

## (Re) Introduction to Media Literacy

### Who Am I?

When asked the simple question “**Who are you?**” most people respond by stating their name. But who you are is far more than just your name. This question is really asking you to **describe your identity**.

**Identity** can be defined as:

- A person’s **sense of self**
- A set of **characteristics, behaviours, and personality traits** that distinguish one individual from another
- The **unifying link** or connection between your private and social self

The simply worded, yet complex, question “**Who are you?**” is really asking:

- **What defines who you are?**
- **What makes you unique** and gives you an identity that is different from that of everyone else?
- **Have you always been who you are today?**
- **Who and what has influenced your identity?**
- **Is the identity you present always the same, or do you have multiple identities?**

### Influencing Factors

Various factors have shaped who you were yesterday, who you are today, and who you will be tomorrow. Some of these influencing factors are:

- **Your family and friends**
- **Your cultural or religious background**
- **Your experiences**
- **The norms and expectations of society**

Each of these factors plays a role in **molding you** and transforming your **sense of self**, the identity you present to the outside world, and the person you are.

### Mirror, Mirror on the Wall ...

Everyone has heard the saying “**Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,**” but when it comes to the world of **media and advertising**, is this saying still relevant? Do you, as the viewer and consumer of media messages, decide what defines beauty, or has the media already made that decision for you?

*Pause for a moment and think about the people presented in the advertisements you see every day on television, in magazines, on billboards, or on buses.*

- Do the images that inundate you daily present **people of different shapes, ethnicities, and ages?**
- Or is there **only one shape, one ethnicity, and one age group** being portrayed most of the time?
- If **certain groups are not being represented, is there an implied message being sent?**
- And if so, **what is that message?**

Whether you realize it or not, your **exposure to media productions and advertising influences your self-image and your self-esteem.**

When you question, critique, and challenge the images and messages portrayed in the media, you are demonstrating your ability to be **media literate.**

**Being media literate means:**

- Having an **informed and critical understanding** of the nature of the media
- Understanding the **techniques used in media productions** and their **impact**
- Having the ability to **engage with mass media in an active, critical way**

## Media Terminology

Before beginning your exploration of media and their impact on identity, quickly review some important terminology:

- **Media** are the means or delivery methods of communication, including **audio, visual, audiovisual, print, and electronic** methods.
- **Mass media** refers to communication targeted at a **very large audience**, such as **television networks, magazines, newspapers, movies, and the Internet.**
- **Media texts** are the **products communicated through a medium**, such as stories, news, information, and messages.
- **A medium** is **one specific communication vehicle**, such as **radio, television, or the Internet.**

## Key Concepts for Analyzing Media

### 1. All Media Are Constructions

- All media texts are **created** by someone for a **particular purpose and effect.**

- Every aspect of a media text—**people, appearance, music, dialogue, text, lighting, and setting**—is carefully considered to **portray a specific message** and create a **desired representation of reality**.
- Example:
  - **Crime scene dramas** use **foreboding music and dark shadows** to create suspense.
  - **Romantic scenes** use **soft lighting and instrumental music** to evoke emotion.
  - In reality, **people's lives are not set to a predetermined soundtrack**.
- **Media-Savvy Viewers:**
  - Recognize that images in media texts **are not accurate depictions of reality**.
  - Instead, they are **constructions or representations** designed by corporations, political groups, or other organizations to influence the public.

## 2. Media Texts Contain Beliefs and Value Messages

- **Media producers and advertisers** convey **predetermined values and beliefs** to audiences.
- **Advertising** presents **idealized or symbolic** images of:
  - **Beauty and success**
  - **The "perfect" life**
  - **Highly sought-after qualities**
- **Advertisers try to make you "buy into" these values.**
- **If you don't see yourself represented** in these images, ask:
  - **What message is being sent?**
  - **What is being implied about identity and value?**
- **Media-literate viewers:**
  - Examine **media texts critically**.
  - Question **beliefs, messages, and ideals** that advertisers and producers present.
  - Step back and **decipher the underlying purpose** of the media message.

## 3. Each Person Interprets Messages Differently

- **Personal identity shapes media interpretation.**
- An **advertisement, commercial, TV show, or movie** is interpreted **differently** by each viewer.
- Interpretation depends on:
  - **Personal needs and fears**
  - **Recent experiences**
  - **Racial and sexual attitudes**
  - **Family and cultural background**
  - **Morals and values**
- This is why a **group of people can all view the same television show** yet have **very different reactions** to it.

## 4. Media Have Special Interests (Commercial, Ideological, and Political)

- **Most media productions are created by businesses and focused on profit.**
- Decisions about:
  - **Content** (what is said or shown)
  - **Technique** (how it is presented)
  - **Distribution** (who buys and how they access it)
  - Are made with **profit and influence in mind**.
- **Media control is held by a small number of powerful individuals.**
  - They decide **what is watched, read, and heard**.
  - Media influences **politics and social change**.
  - The **values and opinions** of a few shape **what information people receive**.
- **Critical Viewing:**
  - Be **aware of who is behind the media**.
  - Consider their **perspective and motives**.
  - Ask **what they hope to gain from the messages they produce**.

## 5. Each Medium Has Its Own Language, Style, and Techniques

- **Marshall McLuhan's concept:**
  - **"The medium is the message."**
  - Each medium (**TV, newspaper, radio, internet, etc.**) has specific elements that **shape how a message is delivered and perceived**.
- **Example: The same news story presented on TV vs. in a newspaper**
  - **TV News:** Uses **images, video clips, and interviews** for **immediacy and emotion**.
  - **Newspapers:** Provide **more background and analysis** but lack the **visual and real-time aspects** of TV.
  - **Each format presents the same event differently.**
- **Media messages shape perceptions of identity, beauty, and success.**
- **Example: Beauty Advertisements**
  - Advertisers claim you can **achieve the "ideal look"** by buying their product.
  - Without **critical awareness**, these messages can lead people toward **goals that don't align with their true values**.

## Final Takeaway

- **Media messages are powerful.**
- **Be critical and aware of how they shape your identity, beliefs, and choices.**
- **Always ask: Who created this message, and why?**