of audiences across North America and Europe. Holocaust denial arguments were unknown to most Canadian audiences at the time, and Canadian news media capitalized on the sensational elements of the developing story. In addition, Canadian media interviewed Holocaust-denying witnesses whom Zuendel had called to his defense, and some of these were attributed as “experts” in media reports. These interviewees were given the same objective treatment as others, implying that the reality of the Holocaust was a matter open to debate (Cohen-Almagor, “Freedom of Expression vs. Social Responsibility”).

While journalists generally have a responsibility to deliver news factually and without moral comment, moral neutrality is hardly justified when such latitude is given for expression deriding the victims of genocide. At times such as these, news media do have a responsibility to help audiences understand the legacy of history, and to call attention to the false statements and flawed reasoning used to construct the image of a hated Other. Media literate citizens need to remind news media that they should be partners in an evidence-based effort to deconstruct such images.

Finally, it's important to note that the prejudice embedded in media representations of the Other is not always obvious, and media literacy skills are needed to recognize the intentions of speakers. Take, for example, the website "martinlutherking.org." This site regularly appears third or fourth in Google listings for the search term "Martin Luther King." The URL of the site conveys an impression of legitimacy to the casual viewer. Links such as "Civil Rights Library" and "Bring the Dream to Life" suggest that the site is devoted to the remembrance of King's legacy. For audiences knowledgeable about the civil rights movement and the recent history of white supremacy movements in the U.S., clicking the links on the site unravels the true intent of the site. For example, clicking the link "Jews and Civil Rights" brings viewers to a chapter of David Duke's autobiographical book *My Awakening* on the topic of "Jews, Communism and Civil Rights."

In "Race, Civil Rights and Hate Speech in the Civil Rights Era," CUNY professor Jessie Daniels reviews the results of a series of experiments and interviews with students who are asked to search for information on King. According to Daniels, even "high-achieving and Internet-savvy" adolescents had difficulty determining whether the martinlutherking.org site was a credible source of information. When one seventeen-year-old student clicked on a link titled "King's Dissertation," she remarked, "Oh, and this looks good. I like this because it's got primary sources" (140). In fact, the link was to an essay supporting the charge that King had plagiarized parts of his dissertation.

Daniels issues a call for digital media literacy which includes "the ability to read text closely and carefully," and "critical thinking skills required to decipher web authorship, intended audience, and political agendas." These are all essential media and information literacy skills. Daniels' further recommendations are worth discussion. He argues that the critical media literacy skill of examining media from multiple perspectives is not sufficient to the task of distinguishing between legitimate civil rights sites and "cloaked" hate sites such as martinlutherking.org, and argues that students must also become well versed in "literacies of racism, antiracism, and social justice" (149).

Television News and the Social Capital of Communities

In our last article, we mentioned the moral responsibilities which journalists have to their audiences. News media have social responsibilities to communities of audiences as well. In *Hate Crimes and Ethnviolence*, Howard Ehrlich, a social psychologist and former director of the Prejudice Institute in Baltimore, devotes a number of chapters to an examination of the ways in which news media bind or attenuate the social fabric of the United States.

Television news coverage of crime is an area of considerable concern. In 2004, a Gallup study reported that homicides accounted for one to two tenths of one percent of all arrests in the U.S., whereas 28 percent of crimes reported on television news that year were homicides. Moreover, most studies of local television news report that two of every five minutes of content is devoted to crime coverage (46). Findings such as these provide additional support for George Gerbner's work on "cultivation theory" in the 1960s and 1970s. Gerbner argued that television programming, including news, cultivated a belief among frequent viewers that the world was a dangerous and violent place (the "mean world syndrome").

Unfortunately, non-white groups figure predominantly in crime stories on television news. For example, in a 2002 case study of local television news programming in Orlando, Florida, 1 in 8 African-Americans and 1 in 4 Hispanics appeared on screen as crime suspects, compared to 1 in 20 whites (75). If the "mean world" theory holds true for most television audiences, the fear prompted by television coverage of crime stories will inevitably distort intergroup relations.

One method to reduce media stereotyping and promote social cohesion is to emphasize the public service mission of local television news, primarily through reporting on local issues and the realistic representation of community members who are involved. Yet most local television news programming trends in the opposite direction. A 2003 study of 45 TV stations found that less than one half of one percent of news programming was devoted to reporting on local public affairs. The virtual absence of such stories is due in part to the small slice of time available for them. News stories typically comprise 12 to 15 minutes of a 30 minute broadcast, while the bulk of the time is committed to commercials, program promotion, weather, sports and cheery banter between the anchors (78).

But the lack of local issues reporting is not just a matter of time constraints. Local television news reporting focuses on spectacles, including crime, fires, disasters, and severe weather. In a study of 2,400 local news broadcasts by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, spectacular events were the lead stories in 61% of broadcasts (78). Such stories are often chosen as leads because they are likely to draw greater numbers of viewers, and thus are likely to enhance the station's prospects for advertising revenue.

Coverage of spectacular events doesn't just occupy a space in the "news hole" which could have been devoted to public affairs, however. It de-contextualizes the reporting of news. Ehrlich offers a hypothetical scenario to illustrate the problem posed by 'fragmented' coverage of local news. If a fire occurs in a low-income housing project, local television news coverage

would likely center on the fire itself, and include little or no discussion of how the structural condition of the apartments might have been a contributing cause, or how the actions (or inaction) of local contractors or public housing authorities might have been a causal factor. Any discussion of how and why these projects came into existence would be unlikely as well. Resource constraints also come into play. Assigning an investigative team is risky, time-consuming and expensive. Keeping stories to less than a minute is much cheaper than committing staff to lengthy research assignments (77-78).

The damage which news media stereotyping inflicts on a community may be difficult to quantify, but Ehrlich usefully conceptualizes the costs of stereotyping in terms of social capital. Ehrlich defines social capital this way: as a resource of communities based on trust in institutions and individuals, social participation, cooperation and mutual aid. Central to theories of social capital is the argument that fewer social pathologies (e.g., drug addiction, chronic homelessness) are present in communities where social capital is high. Some of the evidence for this argument is compelling. In 2002, the World Bank published the result of a 14 year study on the relationship between trust and homicide rates in 39 countries. In their conclusion, the authors write that “. . .the prevalence of trust in community members seems to have a significant and robust effect on reducing the incidence of violent crimes” (quoted p. 85).

It may be difficult to imagine how local television news reporting actively contributes to the social pathology of communities, but with their scant attention to issues which have a substantial impact on the lives of local residents, it is clear that local television stations do little to preserve the social capital of the communities they are pledged to serve. On a more positive note, all of this suggests that youth media production has a vital role to play in communities across the United States. Just a handful of students who are trained to recognize the social implications of the selection, reporting and framing of local news stories can significantly enhance the health of their neighborhoods. By providing tools for critical thinking and campaigning for resources, media literacy educators can help students re-build the communities in which they live.



Heading to NAMLE in July?

Attend the *State of the Field* session on Friday, July 12 at 4pm. CML's Tessa Jolls will be on the panel along with several other media literacy leaders. We highlight a few sessions for your consideration:

[State of the Field \(Poke, Prod, Provoke\)](#)

Friday 4:00

Paul Mihailidis, Emerson College

Rhys Daunic, The Media Spot

Belinha DeAbreu, Fairfield University (CML Fellow)

Renee Hobbs, University of Rhode Island

Tessa Jolls, Center for Media Literacy

Erin Reilly, University of Southern California

The media literacy field is being pushed, pulled, thrown, torn, launched, shoved, and kicked. Want to know where it really is going? Come to this state of the field roundtable-style panel to find out where we are headed.

[Cultivating Empathy \(Workshop\)](#)

Saturday 10:15

Carol Tizzano (CML Fellow)

Lynne Azarchi, Executive Director, KIDSBRIDGE of the Tolerance Museum at The College of New Jersey

Research identifies a crisis in empathy, kindness, and respect among youth and effective media literacy education can help turn this around.

Drawing from the research, 'evidence-based' practice, and success of a variety of educators (media literacy educators as well as art and diversity educators), we will explore how media literacy education offers a roadmap to foster many of the traits that support healthier students, families, and communities. This map is built upon the solid foundation of NAMLE's Core Principles of Media Literacy Education and the Center for Media Literacy's Five Key Questions and Core Concepts.

Our aim is to increase the positive attributes of empathy, kindness, and respect through practicing media literacy education with young people.

Researching the Roots of Our Field: Historical discourses of the U.S. media literacy movement in Media & Values magazine, 1977-1993
Saturday 2:15

Michael RobbGrieco

(An online archive of Media&Values magazine is contained in the CML Reading Room, along with a history of the media literacy field, <http://www.medialit.org/media-values>.)

The contemporary media literacy education community has many strands, each emphasizing (or neglecting) certain aspects of media literacy, and privileging certain educational goals over others. Current debates over what constitutes the field of media literacy, purposes of media literacy, and best practices in media literacy education proceed without the benefit of a history of the ideas, practices, and discourses that have produced the field. As a springboard to an interactive discussion about implications of this study for our current field and the importance of further research into media literacy history, this presentation shares research findings about the role played by Media & Values magazine in the U.S. media literacy education movement 1977-1993. By looking closely at the full run of Media & Values magazine, 63 issues from 1977-1993, this study offers insight into the development of media literacy concepts and practices, as well as the conversations between discourses from media studies, education, and the public sphere that have produced the field of media literacy education.

CONSORTIUM
for **MEDIA LITERACY**

Uniting for Development

About Us...

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

<http://consortiumformedia literacy.org>

Resources for Media Literacy

Game Developers Conference Covers New Ground in Education, Representation of Women

The annual Game Developer's Conference (GDC), held in San Francisco from March 25 to 29, provides a unique glimpse into the latest media tools and education applications used by the artists, animators, programmers, engineers, and advocates who fuel the video game industry.

One of the most interesting trends at GDC was an increasing call for female representation both in game content and in the industry itself. Anita Sarkeesian's videos deconstructing the "Damsel in Distress" trope used in video games (tropes are a shorthand for metaphorical concepts in narratives) caused her to be the target of a massive hate campaign by gamers. Her TED talk covers the hate directed at her and her work, which included death threats, the hacking of her YouTube channel and e-mail addresses, and a game dedicated to punching her in the face.

Tropes vs. Women in Video Games: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6p5AZp7r_Q

Anita Sarkeesian's TED Talk hosted by the Paley Center for Media:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZAxwsg9J9Q>

Regarding women's participation in the video game industry, an entire panel discussing the hashtags on female representation such as #1reasonwhy (about sexism and other challenges female game developers face) and #1reasontobe (reasons why they stay) is available at the GDC Vault. Brenda Romero's talk on her beginnings in the game industry and her criticism of using scantily clad "booth babes" to market games at industry conventions provides some great insight. To view her talk, follow the link below and find Welcome – Brenda Romero under Chapter Selection. Click the grey box and drag it down to scroll.
(<http://www.gdcvault.com/play/1018080>).

The two-day GDC Education Summit primarily focused on tools and techniques to teach students industry-relevant experience. The successes of Carnegie Mellon and USC's graduate-level game design programs have inspired many schools to adopt game curricula and to research videogame-related content and issues. Some schools such as Digipen and Full Sail University distinguish themselves by what game industry skills they teach students, while UC Irvine's program calls for a media studies requirement.

The last panel of the Education Summit was the Game Educators Rant, during which four professors ranted about the state of game education and what they would like to see improved:

- Ian Schreiber (Savannah College of Art and Design) criticized some of the negative

aspects of gamer culture as evidence of bad design. He also discussed the need for a framework to teach students to think about what perspectives and points of view their work conveys, and why this could help industry attract and retain more female participation.

- Jose Segal (DePaul University) examined how teaching about popular games didn't necessarily teach students the skills behind good game design. There is a need for games that are good for teaching how games are constructed, and he emphasized that social conventions were a great way to inspire in-class discussion and explore game design. For instance, a discussion about loneliness might allow students to think of ways for players to experience it in a game, and then use the player's experience to make a statement about a real life problem, such as how the game "Loneliness" (<http://www.kongregate.com/games/jordanmagnuson/loneliness>) uses loneliness to make a statement about depression in South Korea. This is referred to as using game mechanics as a metaphor.
- Clara Fernandez-Vera (MIT) talked about the missteps new colleges make when creating a game program, emphasizing that just one dedicated professor cannot cover the number of diverse, specialized skills needed to make games.
- Lastly, Michael Mateas (UC Santa Cruz) talked about research in interactive media, and the need for better computational media research and models.

More information on GDC can be found at www.gdconf.com

Conference coverage by Peter Jolls

Resources for Teaching and Research

Teaching Democracy: A Media Literacy Approach. Developed and written by Jeff Share, Ph.D., and Elizabeth Thoman, Founder, Center for Media Literacy. Published by the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy (a project of the Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles)

As Share and Thoman write, "Students who learn to think critically about media messages, who value diverse points of view, who challenge the popular interpretation by contributing their own understanding and insights will have the skills needed to ensure the continuation of democracy—and literacy—in the 21st century." *Teaching Democracy: A Media Literacy Approach* is a multi-faceted guide designed to help teachers foster the development of those skills. The guide includes sections on the philosophy, principles and concepts of media literacy; engaging students in a self-driven process of inquiry with media texts; purposes and benefits of media analysis and production; strategies for applying the Key Questions and Core Concepts of media literacy to media analysis; and a guide to implementing "Dilemmas and Decisions," media production projects designed to help students think critically about media and practice the art of public dialogue. Sample videos of past "Dilemmas and Decisions" projects can be accessed at the National Center for the Preservation of Democracy at: <http://www.ncdemocracy.org/>. The *Teaching Democracy* guide is available for free at this site, and at the CML site, www.medialit.org

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Ehrlich, Howard J. *Hate Crimes and Ethnoviolence: The History, Current Affairs and Future of Discrimination in America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009.

Steuter, Erin, and Deborah Wills. "The Dangers of Dehumanization: Diminishing Humanity in Image and Deed." *Images That Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media*. Eds. Susan Ross and Paul Martin Lester. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011. 43-54.

Now in its third edition, *Images That Injure* is one of the most comprehensive and accessible introductions you will find on this important topic.

Thomas, Douglas. "KPK, Inc.: Race, Nation and Emergent Culture in Online Games." *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media*. Ed. Anna Everett. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008. 155-174.

Recommended Resources:

Article 19 www.article19.org

Article 19 takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is dedicated to freedom of expression, unfettered access to information and freedom of the press. From their headquarters in London and six satellite offices around the world, Article 19 staff "work on behalf of freedom of expression wherever it is threatened" through monitoring, publishing, advocacy, campaigning, setting standards and litigation. The website may be useful for the media literacy educator and researcher.

Erjavec, Karmen, and Melita Poler Kovacic. "'You Don't Understand, This is a New War!' Analysis of Hate Speech in News Web Sites' Comments." *Mass Communication & Society* 15.6 (2012): 899-920.

This research is focused on news sites in Slovenia, and observes how the comments sections of these sites are a common venue for hate speech, and more often than not, these comments are only tangentially related to the content of the articles.

Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. *The Language War*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. In chapter 3, "Political Correctness and Hate Speech: The Word as Sword," UC Berkeley linguistics professor Robin Lakoff takes readers on a humorous and illuminating tour of the clashes between liberals and conservatives over the politics of language in the post-civil rights era.

Meddaugh, Priscilla Marie, and Jack Kay. "Hate Speech or 'Reasonable Racism?': the Other

in Stormfront.” *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 24.4 (2009): 251-268.

When most listeners hear the phrase “hate speech,” they visualize words that are lobbed at someone like a molotov cocktail. But it can be argued that most hate speech consists of reasoned (but not rational) discourse motivated by prejudice. This article discusses the various ways in which Don Black’s *Stormfront.org* applies the rhetoric of the “Other” to build support for the white supremacist cause.

Museum of Tolerance (www.museumoftolerance.com)

Teachers will find several resources on the MoT site to help prepare students for a visit to the museum, and to reflect on what they’ve experienced and learned. Media literacy activities include interpretation and analysis of archival photos and Nazi propaganda posters, and an activity in which students analyze evaluate legitimate and revisionist websites dealing with the Holocaust and the civil rights movement.

Slagle, Mark. “An Ethical Exploration of Free Expression and the Problem of Hate Speech.” *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 24.4 (2009): 238-250.

UNC Chapel Hill Journalism professor Mark Slagle conducts a clear, sober ethical assessment of the conflict between First Amendment advocates and critical race theorists who argue that hate speech should be punishable by law under the Fourteenth Amendment.

Med!aLit Moments

Some You 'Like' and Some You Don't

“Like’ if you support this brave little boy’s struggle against cancer!” Anyone who spends time on social media is likely to encounter a post like this. How does one react? It seems cruel and heartless not to respond, and yet the author of the post does little to establish a personal connection with her audience. Activism in social media spaces has its limitations as well. When audiences receive tweets, posts, petitions and polls from multiple organizations, choosing a cause may be more like picking a flavor or a brand. How empowered do audiences feel as they click, like, pin, or sign? Are they engaged enough to do more? In this MediaLit Moment, your students will articulate why some appeals are less than inspiring, and they’ll develop a concept for a message they believe is likely to motivate audiences to support a cause.

Have students develop a concept for a media message which promotes a cause

AHA!: Some messages make audiences want to walk away!

Key Question #3: How might people understand this message differently?

Key Question #3 for Producers: Is my message engaging and compelling for my target audience?

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Key Question #2 for Producers: Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity and technology?

Grade Level: 6+

Materials: For sample non-profit ad: computer, high speed internet connection, data projector. For construction activity: paper, pencil, imagination.

Activity: Ask students for examples of annoying or uninspiring social media posts that asked them to contribute to a cause in some way. If they need any prompting, you can mention the scenario presented in the introduction to this activity. What made the posts or tweets so annoying? Direct students’ attention to Key Question #3, especially if there are any differences of opinion. Direct students’ attention to Key Question #2. Did it have to do with the media format and/or the techniques the producer used? Students may conclude that a good pro-social message can be hard to find.

Next, ask students to evaluate a Greenpeace PSA which encourages audiences to take action against the increasing impacts of global warming on the Arctic. Did they find it compelling? Does it motivate them to become involved? Why or why not?

<http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/en/multimedia/videos/A-Homeless-Polar-Bear-in-London/>

Next, divide students into pairs or groups and ask them to sketch out a concept for an engaging message promoting a cause. They may choose any media format they wish. Ask students to include a call to action in the message. When the activity is complete, ask them to

explain their creative choices. How is the message likely to attract audiences to the cause?

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, © 2002-2013, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>