

Says a high school teacher, “Because our kids are getting so much of their information from the electronic media, we need to teach them how to read this just as critically as we have taught them to read print. Why isn’t media literacy a required course?”

What One Teacher Does

In our *Smart & Good High Schools* study (see p. 2), we interviewed a teacher who’d been teaching media literacy and video production for 10 years. In response to unexpectedly high student interest, she now offers several sections of an introductory course and two advanced courses with internships working with cable TV stations, web developers, and newspapers.

These courses have attracted a wide

ANALYZING MEDIA

1. Who created this message and why are they sending it?
2. What viewpoints are represented?
3. What is left out of this message?

—Center for Media Literacy
<http://www.medialit.org/>

range of students, including many who were previously unmotivated and low-achieving. Once in the course, they typically show improved school attendance. This teacher explained why she first got involved in teaching media literacy:

The social norms of young people are profoundly influenced by the media. I want them to really think about what’s being conveyed. I want the girls, for example, to think about how the ads are telling them to dress and be sexually appealing to boys. I want them to think about, “What kind of a person do I want to be?”

Creating Commercials

This teacher’s introductory media literacy course begins by having students view TV commercials. They are asked to consider, “What’s the message?”; “What psychological appeals are used?”; “What images and audio are being employed?” Then they must make their own commercials, one which is truthful and one which is not. The teacher commented, “After viewing their commercials, we discuss: Is it ethical to manipulate someone to buy something they might not

Teaching Media Literacy and Combatting Pornography

by Tom Lickona



need or a product that doesn’t live up to its claims?”

The course then involves students in creating high-quality public service announcements for local cable TV stations. Next, they turn to critical analysis of TV news, compare the different spins put on the same story by different networks, and examine how television reporting is very superficial compared to that of a good newspaper. They study television interviews. The teacher explained:

First, I have them interview each other on a social or political issue that’s in the news. We discuss what makes for a good interview—a fair interview? How can an interviewer bias an interview? Then we look at actual TV news interviews and ask:

- What questions are asked—or omitted?
- Is the person interrupted or cut off?
- How is the camera being used?

They see that it’s easy to make someone look bad—by an unflattering close-up or by cutting them off before they have a chance to explain their position.

She described a field trip to see a live CNN show in which panelists analyzed the presidential election and responded to students’ questions submitted prior to the program. “Some of the students’ very good environmental questions were not chosen. So I said, ‘Let’s investigate the vested interests of those who own and operate CNN.’”

She said she can tell from students’ conversations that the course affects them:

They’ll come into the class saying to each other, “Have you seen the such-and-such commercial—can you believe it?” They look at TV and movies in a more analytical way. I’ve had parents tell me their student is now constantly saying, “That’s not true,” and “That’s manipulative,” during TV programs at home.

Porn is Harmless? Think Again

Pornography has become pervasive in American society, but research is only beginning to document its impact on children, adolescents, and adults. In October 2015, the *American College of Pediatricians* (<http://www.acped.org/>) issued *The Impact of Pornography on Children*, presenting the results of a compre-

hensive review of the scientific literature on pornography. In youth, the consumption of pornography is linked to increased rates of depression, anxiety, violent behavior, early sexual debut and sexual promiscuity, higher rates of teen pregnancy, and a distorted view of relationships.

“*Porn is Harmless? Think Again*,” (MercatorNet, October 28, 2015) reports research showing that children exposed to pornography may become obsessed with acting out adult sexual acts that they have seen and are more likely to sexually assault their peers.

College students who viewed pornographic material for six weeks, compared to a control group, became interested in more extreme forms of pornography, considered rape less of a crime, and were more accepting of sexual infidelity. In another study, men who consumed pornography were more likely to believe that women cause rape or enjoy sexual assault.

Teenage sexting has been linked with using pornography. Pornography use by adolescents and young adults also fosters the belief that sexual promiscuity is normal. Among adults, pornography is linked to a higher rate of divorce. The more a woman perceives her husband or boyfriend to be using pornography, the more negative the woman rates their relationship.

Recent brain research has found that pornography consumption is associated with decreased brain volume and lower functional connectivity. The neural changes in the brains of pornography users are similar to the changes seen in brains of persons addicted to cocaine, alcohol, and methamphetamines. (See “*Porn is Harmless?*” for citations.)

Clearly, if we’re serious about media literacy and young people’s character development, we can’t turn a blind eye to pornography. We can ask students to reflect on the research findings regarding pornography. We can also ask them to read, and write in response to, Sean Covey’s nonsense discussions of pornography in his books, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and *The 6 Most Important Decisions You’ll Ever Make*.