

Chapter 11

Media Literacy

Media literacy is like the dog in “The Wizard of Oz” who pulls back the curtain to reveal the man behind the Wizard image.

— Frank Baker, media literacy expert

Media literacy helps people ask questions about what they watch, see, hear, and read. It helps them critically assess how the mass media normalize, glamorize, and create role models for unhealthy lifestyles and behaviors, such as smoking. Media literacy involves examining the techniques, technologies, and institutions involved in media production; critically analyzing media messages; and recognizing the role that audiences play in attaching a meaning to those messages. The idea behind media literacy is that teaching people to recognize how a message tries to influence them will lessen the impact of that message. On a broader level, media literacy can be viewed as a form of protection or “inoculation” against unhealthy behaviors shown in the media.

This chapter gives an overview of media literacy and how it fits into a counter-marketing campaign. An extensive resources section at the end of this chapter lists media literacy curricula and other planning aids.

Media Literacy and Youth

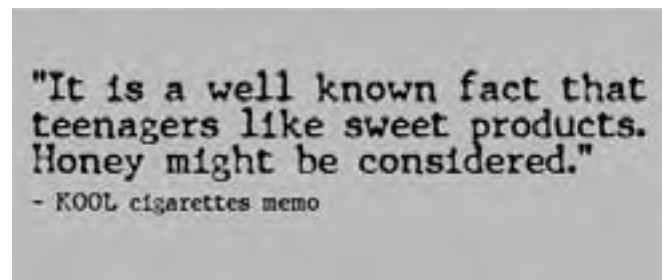
Although some media literacy efforts target adults, most focus on young people and teens—and with good reason. Consider the following data:

- Adolescents spend 24 hours per week watching television—twice as much time as they spend in school over the course of one year (Kaiser Family Foundation 1999; Strasburger et al. 2000).

In This Chapter

- Media Literacy and Youth
- Essential Ingredients of Media Literacy
- How Media Literacy Complements Counter-Marketing
- Implementing a Media Literacy Program
- Evaluating Your Efforts
- Resources

- Thirty-seven percent of children ages 6 to 11 and 55.8 percent of teens ages 12 to 17 have TV sets in their bedrooms (Kaiser Family Foundation 1999; Strasburger et al. 2000).
- Eighty-two percent of adolescents use the Internet (Kaiser Family Foundation 1999; Strasburger et al. 2000).
- Adolescents listen to about 40 hours of popular music per week (Kaiser Family Foundation 1999; Strasburger et al. 2000).
- Studies show that many parents don't see their children's media habits as a cause for concern.
- A landmark study in the 1980s showed that as many young children recognized Joe Camel as they did Mickey Mouse (Fischer et al. 1991).
- Camel's market share among underage smokers rose from 0.5 percent to 32.8 percent after the Joe Camel campaign was introduced (DiFranza et al. 1991).



Youth love learning about media. Their culture and much of their identities are immersed in media. Teaching media literacy is an excellent way to attract their attention and to build their interest in health and smoking issues.

Couple these facts with the tobacco industry's advertising and marketing practices:

- In 2000, the industry spent \$9.57 billion to advertise and market tobacco products (Federal Trade Commission 2002).
- Although no cigarette advertising appears on TV and radio, tobacco images are pervasive. They appear in movies, on clothing, at sporting events, and in other places. One study from Dartmouth College and Dartmouth Medical School showed that smoking in movies is linked to adolescents trying their first cigarette (Sargent et al. 2001).

Consequently, media literacy has developed a large following among U.S. educators and health educators interested in youth. All 50 states have some requirement for media literacy in their education standards (see <http://www.med.sc.edu:1081/statelit.htm>). Furthermore, many tested curricula are available to teach about media literacy on tobacco and alcohol use.

Media literacy programs have shown some success. For example, research shows that media literacy programs addressing alcohol ads can help children become more informed; can diminish the perception that "everybody" is using alcohol; can encourage children to be more critical of the alcohol industry's advertising techniques; and can reduce intentions to use alcohol over the short term (Austin 1997; Slater 1996). The programs may even help to improve long-term cognitive resistance to

| <i>What Media Literacy Can and Can't Do</i> | |
|---|---|
| <u><i>Can</i></u> | <u><i>Can't</i></u> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help change attitudes ▪ Teach people to recognize how messages are designed to influence them ▪ Contribute to changing long-term behavior | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Change long-term behavior in the absence of other program elements ▪ Replace classes or programs that explain tobacco's impact on health |

alcohol ads (Slater 1996). Qualitative research and the experiences of media literacy experts indicate that, if executed well, these programs can change people's knowledge, attitudes, and/or behaviors.

Essential Ingredients of Media Literacy

Media literacy has four main concepts.

All media:

- Are constructed
- Have codes and conventions
- Convey value messages
- Have financial interests

Media literacy includes these activities:

- Critically analyzing media messages
- Evaluating the source of information
- Discussing issues of bias and credibility

- Raising awareness about how media techniques (such as the use of color, sound, editing, or symbolism) influence people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors
- Producing messages using different forms of media

Media literacy has four stages:

1. The first stage is *becoming aware* of why it's important to manage the amount of time spent with TV, videos, electronic games, the Internet, films, and various print media.
2. The second stage is *learning specific skills* of critical viewing, such as analyzing and questioning what's in the "frame" (the perspective brought to the subject), how it's constructed, and what may have been left out.
3. The third stage is *exploring deeper issues* of who produces the media we experience and why. Questions to explore include: Who profits? Who loses? Who decides?

Key Questions in Analyzing Media Messages

- What story is being told?
- From whose perspective is it presented?
- How is it captured?
- How is it edited?
- What type of music is used?
- Whose voice do we hear?
- What is the message?
- Who created the message and why are they sending it?
- Who is speaking?
- Whose viewpoint is not heard?
- Which lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in the message?
- Who owns the medium?
- What is our role as spectators?

4. The fourth stage is *creating and producing one's own media messages* to counter the intended message. For example, a cigarette ad could be recast to reflect tobacco's effects on health; the ad could then be used against the industry. At this stage, the participant's role is that of an advocate.

How Media Literacy Complements Counter-Marketing

Media literacy programs can complement and reinforce a state's counter-marketing program. Educating people about advertisers' motives and about the techniques that advertisers use

to influence attitudes and behaviors helps people to analyze and to decipher tobacco industry marketing efforts and also increases the effectiveness of counter-marketing efforts.

Media literacy programs are easy to integrate with other counter-marketing components. For example, most media literacy programs include a module in which youth develop messages in response to industry marketing. This part of the program can be promoted through public relations and incorporated into grassroots efforts to educate the entire target audience about how the tobacco industry has tried to influence youth.

Although media literacy programs can be an effective component within any counter-marketing effort, they're most likely to be effective when the counter-marketing programs use an industry manipulation or repositioning strategy. (See Chapter 7: Advertising.) Florida's "truth" campaign used media literacy strategies to motivate young people to actively participate in tobacco control activities. In fact, many of Florida's original ads are believed to have helped the viewing audience become more media literate by exposing the role of ad agencies and marketing groups in creating positive images of tobacco.

Media literacy often leads to media advocacy efforts. In many cases, once youth are sensitized to deceptive marketing messages and practices, they're eager to work to counter those messages. At the community level, many community advocates use media literacy techniques to educate the public about the influence of tobacco ads in convenience stores and at sporting events.

Media literacy is also an effective tool for educating legislators and health policy decision makers. Because it's based on educational theories and addresses issues beyond tobacco control, media literacy can be viewed as a less charged critique of industry practices. It can be a useful way to educate policy makers about why the tobacco control movement needs effective policies for youth marketing, youth access, and clean indoor air.

It may be difficult to convey the direct impact a well-crafted media literacy program can have on youth. The best way to convince your state

tobacco control advocates of the power of media literacy is to invite them to attend a media literacy session or to conduct a session designed especially for them.

Implementing a Media Literacy Program

Once you decide that media literacy supports your counter-marketing program's goals, you can begin your search for the right strategies and activities. Many media literacy programs and curricula are available; do some research to find the ones that will work best with your program. (See Programs and Resources section at the end of this chapter.) Here are the general steps for implementing your program:

- **Talk to other state tobacco control program staff about how media literacy fits into their counter-marketing programs.** Many states have used locally developed and tested programs and teaching tools. Ask them about their experiences with media literacy programs and experts.
- **Develop a strategy for media literacy in your counter-marketing plan.** Apply strategies that work with your target audiences. Media literacy is an obvious match for youth prevention programs. If your focus is on industry manipulation, you can use media literacy strategies with adults to deconstruct the tobacco industry's public relations ads and youth smoking prevention messages. Make sure that you have the resources, staff, and time to invest in media literacy as a program strategy. In addition, you'll



need to find one or more experts who can implement media literacy programs in your state. (See the Resources list at the end of this chapter.)

- **Learn about media literacy programs and resources.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Office on Smoking and Health, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Education Association's Health Information Network, and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention jointly developed *MediaSharp: Analyzing Tobacco and Alcohol Messages*, a tool kit for educators, youth group leaders, pediatricians, and others who work with

youth ages 11 through 14. The kit includes worksheets, suggested activities, references and resources, and a video module to use across the learning modules. In addition, several Web sites offer information about media literacy organizations and resources for media literacy. Experts around the country also can help you design a state program. (See the Resources list at the end of this chapter.)

- **Track who is using the program and how it is working in different settings.** Once you've chosen a program and implemented it, be sure to evaluate your efforts. Evaluation will enable you to identify and correct any problems with the program.

Here are several tips from media literacy experts for launching your effort:

- **Include links to media literacy Web sites on your state tobacco control site.** These links will make media literacy tools readily available for teachers, health educators, and others who may be interested in working on tobacco control.
- **Visit state and local departments of education, health, or alcohol and other drug services.**
 - Learn about your state's education standards on media literacy.
 - Determine the department's interest in tobacco media literacy and find out who is addressing the issue.

- Make tobacco media literacy resources and materials available to the department.
 - Work with the department to create professional development opportunities in media literacy.
 - Provide access to teaching tools and resources, and offer to train teachers, health educators, or other staff.
 - Introduce media literacy programs and teaching tools at state and local health and education conferences.
 - Find state media literacy experts to speak to students, parents, or teachers or at teacher training programs.
 - Train people to present media literacy programs at schools and other youth gatherings.
- **Identify youth organizations, religious groups, community hospitals, pediatricians, and other community groups open to addressing the issue of media literacy with their members.** If your counter-marketing program addresses youth prevention, this can be an important addition to your media efforts.
 - Present information on media literacy to the organization leaders.
 - Determine whether they're interested in offering media literacy programs.
- Make resources and teaching tools available.
 - Offer to train staff from the organizations or offer to provide staff to conduct the programs for them.
 - Encourage organizations to publish or display artwork, ads, or other media literacy products developed by youth.
- **Approach local commercial and public television stations, education writers at newspapers, and cable stations with distance-learning access channels.**
 - Offer experts to talk about the concepts behind media literacy.
 - Showcase classes or organizations that are involving youth in media literacy programs.
 - Broadcast ads or other media messages developed by young people.
 - Develop a distance-learning program on media literacy for a cable channel.
 - Propose media literacy articles for newspapers with youth pages.
 - **Involve parents.** Help parents learn about media literacy programs so that they can reinforce and sustain media literacy at home. Inform them about school or community programs through parent resource groups such as the Parent Teacher Association.

Evaluating Your Efforts

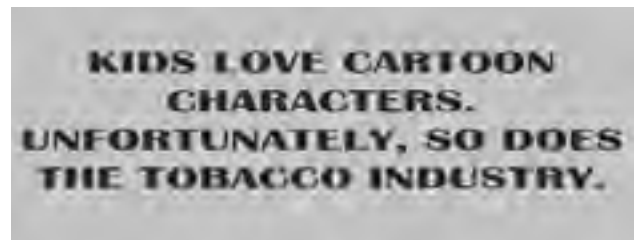
Evaluating your media literacy efforts will help you report to stakeholders and will give you valuable insights on improving your approach. Fine-tuning your approach using evaluation results can help you increase the public's ability to analyze tobacco advertising, its motivation to counter the tobacco industry's goals, and its involvement in the counter-marketing program. Some smokers may tell you that what they learn in media literacy justifies their addiction (i.e., they're victims of industry manipulation). If this happens, don't think that your program is having an adverse effect; instead, consider this argument a "teachable moment." You may need to present additional information to these individuals, including information on health effects and cessation services.

Evaluation will help you answer these types of questions:

- How is the funding for media literacy being used?
- Was your media literacy program implemented the way it was designed?
- Was the audience attentive and engaged throughout?
- Were there significant changes in the audience's awareness, attitudes, perceptions, intentions, and behaviors?
- How can you use the evaluation results to adjust your media literacy efforts and be more successful?

How To Evaluate Your Media Literacy Efforts

You may want to review Chapter 5: Evaluating the Success of Your Counter-Marketing Program, which addresses evaluation in depth. Base your approach to evaluation on how the results will be used and by whom. Once you have determined how the evaluation results will be used, you can develop the most effective questions, plan a strategy for getting answers, and then provide the information to those who need it in a format that they can use. Involve the intended users and allow them to provide input from the start about the type(s) of information that they need from the evaluation.



To help manage the implementation of your media literacy efforts—and to respond to inquiries from your stakeholders—you must monitor and track your activities. As discussed in Chapter 5, you'll need to complete or obtain logs and other documentation tools regularly to track the activities linked to your plan's goals and objectives. For example, if one objective is to teach a certain number of targeted youth about specific content areas and skills within a given time frame, a log can allow you to document how many youth were reached, what

areas and skills were addressed during each session, and when the instruction took place.

Most importantly, you'll want to assess outcomes to determine the effectiveness of your media literacy efforts. This assessment involves measuring the impact on program participants, including changes in:

- Awareness of the role of the media
- Attitudes toward and perceptions of the tobacco industry, its advertising, and the harm both perpetuate
- Critical viewing skills
- Ability to develop their own counter-marketing messages
- Intentions to talk with others about what they have learned

If you conduct an outcome evaluation, use the strongest design possible. A pretest and posttest measurement that uses a comparison or a control group that didn't receive the media literacy education is preferable. A participant survey is one important way to measure outcomes. You may also want to review items from other surveys that evaluated the outcomes of similar programs and to involve one or more experts in the survey development and data analysis.

Using Evaluation Results for Decision Making

The results of your outcome evaluation may show that some outcomes were achieved and others weren't. To understand these results, check your monitoring and tracking data to see whether your media literacy activities were implemented according to plan. If the activities and content linked to certain outcomes weren't taught appropriately or at all, you and your instructors will need to pay closer attention to program design and implementation.

If your monitoring and tracking data show that your activities were implemented as planned, it may be helpful to conduct interviews or focus groups with members of your target audience to understand why certain outcomes weren't achieved. If the focus group is designed and conducted effectively, these qualitative findings may help identify and correct problems with your media literacy efforts, such as low credibility of instructors, inappropriate learning techniques, program content that doesn't resonate with the audience, or lack of time to practice relevant skills. By evaluating your efforts regularly, you'll learn more about how to best engage your target audience, how to increase their knowledge, and how to motivate them to get involved in the tobacco counter-marketing program. Then you'll be able to make adjustments so that each round of media literacy efforts becomes more successful.

Points To Remember

- Make sure that media literacy fits into your overall counter-marketing strategy.
- Learn about media literacy programs and resources. Talk to program staff from states conducting media literacy efforts.
- Identify which media literacy programs and resources match your audience and strategy.
- Determine which organizations can help you implement a media literacy program. Offer them tools and training.
- Track who is using the program and how it's working.

Resources

Health Education

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Guidelines for school health programs to prevent tobacco use and addiction. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Recommendation Report* 1994;43(RR-2):1–18.

Shelov S, Baron M, Beard L, Hogan M, et al. Children, adolescents and advertising. *Pediatrics* 1995;95:295–7.

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Programs and Resources

- MediaSharp is an interactive, multimedia program designed to help young people critically assess how the media normalize, glamorize, and create role models for unhealthy lifestyles and behaviors. It focuses on analyzing tobacco and alcohol messages delivered through entertainment, news, and marketing. The MediaSharp kit includes a video, a leader's guide, handouts, exercises, and an extensive list of media literacy resources; it can be ordered free from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Office on Smoking and Health Web site (<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco>).

- Smoke Screeners is an educational program that helps young people learn media literacy skills by improving their ability to critically analyze messages about tobacco use in movies and on television. The program includes a moderator's guide and video, and it can be used in a classroom or in a youth group setting. Created as part of the youth initiative of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's antismoking campaign, this program is now a national effort. Smoke Screeners is free and can be ordered from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Office on Smoking and Health Web site (<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco>).
- The Center for Media Literacy (<http://www.medialit.org>) is the leading organization for media literacy in the United States. The center has an extensive catalogue of recommended books, videos, and curriculum resources.
- The Alliance for a Media Literate America (<http://www.nmec.org>) is a professional development collaboration that organizes and hosts the annual National Media Education Conference for teachers, administrators, and community leaders.
- South Carolina Educational Television's Media Literacy Program Web site (<http://www.med.sc.edu/medialit>) provides numerous teaching tools for tobacco media literacy.
- The New Mexico Media Literacy Project (<http://www.aa.edu>), sponsored by the Albuquerque Academy, offers a wealth of information for teaching media literacy skills to youth.
- Hip Hop! Influence Within Youth Popular Culture: A Catalyst for Reaching America's Youth with Substance Abuse Messages is a report by Dr. Thandi Hicks-Harper that can help readers to understand hip hop in a prevention context (<http://www.hiphop4kids.com>).

Research Literature

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Teaching and Learning Resources

American Cancer Society. *National Health Education Standards: Achieving Health Literacy*. Atlanta, GA: American Cancer Society, 1995.

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Videos

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office on Smoking and Health; Massachusetts Department of Public Health. *Smoke Screeners*. 1999. To order, call 1-800-CDC-1311.

DeBenedittis P. *Rebelling Against Tobacco Ads*. 2000. Available at: <http://www.medialiteracy.net/purchase>.

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National Institute for Media & The Family. *Smoke & Mirrors*. 1999. Available at: <http://www.mediafamily.org/store/tools.shtml>

New Mexico Media Literacy Project. *Just Do Media Literacy* (companion teacher guide included). 1997. Available at: <http://www.nmmlp.org/products.htm>

New Mexico Media Literacy Project. *Media Literacy for Health* (CD-ROM, K–12 curriculum). 2001. Available at: <http://www.nmmlp.org/products.htm>

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Web Sites and Internet Resources

Alliance for a Media Literate America: <http://www.nmec.org>.

American Academy of Pediatrics, *Understanding the Impact of Media on Children and Teens*:
<http://www.aap.org/family/mediainpact.htm>.

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

Countering the Influence of Alcohol and Tobacco Advertising:
<http://www.drugs.indiana.edu/prevention/advert.html>.

Deconstructing Media Messages: <http://www.etr.org/recapp/practice/youthskills200106.htm>.

Media Education Foundation: <http://www.mediaed.org/>

Media Literacy Clearinghouse: <http://www.med.sc.edu/medialit>.

Media Literacy for Prevention, Critical Thinking and Self-Esteem (Web site of media literacy expert Dr. Peter DeBenedittis): <http://www.medialiteracy.net>.

Media Literacy Review, Media Literacy Online Project, College of Education, University of Oregon:
<http://interact.uoregon.edu/medialit/mlr/home/index.html>.

Media Literacy and Substance Abuse Virtual Library:
<http://www.health.org/features/medlit/library.htm>.

New Mexico Media Literacy Project: <http://www.nmmlp.org>.

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