

Leadership Letter for Global MIL

Media Representation LGBTQ and Media Literacy **02**

Representation is at the heart of media literacy. In this issue of Connections, we invite you to explore representation from two individuals' perspectives, discussing non-binary and LGBTQ gender identities.

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Media Representation LGBTQ and Media Literacy

Representation is at the heart of media literacy. The word representation itself says it all: the media re-present reality – or realities – to us, and we re-present our realities through the media. Through the process skills of media literacy, we learn to “see” through the construction of media, and we are better able to make informed decisions throughout our lives.

In this issue of *Connections*, we invite you to explore gender representation from two individuals’ perspectives, discussing non-binary and LGBTQ gender identities (for definitions, see below). The varying use of pronouns in this issue is intentional and respectful of individual choice.

These small examples of language usage point toward a much larger conversation of what gender means today, and how gender is being represented through media. Definitions and language, and visual and verbal depictions of gender in stories, news and data categories are changing as new understandings of gender are actively researched, promoted and adopted.

Using a media literacy lens, media depictions of gender represent different values, lifestyles and points of view. In every media depiction, some points of view are included and others are omitted. Some individuals and groups are targeted for messages; others aren’t. And certainly, different people will have very different understandings of whatever media message they encounter, and gender is no exception. Yet media depictions of gender – being such a deep identifier of our human condition – provoke strong and emotional reactions and responses that challenge us to engage respectfully and thoughtfully, as well as emotionally.

Today, we have opportunities to understand the fascinating and vital topic of gender as never before. These new understandings are shaking assumptions about gender and society held through millenia, and from the standpoint of that long timeframe, changing ideas about gender are coming at a rapid pace. Social media and the wide dissemination of media messages globally have empowered many more people with voice. This increased capacity has fostered increased possibilities for representing smaller groups – and even many more individuals -- to larger audiences.

The result: we have a much broader and deeper view and understanding of what it is to be human, with all the complexity humanity encompasses. Gender is an essential part of that humanity. We invite you to explore some ideas about gender and gender representation in this issue of *Connections*.

LGBTQ is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning.

Non-binary gender is an umbrella term to describe any gender identity that does not fit into the gender binary of male and female.

Interview Highlights

Interview with Alexx Souter



Alexx Souter, advocate, identifies as gender non-binary and lives with their partner in Los Angeles.

CML: Alexx, at your recent workshop on understanding non-binary gender identity at the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, you spoke candidly to educators about life as a person whose gender identity does not conform to the standard gender binary – male or female. Gender non-binary people receive even less representation in the media than other members of the LGBTQ community. Information is scarce unless you really look for it. And, it was clear that most of the workshop participants entered without even an accurate idea of what the words “gender non-binary” mean. Would you please provide a definition?

AS: In order to explain the gender non-binary, I first have to explain the gender binary. It’s the concept that there are only two genders – male and female, and that your gender aligns with your sex assigned at birth. That gender determination is based on external primary sex characteristics, a.k.a. genitalia. Gender non-binary is any gender identity that does not perfectly line up with the expectation that people are either male or female. It’s essentially a “catch-phrase” for people who express a combination of masculinity and/or femininity, or neither, in how they identify.

CML: Is being transgender the same as being non-binary?

AS: Being transgender and being non-binary are like squares and rectangles. Every rectangle is a square, but not every square is a rectangle. Every non-binary person is transgender, but not every transgender person is non-binary. Most people are familiar with Caitlyn Jenner. Caitlyn is transgender. She was assigned male at birth, but identifies as female. Caitlyn is not non-binary, because she identifies completely as one gender -- female. Someone like myself, who is non-binary doesn’t specifically identify as male or female.

CML: Do you know approximately how many people in the U.S. identify as gender non-binary?

AS: There is not enough research in that area. The studies that do exist show a range of percentages of the transgender community – anywhere from about 0.5 to 3%. And, about one-third of the transgender population identifies as gender non-binary. It’s a small percentage, but it represents well over 1 million Americans.

CML: Why do you think there are so many misconceptions about gender non-binary people,

and even a lack of awareness that they exist?

AS: I think that stems mostly from people simply not understanding how somebody could not identify with either maleness or femaleness. I often get asked questions like, “You’re a boy in a certain way, so why don’t you identify as one?” The answer to that is, “I just don’t.” That’s how my brain works. That’s how my heart works. I don’t know why that’s the case and, actually, I don’t think it really matters. It’s who I am.

CML: In media literacy education, we teach content consumers and producers to ask, “how might different audiences experience this message differently?” For the gender non-binary audience of 1 million plus, that question is particularly pertinent. In general, we live in a gender-binary culture. Our society divides most clothing into men’s and women’s styles; pronouns, such as he and she (which we’ll talk more about later) are gender-specific, etc. To most people, these are very much expected divisions, and main-stream messaging in news, entertainment, etc., reflect that. For gender non-binary people, those messages may be received differently.

AS: Yes, because we don’t see ourselves represented there. For those of us who don’t identify exclusively with being male or female, it’s rare to see representations or messages about gender that we can identify with. I think that better, more accurate representation of non-binary people in media and other messaging could go a long way in breaking down the stereotypes and could even decrease violence against our community.

CML: What kinds of things do you believe would reduce overall confusion about non-binary gender identification?

AS: Along with better media representation, education can play a big role. I believe that including age-appropriate education about transgender and non-binary individuals is vital to decreasing stigma and confusion. I think it should start at a very early age. And for adults, I think workplace sensitivity training is crucial.

CML: In your workshop, you spoke about pronoun preferences that many non-binary people feel are more appropriate for them than more commonly used gendered pronouns, such as she, he, hers and his.

AS: Yes, I prefer they/theirs/them. So, third person singular pronouns. These non-binary pronouns are familiar to most people, I just use them differently. Others prefer “neo-pronouns” such as ze/hir/hirs or xe/xem/xyrs. I really like lun – lun/luns/lunself, because it’s based on “luna” which means “moon.” Lun pronouns allow people to choose pronouns based on an aspect of who they are, instead of their sex characteristics. Ultimately, I think use of pronouns boils down to simply respecting the language individuals prefer and identify with. Everyone deserves that respect.

CML: You are talking about a very different interpretation of pronoun use than the one most people currently understand. In communication, including messaging and media representation, people need a common understanding of language in order to accurately convey information.

AS: Language evolves. Language affects culture, and culture affects language. Gender-neutral first-person pronouns are not new. They were used as far back as the 13th century, and can be seen in Chaucer, Shakespeare, etc. Female pronouns, such as she and her, only arose in English in about the 12th or 13th century. Prior to that, almost all pronouns were masculine.

CML: Yes. That kind of change comes over time, and it's not always consistent. People have differing points of view about it, and it can be hard. It seems what you are talking about is opening a negotiation – bringing to light that we did not always use gender when using pronouns, and presenting alternatives to the current understanding of pronoun use.

AS: I view it as less of a negotiation, and more of an evolution – a natural mutation of the English language. Like any mutation, whether or not it continues will be a matter of “survival of the fittest.”

CML: You see it as more a matter of “nature taking its course?”

AS: Yes. Anything can change within a language. Just look at the numerous words Shakespeare himself invented that are now commonly used. I'm in my bedroom right now. How would I be able to communicate that to you if Shakespeare hadn't invented the word “bedroom?”

CML: I imagine many people – especially people who identify with the gender binary – make a lot of mistakes even when they have the best of intentions to incorporate non-binary pronouns into their language and respect people's pronoun preferences.

AS: Mistakes are common when using unfamiliar pronouns. That's ok. A good-faith effort to respect my pronoun preferences is much more important than perfection. Just fix it, and move on. Mistakes are not a big deal to me. I hope they aren't to others either.

CML: Media definitely influences our language, as well as our empathy and understanding of others in many ways. For decades now, people have humorously used the phrase, “They're Heeere!” That only occurred after a character said it in the movie “Poltergeist.” The movie “Rain Man” offered audiences a way to consider what it would be like to live with a loved-one with autism or have it yourself. How do you think the media is doing in terms of representing gender non-binary people?

AS: Lukewarm, at best. Every time I hear about a non-binary character in anything, even if it's something completely out of my realm of interest, I look it up. If the reviews are good, I will

consume that media even if it's not a genre I like, just because of how important it is to me to see someone like myself represented in media.

CML: Why do you say that representations are “lukewarm, at best?”

AS: Usually, they are pretty one-dimensional characters. They are limited to their struggle with gender. That's not what I'm looking for anymore. I want to see fully-realized characters who do things other than dealing with their gender identity. I want to see gender-fluid, dragon-fighting knights, and transgender supermodels winning awards, not just characters struggling to accept their bodies.

CML: Do you think that there is any media now that is doing a good job of representing gender non-binary people?

AS: There was a web series called “Carmilla” based on the book of the same name, and one of the characters was non-binary. The character went by their last name and used they/them pronouns. In that show, they didn't make a big deal about that character's gender identification. They were just included and respected for who they were. All in all, I thought the producers of that show went about it in a very respectful way. “Carmilla” is available on YouTube for free. Jazz Jennings is a transgender teen. She is not non-binary, because she identifies as female. But her book “I Am Jazz,” is written to be appropriate for very young children, as well as parents and teachers. I think she has done a lot to raise awareness and increase empathy for all children who are transgender.

CML: Are there other representations of gender non-binary people in media that you find less accurate or less respectful?

AS: I think sketch comedy is the biggest offender when it comes to disrespectful portrayals. You get these gender ambiguous characters, and the audience is led to spend the whole time trying to figure out their gender. The “Pat” character that used to be on Saturday Night Live is one example. The portrayal of non-binary people or people of ambiguous gender as puzzles to be solved really gives the wrong message about what's important in life. And for many, Pat was the first portrayal of a non-binary person they'd seen. That's too bad, because Pat wasn't a positive character. They were rude, obnoxious and one dimensional. There's room in our media landscape for much more multifaceted gender non-binary characters.

CML: Another question that media literacy education teaches people to ask is “Who created this message.” Jazz Jennings is a transgender young person herself. Her book reflects that perspective. I don't know whether the Pat character on Saturday Night Live was created with the input of non-binary people.

AS: I don't know either, but it doesn't appear so to me.

CML: Media literacy also encourages asking “Why was this message created?” Jazz Jennings has often spoken about her goal to support other transgender children. What do you believe Saturday Night Live’s purpose was in creating the sketches about Pat?

AS: I think their purpose was to laugh at gender ambiguity, and to use that as a vehicle to sell to their advertisers and make money. They were not coming from a perspective of – there are people who identify as gender non-binary. Pat does not describe us at all, really. Pat was created for laughs, not accuracy. I think media representations like Pat would be a lot less harmful in a world where more people already know more about real non-binary people and there was less discrimination. Then it would like, for example, laughing at sketches about people who are tall.

CML: Media literacy is really about giving people the skills to ask the right questions when they are considering everything from text books to movies to posts on the internet. So, if children are taught from the beginning of their educations to truly ask who’s creating this message, and what its purpose is, what techniques are being used to capture attention, etc. what would that mean to you?

AS: If people were more media literate and were asking the good questions, I believe more would see that gender non-binary people are simply asking that their gender identity and preferred pronouns be respected. In general, my hope is that media literacy education would lead to more respect for overall human dignity.

CML: Why is that so important for people in your community?

AS: Increasing respect for human dignity can be life-saving. The truth is, transgender people, including youth, have a far greater rate of suicide attempts and deaths than the general population. Increasing understanding, empathy and respect for our community is crucial. We are also at-risk for increased violence against us. Living with the knowledge that there are people out there who not only disrespect you, but actively wish you harm because of some attribute about yourself that you have no control over is very difficult to undertake. Everyone deserves to live safely and with respect.

Interview with Rich Ferraro, GLAAD



Rich Ferraro is the Chief Communications Officer for GLAAD, a media advocacy organization for the LGBTQ community.

CML: GLAAD is the world's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) media advocacy organization. Why was the organization founded, and what is its purpose?

RF: At GLAAD, we believe that what people see in the news media, on television, film and in other scripted media, as well as on social media has a tremendous impact on how they view the world and interact with people in their day-to-day lives. So, media powerfully affects the lives, experiences and even safety of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community. Ultimately, media representations contribute to how people treat LGBTQ individuals, how they vote on LGBTQ issues, and what they do when one of their family members comes out as LGBTQ. So, GLAAD was formed in the early 1980s to work through the news and entertainment media to leverage this highly impactful platform, further stories of LGBTQ people, educate non-LGBTQ people about our common values, and share about who makes up the LGBTQ community.

CML: Was there a specific impetus to start GLAAD at that time?

RF: In the 1980s, there were news articles running in top-tier, mainstream news outlets about the HIV and AIDS crisis that were essentially demonizing anyone living with HIV, and especially gay men. GLAAD started as an activist organization to combat those false and harmful narratives. Then, it grew to cover multiple issues that affect LGBTQ individuals and give the public more accurate information about who LGBTQ people are. Throughout history, there have been many stereotypes about our community in the news and on television that were harmful and inaccurate. That led to an American culture that was not accepting of the LGBTQ people. Through the work of GLAAD and other organizations that work through the media to change that narrative, acceptance for LGBTQ people has risen.

CML: What kinds of stereotypes were being portrayed, and why were they harmful?

RF: I've been with GLAAD for 10 years, so I can speak to the stereotypes that I've seen in my time here. A decade ago, when you turned on the television or looked at the newspaper, you saw a lot of images of white, affluent gay men representing the LGBTQ community. So, one of the things that we prioritized at GLAAD was to get more diverse stories out there. We wanted to raise visibility of the fact that LGBTQ people live in every racial community, in every religion, and that LGBTQ people are not just gay white men. We knew it was important to expand America's understanding – to let people know that the LGBTQ community is as

diverse as America itself.

CML: Are there any specific shows or characters that you believe have been integral in portraying LGBTQ people in a different way that may have changed hearts and minds?

RF: Everyone points to Ellen DeGeneres' coming out as a watershed moment. That was in 1997 – more than 20 years ago. At that time, a lot of people didn't know much about LGBTQ people. I remember Ellen on the cover of Time Magazine with a caption of her saying, "Yes, I am gay." That really opened a lot of people's minds. That word – "gay" – that had often been used in a derogatory manner by the media, was coming from a loved and respected media personality that people had come to know through her sitcom and later her talk show. That helped people to understand Ellen as just a proud American like everyone else.

Also, "Will and Grace" is often credited with educating people about LGBTQ people – particularly gay men. When former Vice President Joe Biden spoke out for marriage equality before it was the law of the land, he credited "Will and Grace" with opening his eyes. I think that show did a great job of representing the common values that LGBTQ people share with non-LGBTQ people. That began an increase in media visibility and more accurate representations of LGBTQ people. We saw more stories about LGBTQ people raising children, parents who love their LGBTQ kids, priests and nuns who support their LGBTQ parishioners, etc. Those stories, of families and allies, also changed hearts and minds. Today, all of the national polls show that a majority of Americans, regardless of race and even religious backgrounds, support marriage for LGBTQ people.

CML: And, you believe that media was an integral part of making that happen?

RF: Yes. That's why I continue working for GLAAD. Media was a key driver in the change we've seen in recent years. Prior to when Ellen came out, marriage equality was a "hot button issue" – a really impossible issue to deal with as recently as the late 1990s and early 2000s. Throughout most of the country, there weren't a lot of LGBTQ people who were out in their daily lives. The only way we were able to create a culture where LGBTQ people are more comfortable coming out was through media visibility and gaining new allies. After Ellen, the media began talking about our issues in more responsible, fair and accurate ways. Ellen basically kicked open the closet door and created a world where LGBTQ people could start being honest with people in their own lives.

CML: What is it about media that makes it so powerful in shaping people's perspectives on the LGBTQ community, and ultimately their actions in terms of inclusiveness?

RF: It's a matter of familiarity. Generally speaking, once people meet someone who is LGBTQ, they come to accept and respect them. Not everyone, of course. But, for the most part, as people get to know us, they come to see we are just like everyone else. That happens whether people meet us in their daily lives, or on TV. Again, I'll use the example of marriage

equality, because it's one of our community's biggest and proudest moments. Edie Windsor was the plaintiff in the Supreme Court case *United States vs. Windsor*, which was the landmark legal victory that overturned the Defense of Marriage Act and granted marriage rights to same-sex couples. Real stories about Edie changed the game to make that possible. American people heard Edie and her partner's story for decades – a story about lasting, unconditional love and strong commitment to another individual. When Edie's partner lost her life, the fact that Edie would not inherit her estate was a problem for the American people. They might or might not have known a lesbian woman like Edie, but they knew about love. They knew about marriage and commitment. They knew that Edie deserved to honor her partner after her passing. That is a great case study because it showed that, when people got to know Edie, it became less an issue of marriage equality and more an issue of human equality.

CML: One of the primary concepts in media literacy education is teaching students to be aware of what content producers include and what they leave out. More LGBTQ stories and more accuracy in telling them seem to really have influenced societal change. Did GLAAD do any research on what stories needed to be told in order to affect change?

RF: Yes, GLAAD and a lot of other organizations did a lot of research based upon that. Research was done on how the media was covering marriage equality, what language was used, etc. GLAAD did trainings in newsrooms with other media organizations on best practices for accurate representation of the LGBTQ community and LGBTQ couples. The trainings were well received, partially because of our reputation for solid research and reliability. GLAAD is the leader when it comes to media advocacy and media education for LGBTQ issues.

CML: What type of research was done?

RF: We did polling and focus groups on the best ways to talk about same-sex marriage and grow support. For example, using the word “homosexual” versus using the words “gay” and “lesbian.” Most people respond in a much more positive way when they hear about a “gay” or “lesbian” couple than when they hear about a “homosexual” couple. Along with the trainings, we created tip sheets and messaging guides for journalists to consider as they were covering the issue.

CML: So, you were able to offer the content creators – journalists and other media producers – language that was proven to be more effective in gaining support. What else did you offer content producers as part of your advocacy?

RF: GLAAD and other organizations identified same-sex couples that had powerful stories to tell. We passed them on to talk shows and news media, so that Americans could see these couples, learn about their love and commitment, and understand their shared values. The couples also spoke openly about the discrimination that they faced because they couldn't gain

access to the same rights and protections as straight couples. Those couples did a lot to move the public to support marriage equality and created an America where the Supreme Court could pass it. I always say that GLAAD doesn't lobby in courtrooms or on Capitol Hill. GLAAD lobbies in the court of public opinion. Whether it is marriage equality or another issue, leveraging the media is powerful. News media, entertainment media, social media, -- and now, we are expanding into video games.

CML: Video games? So, for example, a super hero who happens to be LGBTQ?

RF: Yes, and also working on changing the language used in these games. Language in video games is frequently very anti-LGBTQ. The use of slurs is common, and you hear that spill over into conversations at big video game conventions. There are also a lot of threats of violence against LGBTQ people in the games. That is harmful. From a media literacy standpoint, think about how different audiences understand messages in different ways. If you are an LGBTQ player who is logged in and playing against other players, and you hear slurs or threats directed at you or your community, it can be very disturbing. Also, millennial males are a large audience for video games. By including slurs and implied violence, it creates an environment that empowers them to use that type of language in their everyday lives.

CML: Just like any other media.

RF: Yes, exactly. But with video games, no one is really monitoring the parent companies the way they do with other media. But, there is real interest in creating environments where everyone can play and feel safe in the gaming environments. So, one of GLAAD's biggest projects planned for next year is to do for video games what we have done in the past for news media, TV and film. We are looking at how to influence the video game industry to be safer and more inclusive.

CML: Media literacy education is more about getting people to ask the right questions to make wise decisions and think critically than telling people what to believe or how to communicate. It's a process of inquiry. If more people had access to media literacy education – if they questioned things more deeply from a young age – how do you believe that would affect GLAAD and the LGBTQ community?

RF: It would be a game-changer if people questioned what they see in the media when it comes to LGBTQ issues. If end users scrutinized headlines and language instead of just reacting. If they asked, "Who has written this, where are they getting their information, who are they quoting, and why," they could fully grasp a story much more effectively. A lot of misunderstanding about LGBTQ people and discrimination would be reduced. Especially today, news is coming at journalists fast and furious. New room staffs have been reduced to critically low levels, so most journalists simply don't have the bandwidth to ensure accuracy like they should. Journalists that I speak with through my work at GLAAD tell me it's like drinking from a firehose all the time. So, to really learn about an issue, I think it's important to

go to more than one news outlet or source. Seek out multiple sources and make sure the facts line up.

CML: Those skills have always been crucial. But now, anyone can produce messages, not just professional journalists. Meanwhile, there are far fewer professional gatekeepers to filter the accuracy of information. So, they are more important than ever.

RF: They certainly are.

CML: We talked a lot about language and its ability to influence public opinion. What about images? Has GLAAD also looked at that?

CML: Yes, images make a difference, particularly as we work on issues affecting the transgender community. Today, there is a lot of debate about so-called “bathroom bills” – legislation about whether transgender people should have access to public restrooms that match their gender identity. Language that we use plays a role, but so do the visuals that are used. Laverne Cox is a well-known and well-liked transgender actress. When her image is connected to the issue, versus just a stock image or just a bathroom sign, people are able to visualize who the issue affects. Again, it’s familiarity. Laverne has done such a tremendous job of educating people that she is just a woman like any other, that her image resonates with people.

I hope that with more media literacy education, consumers of media that are encountering these issues in the media will always be questioning who transgender people actually are. They are no harm to anyone. Their goal is to simply live their lives, and I think seeing that in visuals really helps further public education about it. Media depictions – both in language and images – has a long way to go, with representations of transgender people especially. People are really much better off learning about the trans community by doing their own research because, oftentimes, you are not going to get enough from mainstream media.

CML: GLAAD puts out reports on how media is doing in terms of LGBTQ representation, correct?

RF: The report is called “Where We Are on TV.”

CML: And, where are we now? You mentioned that gay, white men have the most representation. What about other groups?

RF: Right now, television, film and other media could do a much better job of representing transgender and gender non-conforming people, and there are real business reasons to do so. Of course, we all know the ethical reasons – to include images that represent all of America. But right now, there is a lot of possibility for content producers to gain earned media coverage when they do a great job of telling a story about transgender people. The community

responds very well. Social media lights up, and generally mainstream media outlets talk about it because including transgender characters and stories is still somewhat groundbreaking. There is a lot of value in doing a responsible job of telling trans stories.

Our report, “Where We Are on TV” comes out every year. We’ve found that broadcast television, as well as cable and streaming have high percentages of LGBTQ characters, but diversity is lacking in a big way. As I mentioned, the majority of LGBTQ characters on TV today are white gay men. That does not match the reality of our very diverse LGBTQ community. So, we sit down with producers, scriptwriters, studios and network executives to talk about the importance of representing specifically LGBTQ people of color, bisexual people, transgender and gender non-conforming people, and other diverse sections of the LGBTQ community. That means low-income LGBTQ characters, disabled LGBTQ characters, interracial LGBTQ couples, etc. GLAAD’s goal is to make the LGBTQ characters represented in the media match the diversity that’s in the community. We’ve done work with Freeform, a cable channel that is generally watched by millennials and young women, on a really groundbreaking story of a queer Muslim woman. That can be a lifeline to other young queer Muslim women who finally can see themselves represented in the media, find stories they can relate to, and see characters like themselves who are flourishing. It also opens the general public’s eyes to the fact that LGBTQ people come from all walks of life.

CML: When you say “lifeline,” you really mean it. LGBTQ people are much more at risk for suicide, depression and other mental health conditions. How do you think media representation can help?

RF: The latest survey findings say that 40% of transgender individuals in America have attempted suicide. Not thought about suicide, attempted it. It’s shocking. It’s so important that transgender people see images of other transgender people succeeding, not only in their day-to-day lives, but also through television and film. One good example is a CBS show that debuted last fall called “Doubt,” where Laverne Cox, a transgender woman of color, played a successful transgender lawyer who fell in love with a man who was also lawyer. That marked the first time a transgender woman fell in love on broadcast TV. That is so important for many young transgender women who previously didn’t see love as a possibility for themselves, because so much of their lives have been lived in isolation. Prior to “Doubt,” they hadn’t ever seen a transgender woman of color on television who is successful and falls in love. And, by the way, if you are growing up transgender, it is not uncommon to only see one character in the media with whom you can identify.

CML: What about in less mainstream media, such as self-created content on YouTube?

RF: YouTube and other sites where you can post videos serve as platforms where LGBTQ people can share their stories and reach so many. Television doesn’t have a lot of transgender characters, but on YouTube you’ll find a lot of transgender stories and transgender people telling their own stories. Transgender youth seek these stories to find

people they can relate to, or to see what their futures might look like.

CML: That really goes back to that basic question posed by media literacy education – “Who is creating this content?” Seeing something that was created by someone who is transgender is very different than a media construction that might portray a stereotype or, like you said, be influenced by different agendas or issues, such as whether a journalist has time to do thorough research. Although misrepresentations may come from anywhere, self-created content does offer an opportunity for people to hear from voices that may not otherwise have been given a platform.

RF: Yes, if you are looking to learn about the LGBTQ community I think you have to go beyond mainstream media. Images of LGBTQ people in top-tier news and entertainment don’t give the whole picture. Content that is produced through the lens of someone who is living the LGBTQ experience is going to do a much better job of reflecting the diversity of the community. So, sites like YouTube and Instagram, where LGBTQ people can tell their own stories in their own words, are good options. Good information about what is happening in our community is also available through media outlets that specialize in representing the LGBTQ community. The Advocate is the oldest LGBTQ magazine. Logo TV is a popular cable network for LGBTQ people and allies. NBC has NBC Out, and Huffington Post has Huffington Post Queer Voice.

CML: Those types of specialized media come from a different perspective, and could be very good resources for those wanting to gain deeper insight into the issues affecting LGBTQ people in their schools, work places, communities and families.

RF: Yes, and just like all media, I recommend that people look at those sources using critical thinking skills and make their own decisions. Listen to LGBTQ people and stories, inform yourself with facts about what is happening to LGBTQ people, and share them with your networks.



CONSORTIUM
for **MEDIA LITERACY**

Uniting for Development

Published in *Hastings Law Journal*, June 2018
["Media Literacy: A Foundational Skill for Democracy in the 21st Century,"](#) by Tessa Jolls and Michele Johnsen.

Introducing CML Infographics

With each issue of *Connections*, CML will publish a new media literacy infographic (see left) designed to help you teach and explain media literacy concepts and ideas to students, parents, and policy makers. Find them on CML's [website](#) and share with your friends!

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About Us...

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents. The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

<http://www.consortiumformedia literacy.org>

Resources for Media Literacy

Representation and Media Literacy Resources

GLAAD – GLAAD works through entertainment, news, and digital media to share stories from the LGBTQ community that accelerate acceptance.

CNN Report on GLAAD's Where We Are on TV (2017):

<https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/09/entertainment/glaad-tv-report-2017/index.html>

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media -- focuses on media representation of women and girls.

Media Education Foundation – Documentary films on a variety of topics related to gender identity, sexual orientation and culture.

Center for Media Literacy Archive – searchable newsletter archive contains past issues on gender and media.

MediaLit Moments

Incredibly Hard to Tell

A recent study from [Pew Research](#) indicates that Americans struggle to tell fact from opinion even within the same article. In the past, newspapers had clearly marked sections designated as News, Opinion, Sports or Entertainment and the distinctions were obvious. Today, as articles are shared online and out of context, the lines are blurred. The recent release of *Incredibles 2*, has resulted in lots of media coverage – everything from financial reports to movie reviews. *Let's see if students can tell what's fact and what's opinion.*

AHA!: It can be hard to tell and some articles contain both!

Grade Level: 7-10

Materials: Forbes article on *Incredibles 2* is written like a financial report but is also a movie review. The author is a media columnist who reports on the film industry.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2018/06/20/box-office-incredibles-2-scores-record-27m-tuesday/#7c02cc9157ae>

Key Question #1: Who created this message?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same message differently.

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are included or omitted?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

Activity: Have your students read the Forbes article. Ask for a show of hands indicating if this is an opinion piece or a news report. Have a few students explain their reasoning. Then offer the descriptions below and talk about ways to identify fact vs. opinion.

News is fact-related and verifiable. Often includes statistics and/or quotes from experts. Usually written by a professional journalist, word choice tends to be descriptive rather than emotional. The goal is to inform readers by reporting who, what, when, where.

Opinion (or Editorial) pieces are written by individuals tasked with presenting their side of the story. Often in the form of a column or a review. The goal is to sway the reader to the author's point of view.

It's helpful to know who authored the piece and what their job title is: reporter, columnist, news anchor, talk show host, activist, etc. This will give you some indication of their role and purpose. It is not uncommon, as seen in the Forbes article, that columnists also provide facts. News articles should include facts only.

Ask your students: Are lines blurred? Is it hard to tell? Why is the distinction important? Why does it matter? Are both types of information interesting? When sharing information online, should it be noted if you are sharing news or opinion? Use the Key Questions and Core Concepts in your discussion.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, © 2002-2018, Center for Media Literacy.