

# Media Literacy Survival Guide

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**How to Survive in a Society Setting You Up for Failure**

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Crombie 11

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## Chapter I: Art

Art, whether through sculptures, drawings, paintings, and countless other mediums, in all time periods and cultures have shown its traces of violence, hatred, objectification, and discrimination. This is not to say that *all* pieces were constructed out of these themes, however many famous “masterpieces” can be seen as excellent examples of values and sentiments of an earlier era where such attitudes were acceptable. Even today’s modern art movements have shown examples of these themes with the intent to provide new and exciting ideas that may be considered hateful or degrading. Whether



hidden or blatant these messages often influence the viewers’ perception of what “fine” or “sophisticated” art truly is, shaping the audience’s ideas of their world around

them. Precisely because art is such a powerful force in human culture, it is but a stronger reason to provide information about how it shapes us whether outright or unconsciously.

Women especially, of all ethnicities, shapes, and sizes have seen vicious exploitation through popular art movements. Some of the most famous and valuable art in the world has had damaging undertones that would suggest how women should



behave. In a word: more promiscuously. Women's bodies have been under constant scrutiny as painters, sculptors, and more, try to shape the "ideal woman" for the world to see in the guise of "celebrating a woman's body".

Moreover, Art has also been a particularly dangerous tool against religious minorities and people of color. Especially in times of war, differences between religion, race, and gender have been exaggerated to isolate certain people as the "enemy group." Take for example the Jewish people during WWII, or really any group labeled "undesirable" by the Nazi party during that time. Propaganda through the use of insulting posters and photos were popular in order to spread hate-filled messages to the public. The same can also be said in America's history where African-Americans and other racial minorities have been victimized for centuries. Not to mention all the different religious groups that have been targeted over the years and decades of homophobic slander.

So while art has provided the human culture with so many positive ways of self-expression, it must be remembered how it can be used in the exploitation and degradation of people all over the world.

**WIPE THAT SNEER OFF HIS FACE!**



Dr. Seuss

BUY

**WAR SAVINGS BONDS & STAMPS**

## ***Chapter II: Television and Movies***

Throughout the years movies and television have been notorious for insulting the public's intelligence by promoting ideas and images that funnel women and minorities into a certain "type". Women on television all seem to fit certain categories: the bitter, man-hating spinster, the catty and jealous bitch, the ditzy air-head, and the over-sexualized tramp. These stereotypical roles seem even more pushed when you look at reality T.V. shows. These categories are simplistic at best and downright insulting when it comes to these "unscripted" programs. Writers are hired specifically to create drama and make women look like downright idiots on these shows, more often than not casting them to compete with each other over a man or material gain.

Take VH1's "Flavor of Love" series as an example. Here women are called by insulting nicknames such as "Deelishis," "Hottie," "Krazy," or, "Thing 1," and "Thing 2," and must compete in humiliating



challenges, all to win approval and dates from famous rapper, Flavor Flav. Not only do the contestants shock viewers with ridiculous behavior but never is it expected that the relationships will really last after the season finale. The show only pushes stereotypes about America's minorities. African-American women are made out purposely to look incompetent and sexually promiscuous by the show's writers. Flavor Flav himself is supposed to represent how the typical man is supposed to act. These women and Flavor are made to look like complete fools on

public television all for the entertainment of laughing viewers.

The same could be said for contestants on the super popular dating show: The Bachelor. Women are shown to be backstabbing, catty monsters that would do anything for a man's attention. Drama is purposely created to reign in more viewers hoping for a glimpse of these women acting out. It also pushes the stereotype that only rich white men and attractive white women have a shot at finding true love. Notice that few minorities are casted on the show and in all its seasons no non-white girl has ever won. The show's creator Mike Fleiss defended its predominantly white cast saying,

"We always want to cast for ethnic diversity; it's just that for whatever reason, they don't come forward. I wish they would." They don't come forward? So 85,192,273 people (The approximate population of minorities in America) just decided not to try out period? That's a whole 27.6% of our country's population without representation. Although let it be said that none of the show's bachelors have ever married the winner of their seasons in any case.

But its not only young 20 and 30 somethings who are caught on camera pulling ridiculous stunts. Take for example TLC's "Toddlers and Tiaras" where small children are transformed into "beauty queens" through the excessive use of makeup, hair pieces, tanning, and often times skimpy clothing. Hours and hours of rehearsals and grooming are required to transform these young girls into mini adults or perhaps more accurately *dolls*. Some



hardly resemble children at all once they're all dressed up, instead made to look like scandalous prima-donnas. It begs the question whether these 6 going on 26 year olds may suffer any kind of identity or self-esteem issues later on in life. Surely girls taught from the start that it's alright to be judged by your appearance may have difficulties separating the real world from the pageant world.

Another notorious show known for distorting reality is MTV's "Jersey Shore." Here a group of rowdy young people hit the clubs and, whether consciously or not, send out messages the excessive drinking is no big deal. In fact, that's what made the eight cast-mates famous in the first place: their obnoxious behavior where the women embarrass themselves for laughs and the men routinely humiliate other girls based on their looks. Nonetheless the Jersey Shore has amassed a great following which may be telling evidence on what kind of behavior today's T.V. viewers prefer to spend their time watching.

Television today and in the past has been an enormous tool in shaping how society views the world around them. Although the examples I've provided are specifically "reality" T.V. shows, the same kind of trends and behavior can be traced in today's motion picture movies. By pegging behavior that should make any one embarrassed as "reality" we are really harming our own selves in the long run. Are the messages we send that suggest the only way a woman can be successful in television is to act in a way that demeans and degrades her reality? And that in order to be a man you must act like a misogynist or a bigot? When we as a nation are famous for producing films seen around the world don't we have a responsibility to tell the truth?

## **Chapter III: Pop Culture, Celebrities, and Trends**

As we can all attest to, Pop Culture often drives what's acceptable in our society. These, often painful, trends can leave a powerful impact on people of all ages, classes, and ethnicities. These influences can be so strong that people will shape their behavior, attitudes, and appearances around what may be popular at the time.

Celebrities especially can be immense figures that people will seek to emulate at all costs, especially in westernized societies. Millions of women every year spend time and money on products that will allow them to resemble those they see in the media. But they are not alone. Men too feel pressure in order to be good enough for the public eye, often zeroing in on their physical appearance or the items they own in order to gain attention.



The idea is that through looking and behaving like these select few, that person will attain social acceptance. The constant quest for being “cool” is one that drives millions here in the U.S. It’s even grown its own countercultures with their own “being uncool is cool!” message. Yet these only act as subgenres of the same toxic, consumerism driven idea.

Trends, in America especially, often change in rapid succession whether by decades, years, or even

seasons. The amount of effort it would take to be in fashion at all times is colossal. And one that many people strive for. There are magazines, how-to books, videos, online instructions, and even television shows, all dedicated to helping you, figure out what's cool and what's not.



It affects all groups with varying interests. Not any one clique is immune to the effects of trends and Pop Culture, and as such we should all be aware of its power over us.

## ***Chapter IV: Music***

And what can you say about music that hasn't already been said? We all know the power that music holds over people. It can create happiness, spark uneasiness, ignite anger, and much more. Music is one way that people connect to the world around them. Its how some people make friends and it's as varied as we are as a human race.

So it goes with out saying that with great power...comes great consequences. Just turn on any radio station with any type of music and you have people trying to convey a certain message. Whether it's a first love, heartbreak, injustice, friends, or just music to make music, there's someone on the other end trying to tell you *something*. One of the most difficult things can be trying to decode those messages into something that makes sense.

A plethora of genres can contain messages that can be considered harmful or offensive. Although Rap and Hip Hop have traditionally been pigeonholed as the stomping ground of arrogant bigots and sexist playboys (mostly because this genre contains a myriad of examples) these messages are present in other popular types of music: Pop, Rock n' Roll, and one of Rock's spinoffs Heavy Metal, being a few. More often than not violence, sex, drinking, drugs, and other vices are glorified in songs and music videos. Here's one good example:

OH NO! The fight's out  
I'ma 'bout to punch yo...lights out  
Get the F\*CK back, guard ya grill  
There's somethin' wrong, we can't stay still  
I've been drankin' and bustin' two  
and I been thankin' of bustin' you

Upside ya m\*therf\*ckin' forehead  
And if your friends jump in, "Ohhh gurrlll",  
they'll be mo' dead

-Ludacris' "Move B\*tch

Such a loaded message of violence towards a woman should be cause for concern over his psychological health. And because of music's accessibility it can reach all people of various ages. It is often these types of songs that gain massive popularity for their scandalous lyrics or meanings. This poses a problem when the constant stream of music we hear on radios, on television; imprint these careless and possibly unhealthy behaviors.

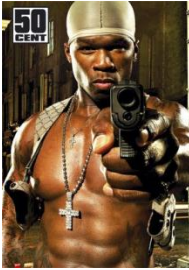
Now this is not to say that extreme censorship should take place. Adults should be responsible for themselves and can produce music how they please. But when these songs crossover to affect children and young adults who do not have that same responsibility, sense of self, or inner strength, and behave accordingly, then its possible that what may have been intended solely for entertainment has become harmful.



Now that of course may fall into the responsibility of the parent however the chain is far more complex than that. For music producers and record companies their objectives are simple: to make money. If advertising raunchy or hateful music on store shelves and T.V. channels aimed for young children is going to sell more records, and often times it does, then so be it.

With that kind of mindset coming from the suits of big corporations how are parents supposed to block every single negative influence on their kids? They can't.

Musical entertainment can be impactful on women especially. You can see for yourself on CD shelves across the country the kind of ways in which the female sex is portrayed. Whether from some generic "gangsta" rapper's rhymes of "Bitches and ho's!" or perhaps some fluffy-headed pop star in a sparkly miniskirt singing songs with no sustenance, or a heavy metal shredder screaming about how he wants to kill his girlfriend, what are women and girls supposed to think about themselves?



As a musician who cares about the people who may listen to their music, you'd think they'd contemplate the meanings in their lyrics a little more; how they may be perceived by audiences of all types. Of course there are always exceptions. Countless talented musicians whose messages try to steer away from harsh insults at a woman's looks or intelligence. These words are for the many who couldn't care less about how their messages may be detrimental for the future success of girls and women everywhere and how holistically they are contributing to a global attitude.

## **Chapter V: Advertisements**

Since their inception advertisements have been, by definition, a way to sell you something. Always used as a method to get you to purchase something from the respective company or corporation. But while ads in the past may have been relatively straightforward: an article in a magazine or newspaper; a flyer, today they have become quite sophisticated. Companies will search high and low for ways to push their products in more new and exciting ways. Whole teams are pulled together to design concepts, film commercials, put together photographs, and more.

But while companies try more and more to create the best ad, sometimes we as consumers do not even realize we're trying to be bought. At times only our subconscious is able to pick up the subtle hints of being persuaded. They're small but persistent pokes that never seem to end. Attempting to keep you unsatisfied with what you have and always trying to make you want more and more and more and more.

But sometimes these pokes are not so subtle. Companies are known for their intentions to shock you or perhaps make you laugh, that way you'll remember



their name and product longer. Ever wonder why you can remember funny commercial jingles and not so much the meaningful stuff like a chemistry term? They're meant to stick in your head till kingdom come or at least until you give in to and buy their product.

Sometimes the methods they use to shock you turn insulting. Racial slurs, homophobic remarks, and sexist photos are all just tools in an advertiser's toolbox in order to fool us. While back

in the day the primary goal was to make women look inferior, many ads today promote severe, sexual violence towards them. And while women are made to look like fools; laughable playthings, the companies' power is just as strong over men, by shaping how a "real man" is supposed to act. It's almost scary how complete strangers can trick us into changing what we want through a few seconds of a commercial or a few photos in a magazine.

The constant attack of ad after ad and command after command can be exhausting. Especially when many of the messages they're trying to send out tend to make cruel remarks about social "norms," for instance how people should look or behave. Just check out the Dolce and Gabbana ad to the right. The only message being shown here is gang rape. Yet the company is regarded for its "good taste" and sophistication.



Common statements advertisers try to make are that you are or *should* be unhappy with the broken/outdated/obsolete product that you do own; that in order to be "with it" or "in the loop" you should make the switch as soon as possible. This seems to enforce that what you are and what you have are not good enough, but can be *if* you change. And in following America's quest for cool what do you think the majority of the public is going to choose to do?

It's all tied together: the movies, music, television, clothing, iPods, Macs, beauty products, Nike tennis shoes, everything. All a push to change you into something *else*. When the people forget who they are in

order to change into something they believe will help them become- what? More popular, wealthy; known? More successful? Perhaps its some ancient survival mechanism adapted to modern consumer times. In an era when commercialism is at an all time high, profiting on social changes and fads: indie kids, punks, sports stars, and skinny as a rail actresses, were all really just the same. While individualism is pushed to the nth degree were all just sheep being led to slaughter, whether we look and act the same or not. We're all just surviving in a society setting us up for failure.

## **Chapter VI: A Word for Women (and Men!)**

So what are we going to *do* about it? If any of you are angry about the things you've read, well, you should be. Contrary to popular belief, injustice is rampant and it takes all of forms, against men and women of any kind. The fact that we are being lied to on a daily basis for the pure reason of greed and pride should make the average person furious. The fact that women are stripped down and humiliated daily, that people of color are made to look unintelligent or incapable through the media at every turn, that men are forced to adopt roles of macho men in order to be acceptable. And above all, that we *fall for it!*

We brush off feminism as a crazy movement for overreacting man-haters. We dismiss the signs of young girls eating less, forcing themselves into revealing clothes, miserable, all for the sake of being successful; all because the few men who control the world say that's what has to be done.

And instead of questioning this toxic system we make excuses for it. "Oh, the women on those shows signed up for it!" Yes, but it was our society that taught them it was acceptable to behave that way. "If you don't like that kind of music don't listen to it!" How can we not? It's literally everywhere, and it teaches our kids and us how to look at one another. Or worst yet, "It's not like we can do anything about it anyway..."

As a matter of fact we can! We all have the power to think and speak for ourselves. So why let that power go to waste and watch this world get more and more out of control by the minute? By taking responsibility into our own hands; calling out the corporations that control our food, entertainment, and

products, we can reclaim some of that power that we've lost so long ago. We cannot keep making excuses for stupidity especially when it's the issue it is today. Be aware of the messages thrown at you day to day. When are we going to say enough is enough with portraying racial minorities, religious groups, and members of the LGBT community in the media in a negative and stereotypical light? Why should we have to remind producers that that kind of casting is wrong?

Men, look at how girls and women just like your mothers, sisters, aunts, friends, are being treated. Do you still feel like it's not a big deal? And that issues like battery and rape are someone else's problem, not yours? Look at how society tells you how to behave. Is that who you really are and how you really want to be?

And women, how long are we going to endure all the idiocy? When exactly did we give up our power? How long is it going to take for us to wake up and take our lives into our own hands; start deciding how *we* want to look like, behave, and to act on what *we* believe?

So while society may have other plans, we can still become empowered individuals. So let's get to work!

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