



**A Guide to
Understanding & Developing
Conscious Media Literacy Skills**

**Written by
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**LISTEN-IN! WATCH-OUT! WORD-UP!
MEDIA GUIDE EXCERPT**

Listen-In! Watch-Out! Word-Up!
A Guide to Understanding and Developing
Conscious Media Literacy Skills

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Introduction

Media, in-part, reflects and informs cultural discourses. Thus, the ability to accurately assess information disseminated through media is increased by acquiring Conscious Media Literacy skills. Conscious Media Literacy skills are also valuable tools for obtaining media-justice regarding social-issues.

Though we may not recognize them as narratives, we begin to learn accurate, inaccurate, and false narratives at a very early-age. Without informed guidance to discern truthful from false narratives, one might never learn the difference.

It is the false and inaccurate narratives that can cause undue influence and considerable harm.

I believe that it benefits society at-large to be more concerned with consciousness in media-consumption and media-creation. By expanding our consciousness in a number of areas, but specifically in how we assess media, we can elevate discourse. As an achievement of elevated discourse, we can elevate society at-large.

If we want to disrupt false narratives, we must recognize that some media is used to manipulate discourse. To create proactively accurate narratives, we need to have knowledge about how manipulated discourse works.¹ To perpetuate *factual* narratives, it requires that we have a desire to create and consume factual media.

Conscious Media Literacy (CML) (Existing terms but Author's expansion of definition for use with this guide):

Conscious Media Literacy is to be well-informed by well-rounded knowledge and competent-consciousness about subjects and subject matter and to demonstrate that knowledge in media content creation and media content consumption.

CML, can bring an awareness of false narratives that have manipulated discourses as a way to marginalize people throughout history. Awareness informs if, when and how historically false

DISRUPTING MANIPULATIVE DISCOURSE

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According to text linguistics scholar, Teun A. van Dijk manipulative discourse can come in the form of "social power abuse, cognitive mind control and discursive interaction. Socially, manipulation is defined as illegitimate domination confirming social inequality. Cognitively, manipulation as mind control involves interferences with processes of understanding, the formation of biased mental models and social representations such as knowledge and ideologies. Discursively, manipulation generally involves the usual forms and formats of ideological discourse, such as emphasizing Our Good things, and emphasizing Their bad things."

¹ According to Text Linguistic Scholar, Teun A. van Dijk, manipulative discourse can come in the form of "social power abuse, cognitive mind control and discursive interaction. Socially, manipulation is defined as illegitimate domination confirming social inequality. Cognitively, manipulation as mind control involves interferences with processes of understanding, the formation of biased mental models and social representations such as knowledge and ideologies. Discursively, manipulation generally involves the usual forms and formats of ideological discourse, such as emphasizing Our Good things, and emphasizing Their bad things." At all these levels of analysis it is shown how manipulation is different from legitimate mind control, for instance in persuasion and providing information."
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0b2f/9e04d2ea4a46af687a54350d9dfff4644eb9.pdf>

narratives are perpetuated in media discourse today. Knowing this information may:

1) help media-consumers, media-content-creators, media-makers and media-sponsors and promoters (media influencers) put media or ideas for media-content, in an appropriate context and, 2) help us decide when and why, media has *intentionally* been designed to reinforce false narratives or in other ways designed to cause offense and, 3) help us decide if and why, media was *unintentionally* designed to reinforce a false narrative or in other ways not designed to cause offense and, 4) decide whether media is objectionable.

Competent in Consciousness (Author's Definition for use with this guide):

We can be conscious about many things and we can be competent at doing many things. However, if we do not pair the right consciousnesses with the right competencies, it may put us at a disadvantage when we want to avoid unintended inferences and thus, offense.

When desiring to interpret media-messages, if we are not competent in the right consciousness, we may be unable to interpret media accurately.

To be competent in consciousness is not to *profess to know all*, but to *be intentional* about:

- Understanding what we know, as well as, what we do not know or acknowledging uncertainty of whether we know it.
- Engaging well-rounded lenses when it comes to media-creation. This may require that we consult the appropriate resources about subjects that we have no natural understanding of and have no authentic lived-experiences with. Particularly, we need to gain understanding of false narratives regarding groups who have historically been marginalized due to prejudicial beliefs and ideologies.
- Engaging a well-rounded lens when it comes to media-consumption. To educate ourselves about if, and how, media was intentionally designed to be biased. Particularly, to understand false narratives regarding groups who have historically been marginalized due to prejudicial beliefs and ideologies.
- Understanding that engaging a well-rounded lens includes: 1) performing credible research and, 2) seeking credible thought-partners when necessary (and knowing when it is necessary) to inform and guide media-making and media-consumption.

Social-Justice Media Author's Definition for use with this guide: Media made with the understanding that media-content and media-makers can create false misrepresentation or non-representation of a person, people, story, event, or narrative of an issue covered in media and by doing so creates further injustices, particularly concerning social-justice

issues. Thus, social-justice media-makers seek to bring integrity to coverage of social-justice issues through use of accurate narratives and ethical representations in media.

The Great American Hypocrisy Stupor Strategy (GAHSS)

The term “Hypocrisy” is an existing well-known term. Traditionally it means to “feign a belief”. The way in which hypocrisy was historically employed on a massive scale has always been of concern to many conscious citizenries. The GAHSS, however, goes beyond “feigning a belief”. The way Hypocrisy is used as a strategy with increasing fervor by many media-makers and media-content-creators today is considerably concerning.

The GAHSS process of reinforcing hypocrisy and thus, reinforcing denial, is a go-to strategy employed on systems and on individual levels and in simple conversations to national debates.

The GAHSS can be employed for:

- 1) Esteem preservation: The GAHSS is often used to preserve esteem in an individual, a group or segment(s) of society. When employed, GAHSS enables him, her, or them, to remain in a continuous state of disassociation from facts and evidence to:
 - allow one to present as having, but avoid acknowledgement of having, similar behaviors as another individual, a group or segment(s) of society, so that he, she, or they can use those behaviors to judge “others” negatively,
 - selectively impose a belief or standard on an individual, a group, or segment(s) of society, but not on other individuals, groups, or segment(s) of society, or oneself,
 - deny the value, beauty, and uniqueness of those who have been othered or marginalized in society but, to recognize those types of, aesthetics, characteristics, or traits as valuable assets when:
 - *different* individuals authentically have them, or
 - when *different* individuals, group, or segment(s) of society manufacture those characteristics or traits or otherwise artificially simulate or imitate them.
- 2) Situations that reflect the most obvious lunacy, criminality, moral-deficiency, or mean-spiritedness, that one would normally denounce if he, she, or they were the victim of. Instead of denouncement, the GAHSS is used by those individuals and maintainers of systems to rationalize and justify the irrational and unjustifiable.

By not denouncing a situation with impartiality, individuals, and maintainers of systems, believe he, she or they will personally or collectively gain something, or that there will be a retention of favor or systemic power that will sustain previously ill-gotten gains.

- 3) This strategy only works when there is:

- an extreme unwillingness to be uncomfortable with truths because those truths are different from preferred beliefs, and preferred biases and,
- an unwillingness, to think-critically about narratives and,
- a lack of ability to think-critically about narratives due to an over dependence on a “banking system of education”.²

This strategy is so effective that when people employ the strategy on others and become a victim of it themselves they do not realize or refuse to admit it. Without intervention and a willingness to accept facts, individuals, groups, and societies willfully operate within a fantastical stupor.

Media content is often inspired by and made to reinforce certain hypocritical narratives. Media then can be the supply-chain that continually fuels the stupor so that targeted citizenry does not realize or does not have to confront that they are in a stupor.

Consciousness-building and Conscious Media Literacy can break the stupor and is thus, a formidable opponent that can vaporize the GAHSS.

The High Price of Rollbacks

Like many people, I believe that children are our future. Yet, we adults were once the children who had the future placed in our hands and given the charge to “do better”. So, aren’t we the ones the world has been expecting to progress and change it for the better?

Even with a love-hate relationship that media can inspire, we must acknowledge that when it comes to media overall, society has made great strides in the way information is expressed, produced, and accessed. Additionally, innovative strides have been made both creatively and technologically to allow wider access to information and more options for confirming it.

Among other benefits, these strides have improved upon how we understand our civil-rights, as well as how we demand them. Yet, some adults want to rollback these gains so that our children and future generations must start-over in reinstituting them.

- We see rollbacks when adults use media to perpetuate historically false narratives.
- We see rollbacks when limits on freedom of the press and symbolic expressions are legislated or coerced.
- We see rollbacks when independent news and media outlets are stripped of funding.

² Paulo Freire’s “Banking System” of education from his book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” is a critique on educational systems where the teacher is the holder of knowledge and students are viewed as one-way repositories for the teacher’s knowledge and not as a two-way thoroughfare of knowledge-exchange. Thus, the intent is that the students will only learn what the teacher knows and/or what the teacher imparts to them. This system can then “miseducate” students and create a lack of ability to think critically for one’s self. I include both formal and informal means of education when speaking of education.

- We see rollbacks when as media-consumers, our access to independent media is curtailed, whether that occurs through pre-scripted media or monopolies on programming stations that limit the variety of information one can receive.
- We see rollbacks when people use new colonialist scripts in an attempt to redefine identities of people of color *again* and for their personal gain *again*.
- We see rollbacks when adults do not promote an interest in the common-good but promote self-interests and use the media to do it.
- We see rollbacks when truths are suppressed in favor of promoting hypocrisies and falsehoods as truths.
- We see rollbacks not just when gains are repealed but also when there are *attempts* to repeal them.

As adults, we have a duty to look and move ourselves, our families and society at-large forward. We should not be able to look in hindsight at what was a collective apathy for, and complicity in, normalizing gross offenses that not only set society back, but also set civility back.

Therefore, we also need the knowledge to explain what line was crossed and how it was crossed. Alternatively, if the case may be, what line was not crossed and why it was not. We must do the required work now, not relinquish our responsibilities by putting them in our children's hands to accomplish later.

The cost would be too high for us now to wait, and too high for them to pay later for *our* complicity.

About and Why The Conscious Media Literacy Guide

This guide is for everyone. It is meant as a resource for media-consumers and media-makers as well as, for sponsors and promoters of media.

Everyone has a place on the continuum of media, thus, there is a role for, and a responsibility for everyone to be consciously media literate.

I consider the selected communication tools and strategies included within significant in their ability to inform and influence media-consumers. These communication tools and strategies can also be used to create media which significantly reinforces or constructs false and harmful narratives.

Knowing more about the strategies explained within, can help understanding of how they are employed to create overtly influential and often subliminally influential messages.

When we are consciously-concerned in our own media-content-creation, awareness of how these tools are used, can also help us to deconstruct false and harmful narratives.

One (but not the only) way, to combat negative media influences, is to recognize that media has a huge influence in shaping ideas of who and what society at-large believes has value.

Thus, media influences our development of explicit and implicit biases. Those biases can then shape our perceptions, ideas, and interactions with each other and about places, and things. It is helpful to recognize *how* media-content-creators and media-makers use media to achieve that type of influence.

“To guide” is to accompany individuals or groups and to explain the meaning and significance of selected points-of-interests. That is what this guide is meant to do. I wrote it to show selected points of interest that I believe are important stops on the journey toward consciousness in media literacy regarding to both consumption and creation of media.³

As a media analyst that focuses on issues of representation, and as an advocate for social, economic and political equity for all, I analyze media through multiple lenses.

As a woman of color and specifically a Black woman, I know that through perpetuation of historically false and hypocritical narratives, some media targets gender, people of color, Black women and girls and Black men and boys specifically for messages of devaluation.

I have seen, experienced and studied how influential media can be on adults and children’s perception of themselves, the world around them--and even the world at a distance. With the hyper-pace of media generation and passive consumption of it, too many children are overtly and subconsciously absorbing negative messages and believing false narratives.

Culturally-detrimental, subliminally biased, and manipulative media can impede adult’s and children’s self-esteem and impede positive self-esteem development. As well, manipulated discourses in media can impede accurate mental model development.

Distortions of self-esteem, both low and high, can influence our behaviors toward ourselves. Distortions of self-esteem can also influence the way someone treats another. It is my intention that the guide will aid the user’s understanding of a few widely used communication tools and strategies used for media-messaging. As well, that by reading the guide, users will be able to analyze media more constructively and teach other children how to as well.

³ Because we are a visually-oriented society and heavily influenced by appearances, this guide focuses more on strategies pertaining to visual representations and media-related discourse. Though many of the strategies presented herein are found in text and talk, (particularly in music lyrics), audio representations will not be the focus of this guide.

Goals of the CML Guide

The media literacy guide was created to achieve the following goal:

To help educate media-influencers (media-consumers, media-content-creators, media-makers, media-sponsors and promoters), about the concepts the author terms as “Conscious Media Literacy (CML)” and how these concepts can develop skills that help inform accurate discourse and develop responsible media consumption, creation, sponsorship and promotion.

Objectives of the CML Guide

The objectives that support the goal, will include but are not limited to the following:

- 1) To provide concepts about media that reflect cultural and competently-conscious considerations, regarding media-creation, media-sponsorship, media-promotion, media-consumption and media-interpretation.
- 2) To provide useful tools and information to advance adult’s (whether they are parents, care-givers, formal or informal educators, employers, employees, media-makers media-consumers, or media-sponsors or promoters), understanding of what it means to have Conscious Media Literacy skills, as suggested by the author.
- 3) To provide useful tools and information for adults to help advance understanding in children and youth, of what it means to be consciously media literate as a media-consumer and a media-maker.
- 4) To articulate how contemporary narratives delivered through media-content have roots in historically false narratives and continue to target people of color, Black men and boys and Black women and girls.
- 5) To articulate how manipulated discourse on race/ethnicity/identity and representation: rely on hypocrisies, often entail colonialist scripts, reduce value, impede healthy esteem-development, hinder critical-thinking and have other negative consequences.

Strategies Used in the CML Guide

The strategies employed to accomplish the objectives will include but are not limited to:

- Use of real-world examples of how individuals and companies intentionally or may unintentionally, construct and perpetuate false narratives using media as a platform to do so
- Brief explanations of, and how, selected communication tools and strategies can be used to construct and convey messages that develop mental models, and manipulate discourse(s)

- Explanation of how Questions to Consider may be helpful in checking for, and reducing false narratives or biases in media *before* it is created
- Explanation of how to use the Media Consciousness Quadrant© to help guide intentions of media-content-creation *before* it is created, or to help guide interpretations of media *after* it has been created

Ideas to Consider

- Media messages are communicated through text, talk, imaging and symbolism.
- Media messaging can have an influence on both subconscious and conscious levels and can be targeted toward specific audiences.
- Manipulated discourse in media messaging can be recognized by consciously media literate consumers irrespective of his or her own race or gender and regardless of whether she or he is being targeted or not.
- False narratives about race and gender were historically constructed and continue to be perpetuated through text, talk, imaging and symbolism (media), and are currently being created and disseminated through text, talk, imaging and symbolism.
- Historically and currently-constructed false narratives are perpetuated in media that targets people of color, Black women and girls, and Black men, boys, specifically.
- Conscious Media Literacy skills, can develop necessary awarenesses to help discern intent and to place intentionally or unintentionally offensive and harmful media in a proper context and thus, may reduce degree of harm.
- The ability to communicate in ways that demonstrate Conscious-Concern© is an on-going practice.⁴

What Does It Mean to be Media Literate?

Many people are familiar with the term “Literacy” as the ability to be able to read, write, and have some understanding of what is being read and written. The term “literacy” has been part of English vernacular for a long time.

When learning traditional literacy in school, students must study various forms of literature by authors of varying styles and ideas (ideally, anyway). They are then given tests at regular intervals to indicate their understanding of the literature or text.

⁴ See Media Consciousness Quadrant© Terms and definitions

The ability to understand and articulate what is being read and written and to paraphrase it correctly is considered “Comprehension”. Because there are several mechanisms to media, there are several aspects to having media literacy comprehension.

Various levels of comprehension exist among those aspects as well. What does it really mean to be media literate in practice, not just in theory? One answer is that consciousness in media literacy needs to be part of the goal.

There has long been a push for segments of society to be passably technologically literate. That is, to recognize equipment such as computers, tablets, smart-phones, etc. and to understand how to use them for online purposes such as banking and bill-paying etc.

There is even encouragement to understand technology enough to use it for dating and other ‘personal interests’ websites.

While there is a push for technological literacy when there are financial advantages to the makers of services, when it comes to media literacy, technology-users are not required to have a passable level of comprehension.

A wealth of media and media-generating applications offer a variety of ways to be literate. Both adults and children need to be media literate, to understand what is being communicated through use of technical applications as well as, through traditional means of media-messaging (i.e. printed materials).

Understanding media-speak on deeper levels, and thus having “media-literacy” was once the domain of trained professionals. People who were educated and paid to have expertise in the various components of communicating a message, also had the power to create educational, informative, and provocative media.

Those professionals also had the power to create media that preyed on the psyches of consumers. Throughout time, some media-creators have used that power, to create media-messaging that has been overtly harmful at worse and subliminally harmful at worst.

Suggestions of inferiority and even suggestions to harm oneself or to cause another person bodily harm can be obscured within text, talk, images and symbolism. Media Literacy helps us to recognize harmful media.

Media literacy for everyone helps to equip an individual against the effects of institutionalized race, gender, and religious biases (to name just a few biases that frequently occur in media).

Media literacy helps an individual to discern what is disseminated *by* the media, and discern fabrications that are disseminated *in* media. Put simply, media literacy gives us

tools to help us better to discern what is truthful and accurate, from what is not and better discern who is providing information and possibly discern motives for why.

What is Media Illiteracy?

The opposite of literacy is “Illiteracy”. Thus, illiteracy is the inability to read, write and comprehend that which is read, written, and even spoken. Just as there are a number of ways to be media literate, there are also a number of ways in which one can be media illiterate. In some cases, an individual can read or understand written or spoken words on a basic level but he or she is unable to articulate or paraphrase what the text or talk means in its entirety.

We see this when someone is first learning to read. He or she can sound-out the words and may know what the words mean separate from each other. However, when the words are strung together he or she may not yet be skilled enough to paraphrase an entire message of the text, (talk, symbol, or image) to show complete comprehension of it.

If we think about learning a foreign language for example, in our initial stage of learning, we may be able to understand two or three words strung together. However, the more words that are strung together, the more complicated the sentence, thus, the more time it may take to process them for a complete understanding. That is, until we are proficient in the language.

Sometimes we may know enough words in the language that we can get the gist of what is being said or spoken, by putting the words we do not know in the context of words we do know.

In the interim, a lot of information can be lost in our transition and translation. Proficiency in learning a language may take a lifetime of study (even if it the language is not foreign to us).

The same is true with acquiring proficiency in media literacy.

Media *Illiteracy* is the inability to analyze critically an image, text, talk or symbolism, in a way that one will acquire and can articulate a complete understanding of a media’s message.

As is traditional illiteracy that we are familiar with, media illiteracy is detrimental because it can impede understanding of a message when it comes via text, visual imaging or through other forms of media such as Symbolism.

As tools for media creation get more sophisticated in creating both good and suspect media, media literacy must continue to be studied so that we can keep-up. If possible, we need to stay ahead in a field that has no signs of slowing its pace.

Some may agree that manipulated discourses, particularly in politics and concerning race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation, are an increasing threat to accurate narratives today. Therefore, media literacy is especially critical for individuals and groups who are subject to be marginalization and for those who seek to be allies.

The inability to analyze a media-message sufficiently, makes one vulnerable to communication that contains:

- a false historical narrative, and manipulated discourse
- messages that specifically target an individual or group(s) of a particular race/ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation with an unfavorable and biased message
- messages that prey on deficiencies in esteem, prey on inaccurate or biased mental models already developed (or contain messages that seek to impede esteem and accurate mental model development)
- messages that advocate that one harms him or herself or others
- messages that want to control behaviors and thoughts in a manner that is favorable to a group--even if those being influenced or controlled-- are members of the same group attempting control

Traditional illiteracy and Media illiteracy, are intellectually and economically detrimental. Additionally, they are detrimental to social, emotional and physical well-being. As a concerned society, we cannot let Media *ill*iteracy hinder current and future generation's success, as illiteracy hampered previous generation's success.

We must also recognize that basic media literacy skills may not achieve the necessary abilities to among other considerations:

- recognize manipulated discourse, or when false narratives are manipulating discourse
- recognize how false narratives are created or reinforced
- how imaging is constructed to subliminally reinforce false narratives
- how media influences mental model development

Conscious Media Literacy

Today's media needs to be analyzed in ways that we can discern whether it was created to demonstrate Conscious-Concern© for accurate narrative construction and representation.

And, we need the ability to discern whether media was created which demonstrates Conscious-Unconcern© for inaccuracy in narrative construction and misrepresentation.⁵

Conscious Media Literacy is to be well-informed by well-rounded knowledge and competent-consciousness about subjects and subject matter and to demonstrate that knowledge in:

- narrative construction
- media-discourse
- media-content-creation
- media-content-consumption
- media sponsorship
- media promotion

CML, can bring an awareness of false narratives that have manipulated discourses throughout history as a way to marginalize people. Conscious awareness informs if and how historically false narratives are being perpetuated in media discourse today. Knowing this information may:

- 1) help media-consumers, media-content-creators, media-makers and media-sponsors and promoters (media influencers) put media or ideas for media-content, in an appropriate context and,
 - 2) help us decide when and why, media has *intentionally* been designed to reinforce false narratives or in other ways intentionally designed to cause offense and,
 - 3) help us decide if and why, media was *unintentionally* designed to reinforce a false narrative or in other ways not intentionally designed to cause offense and,
 - 4) decide whether media is objectionable, and provide us the articulation if we object
- CML skills support the ability to make a detailed analysis of media when messaging comes through one, a combination or all of the following methods:
- 1) **Text:** printed words, literature, posters, advertising, lyrics
 - 2) **Talk:** Verbal dialog, spoken words, recorded words, lyrics
 - 3) **Imaging:** Imaging that shows real or imagined people in real or imagined contexts or situations. Imaging that shows real or imagined places or things in real or imagined contexts or situations. These images and imaginings can come in print, electronically, digitally, and verbal descriptions.

⁵ See Media Consciousness Quadrant©, Terms and Definitions for more information

- 4) **Symbolism (and Signs):** While symbolism is a form of imaging, it is distinguished here from photographic and video imaging. Symbolism can also be exhibited through an action, which is symbolic of a belief (such as crossing oneself, kneeling or standing for a flag, etc.).

Being consciously media literate, is to be aware of how history has created false narratives that manipulated discourses which are still being perpetuated today. False narratives not only target people of color, they also target gender, people of different faiths, and sexual orientations because of deeply-entrenched beliefs that exists within our larger-society.

Not only does having CML skills support media-consumers to productively consume and create media with culturally and competently-conscious lenses, the skills can support them in recognizing media-content-creators who do not.

Media-content creators can benefit from having conscious media literacy skills when they employ them in the media they create, sponsor, or promote. Thereby, a reduction of media containing false narratives and misrepresentation can be achieved.

Of course, not every message has intent to cause harm. Many messages have no intention to, and do not cause harm. Yet, it is a rare message that is crafted absent intent for the media-consumer to engage with it *in some way*.

Conscious Media Literacy Informs Discourse

One cannot be consciously media literate if he or she does not acknowledge that some media can be and is intentionally produced to be racist. Important distinctions exist between media that is informed by race and media that is racist or biased against a particular race/ethnicity.

Race and ethnicity can inform Media when it points out how raced-based sentimentalities have inspired media-content-creation that is biased or even racist.

Discussions that lead to accurate representations of race and truthful narratives can be powerful tools that educate how we think critically, that inform our beliefs and inform how we interact with each.

Media that is racist, does not want to credibly inform or credibly educate about race and racial dynamics. Racist media does not seek to educate by encouraging critical-thinking. Racist media uses a dominant lens and seeks to influence what we believe by thwarting critical-thought, by guiding (or shutting-down) interactions based on uneducated beliefs.

The distinction between racist and race-informed media is a necessary to make. Some media-content-creators still elect to create and perpetuate inaccurate-at-best, and false-at-worst, media. That type of media is frequently rooted in dominant narratives that contain, biased, false ideologies about race. They do not create media that is informed by race.

Conscious Media Literacy skills can help us acquire the ability to recognize whether media is intended to *further* discourses in informed ways. These competencies can also help us acquire the ability to recognize whether media is intended to *manipulate* discourses which impede progress.

Conscious Social-Media Literacy

Social-media applications have not only influenced media production, and consumption habits but they have raised the level of unfriendly-user assumptions.

A consequence of behind-the-computer-screen communications is that many people have deleted the line of civility that used to guide how people speak with one another face-to-face.

Often, the nature of discourse devolves to the point that one is not sure if they are speaking to an adult or a child. Speaking of children...with a telephone, at least you knew whom you were calling; and aside from a parent or sibling possibly listening in, you knew with whom you were talking.

Now, in addition to social-media being a hotbed for fake news, it is also a hotbed for adults faking that they are kids and kids faking that they are adults. Our guard needs to be up while in the safety of our home, but also when we *virtually* travel outside of it.

Conscious Social Emotional Intelligence

Consciousness further develops our way of thinking of how we choose to participate on social-media platforms. These spaces are “social,” yet, are also locales of unsociable, increasingly political, racially charged, and isolating atmospheres that social-media users must navigate.

When we have at least explored an issue thoroughly, we are more able to shore-up our own beliefs with more credibility and express them with more fact, articulation, and diplomacy.

Social-media bullies rely on being racist, genderist, hypocritical, loud, and crass to get their point across because they believe that volume and incivility has substance. People with consciously developed social skills and socio-emotional intelligence skills know the reverse is true. Being loud and crass puts a spotlight on lack of substance.

Conscious social-media users know that substance is not loud or crass in its approach. Consciously media literate, social-media users are relieved of the feeling that one must

perpetuate racist, genderist, hypocritical opinions in a loud, and crass manner to make a point.

Substance is reflected in the content of the social-media user's character and the content of their media. In either case, substance that is centered in social-emotional intelligence is clear, more-likely to be credible and speak volumes.

Conscious Media Literacy for the Sake of All Children

Conscious and comprehensive media literacy skills can help parents and caregivers understand existing narratives, and how manipulative discourses use imaging to reinforce those narratives.

When adults understand narratives and symbolism, they can ask the right questions about the intention of the media. As well, they can inquire about if or how symbolism and narratives will be constructed in the media featuring their child-*before it is created*.

When it comes to children, we cannot count on social media platforms to look out for their best interest, (or the best interest of the public in general). Until children learn how to protect themselves from media directed at impeding their positive esteem development, we must **Listen-In! Watch-Out! and Word-Up!** for them.

Aware is Half-Way There

Certain groups, entities, people, and professions have a vested interest in keeping other segments of society marginalized, isolated, polarized and thinking less of themselves. There is a power-gain for the first-mentioned, when the second-mentioned complies.

Rhetoric created to condition individuals or groups to hate themselves or created to condition individuals or groups to hate people different from themselves, has historically been promoted, legally sanctioned and institutionally fortified.

Specific communication tools and strategies are used with intention to create media in such a way that race, identity, gender, sexuality, political, religious-based discourses are manipulated.

Media-content can influence where media-consumers put their attention. Unscrupulous media-content can impede positive self-esteem and mental-model development. As well, select tools and strategies are used to influence how people choose to navigate their feelings.

Media-content-creators, media-sponsors and promoters who want to tell accurate narratives and present information authentically, need to have correctly informed cultural and competent-consciousness.

Gaining conscious and comprehensive media literacy skills requires effort. Conscious and comprehensive media literacy requires that among other things, media-consumers, media-makers, promoters, and sponsors strive to:

- Care about accurate representation(s) and narrative(s)
- Recognize historically false narratives or recognize when a narrative is rooted in historically false narratives, biased beliefs, or ideologies and are manipulating discourse.
- Develop cultural and competent-consciousnesses about the subject of their media.
- Analyze aspects of a media message with proficiency.
- Evaluate sources for origin and credibility.
- Understand Media Plants and how they are used to manipulate discourse in an attempt to advance their agenda or someone else's.
- Understand how Dots On A Narrative work, how to spot them and how to connect them for a more complete narrative.
- Understand modern-day coded terminology. For example, words like “sassy”, “angry”, “exotic” refer to historically biased notions of the character of Black women and girls. In some coded-speak, by referencing something as “urban” it can also imply ‘Black’, ‘edgy’, ‘troubled’ or ‘high-crime’.
- Understand that coded-language and “Dog-whistling” are often used to condition beliefs, inspire actions, and develop mental models.
- Understand that Symbolism delivers a message as does text and talk and imaging.
- Understand elements in the construction of a message to recognize and synthesize them to discern if there is a hidden message and what that message is.
- Understand communication tools and strategies and how they are used in a variety of methods to: obfuscate truths, impede positive self-esteem development, and influence beliefs about value and values
- Understand why a message is intended to be harmful, in order to dispel it, act to eradicate it, and educate others about why it is harmful or offensive.
- Understand whether media is created to continue an imbalance of power, or if it is created to distribute power and empower.

As with most subjects that continually afford us opportunities to learn something new about it, consciousness-building is an evolution. Media is a field that continually offers

opportunities to evolve. Therefore, the work required to be conscious in media literacy—whether it is as a consumer or a maker of media—is continuous too.

Fortunately, the work required to be conscious in media literacy does not require that it happen overnight. Nor, does the work happen in a vacuum. However, it does need to happen sooner rather than later! Conscious Media Literacy work flourishes when it works in conjunction with like-minded media-consumers, media-makers, media-content-creators, media-sponsors, and promoters.

A Whole System Approach

Conscious and Comprehensive Media Literacy skills are important for anyone who wants to avoid creating, supporting and promoting media that reinforces marginalization of certain segments of the population.

Thus, those in positions to create, and those in positions to promote and sponsor media need to have their work informed in conscious and comprehensive ways. This type of competent-consciousness is more likely to reflect cultures, cultural-representatives, and their values accurately.

Conscious and comprehensive media literacy in media content-creation can help sponsors to recognize and promote media with no hidden agendas. They can sponsor and promote media that accurately represents people in ways that deconstruct false narratives.

Seek First to Understand

Communicating respectfully with each other, whether it is through image, text, talk or symbolism on social platforms or face-to-face, is not always easy—especially when one is disingenuous and has intent to manipulate the discourse.

In Stephen R. Covey’s timeless book, “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” the fifth habit is “Seek first to understand. Then to Be Understood. The habit says: *“Through perceptive observation and Empathic Listening these nonjudgmental people are intent on learning needs, interests and concerns of others.”*

If we apply the habit of first seeking to understand, then we can also place ourselves in the position of the recipient of a message that contains false narratives.

The ability to perceive how media might be received might be useful in clarifying a message—if one is unsure.⁶ We may not always hit our mark, but the intention of our aim, should guide the communication process.

⁶ See Questions to Consider for more information on creating a clarifying a message

Why We Communicate

It is helpful to know the basic “Why’s” behind communication. Communicating can be straightforward with no hidden meaning or agenda. That is, the intent of the communication and what the audience is to do with or think about the information, is clear and free of coded language.

- Sometimes media-makers use various strategies to deliver a single message.
- Sometimes media-content-creators use a single strategy to deliver various messages.
- Depending on the strategy that is used, the message’s creator may be encoding a message for one audience, while delivering a general message to the rest of the audience (dog-whistling, coded language).

Not all communications have biased messaging. However, some communication does, and we need to recognize when it does. Media content-creators can use communication tools in specific ways that they become a strategy to reinforce a message that the audience may not immediately recognize as meant *for* them or *against* them.

We must understand how a message is delivered, but also understand basic reasons why *a* message is being delivered. The reasons we communicate may seem obvious, but it is worth reinforcing that there are some standard reasons.

Even suspect messages are premised on one or more of the following basic reasons. Acquainting ourselves with them will help us (and especially children) begin to recognize distinct reasons for communication of a message.

Some reasons we communicate are:

Reasons We Communicate and/or Create a Message:	Reasons We Watch, Read, or Listen to Communication:
To Inform or Educate	To be Informed or be Educated
To Entertain	To be Entertained
To Influence, Persuade or Convince	To be Influenced, Persuaded or Convinced
To Sell something	To Buy something
To Inspire	To be Inspired
Because we like to talk	We like to hear the person speaking

Will Be, Can Be, Won’t Be

Creating conscious media-content requires that the creators be intentional in assessing how content *can be*, not necessarily *will be*, interpreted. There is a significant distinction between “can be” and “will be”.

Whether media “will be” misinterpreted should not be the sole aim in media creation. Unless it quite obviously is meant to be offensive, misinterpretation remains an unknown until after dissemination.

Quite frankly, almost everything can be misinterpreted because some people endeavor *not to* understand, rather than strive to understand.

Therefore, competently-conscious individuals will pay as much attention to whether their media creation “can be” misinterpreted. If decided that it “can be” that is not necessarily a reason to stop the presses.

It may just be an occasion to tighten-up the media by being specific and clear about the intentions of it.

Sometimes avoiding offense is just a matter of asking questions that might highlight the potential for offense. With the advent of the internet and the plethora of credible resources to be found on it, ‘asking someone or finding credible resources’ is not difficult to do (yet).

An Ideal World With Media

We are not yet living in an ideal world. However, just because we do not see it, does not mean we do not know what it could look like. Just because we do not have one, does not mean we do not want one. Just because we do not have an ideal world with media, does not mean that we cannot strive for a better semblance of that world.

If we are indeed seeking to change media-driven discourses from being manipulative, to being transparent and accurate in discourses on social issues, then we must strive for consciousness in media-making and media-consumption.

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Note: The complete guide including The Media Consciousness Quadrant© tool, terms and definitions, and other consciousness-building tools can be purchased on Amazon.com.

Follow the link below to be taken directly there:

<http://bit.ly/consciousmedialiteracy>

About the Author

Ava Montgomery is the founder, and Chief Considerations Officer of Conscious Media Consulting, LLC (CMC, LLC). CMC, LLC is an organization established to consult with organizations that seek thought-partnership in conscious media development and staff-training. She is a recognized Curriculum designer, Trainer and Facilitator with over twenty-years of well-rounded experience in community-capacity-building and Leadership Development training for Corporate and Non-Profit business sectors.

Ava has a considerable passion for media analysis and social-justice advocacy. She enjoys analyzing the influences of media representations and manipulative discourses on public opinions regarding: identity, race/ethnicity, culture, gender, relationships, and equity.

As well, she enjoys analyzing how misrepresentations in media, may influence spoken and unspoken, written, and unwritten opinions and policies that influence Quality-of-Life Indicators for all people, but particularly for historically marginalized people of color.

She believes it is important to teach media literacy to all children from an early age. Media literacy can help children develop healthy media-consumption habits which in-turn may help them develop positive self-esteem. It is never too late for adults to learn CCML skills too!

Thoughtfully Engage with Us!

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