

## HOW TO BE A CRITICAL MEDIA VIEWER

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- Remember that all media images and message are constructions. Ads and other media messages have been carefully crafted with the intent to send a very specific message.
- Question why certain messages are consistently present in mainstream media and why others are absent.
- Look closely at the appearance of media images: the colors, the editing, the camera angles, the appearance of the people (are they young and happy?), the location, and the sound or type of text.
- Compare media images and portrayals of your surrounding environment with your reality. Make a list of the differences so that you are more aware of them.
- Investigate the source of the media images you encounter. Who owns the network that your favorite television show is on? What else does that corporation own? How does the ownership structure of media affect the news and entertainment we receive?  
**Media Ownership Chart:**  
<https://www.freepress.net/ownership/chart>
- What other stories about the world exist than those you see in the media? (About relationships, health, peace & war, materialism, gender, finances, violence, globalization, sex, love, etc.)

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# ACTIVITIES FOR CRITICAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

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Try these activities on your own or with a class, family, or group.

## ➤ **What's in a Media Meal?**

- Imagine you are walking down the street and an invisible person offers you a plate of food.
- What questions would you ask before you decide whether or not to eat it? Make a list of the questions.
- Now apply these same questions (or questions you adapt from these) to media content.
- What did you learn? What questions do you think are most important to ask when encountering media messages?

## ➤ **Focus on Media Ownership**

- Examine Free Press's "Who Owns the Media?" chart at: <https://www.freepress.net/ownership/chart>
- What effects does the ownership structure of media have on the news and entertainment we receive?
- How does consolidation affect diversity in viewpoints and people we see in media?
- How might criticism (of the "status quo," corporate practices, the power elite, capitalism, etc.) be stifled within such a structure?

## ➤ **Deconstruct a Stereotype**

- Think of a stereotype commonly applied to a particular group (ex: "Latinas are sensual and sassy"; "Muslims are extremists"; "Gay men like fashion" etc.)
- What are some examples from media that reinforce this stereotype?
- What are some possible consequences of perpetuating this stereotype?
- What do you know from your own experience that counters this idea?
- Where, in media or elsewhere, do you see alternatives to this stereotype?

## ➤ **Count the Ads**

- Think about all the ads you see and the various places you see them. Make a list of them.
- Estimate the number of ads you see on a given day, while watching your favorite show on TV, or during an hour of internet use.
- Keep a tally of all the ads you see during the chosen timeframe.
- Compare the number with your estimate. What did you learn?

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- Are there things you do in everyday life to avoid ads? Why do you do these things? What are some examples of ads you cannot avoid?
- **Critical Eye on an Ad**
  - Pick an ad that stands out to you or that you encounter frequently.
  - What product or service is the ad selling?
  - What is the ad saying to you? How was it constructed to appeal to you?
  - Do you or would you actually use the advertised product or service? Why or why not?
  - Where and when do you see this ad? Why do you think this is?
- **Press Pause on Product Placement**
  - Watch your favorite show or movie on demand or in some form that allows you to pause.
  - Watch the clip and pause it each time you see a product logo displayed.
  - Make a list of how many times you hit pause and which products you identified.
  - Research product placement. How much do companies pay on average for product placement? How do you think product placement affects the story lines of movies and shows?
  - For more information, see *Behind the Screens: Hollywood Goes Hypercommercial*.
- **Spotlight on Digital Advertising**
  - Visit a social networking site or open a mobile app you use frequently.
  - Do you see ads? What do they look like? What do they promote?
  - Are the ads labeled (“advertisement”; “sponsored”; “promoted”; “paid”)?
  - Why do you think these ads are the ones you see?
  - Can you spot any ads that are not immediately recognizable as ads? How do you know they are promotions?
  - How does your participation contribute to the ad’s message and/or reach?
  - What data are you prompted or required to share in using the platform? (For example, your contact information, location, access to your contacts, etc.) Why?

*For more critical media viewing activities, see MEF discussion guides, handouts & downloads at <http://www.mediaed.org/resources>.*