



# **MEDIA AWARENESS**

## **HOW TO NAVIGATE THE MEDIA**

ACCESS AND DIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	3
Media Literacy .....	5
How do we analyze media? .....	5
Why is media literacy and equitable media so important? .....	7
Diversity and Accessibility .....	8
Privilege .....	9
Oppression .....	9
Sexism .....	10
Homophobia/ Heterosexism .....	13
Transphobia .....	15
Racism .....	16
Colonialism .....	19
Classism .....	20
Fatphobia .....	23
Ageism .....	24
Ableism .....	25
Why question privilege? .....	26
Creating Equitable Media .....	26
Symbols and Signs .....	26
Representation .....	28
Tips on making inclusive media .....	28

## INTRODUCTION – media schmedia.

The media. What a trendy-sounding buzzword. At times, it can sound pretentious, academic and prone to over-analysis. It makes something that's supposed to be entertaining, frankly, quite boring. The truth is, the media is pretty significant for a lot of different reasons.

Despite all this hype, the media really *is* one of the most powerful forces in our society. We come into contact with the media all the time; we ingest 100,500 words of media every day (citation). The media comes in many different forms although it used to refer mainly to newspaper, television, and radio, it has now expanded to encompass movies, music, the internet (blogs, websites, social networking, podcasts), books, magazines, comics, tabloids, video games, cells phones and their apps, video games, and advertisements (billboards, commercials, product placement, posters, etc.).

Because the media is so much a part of our everyday lives and we come into contact with it so often, it has a huge influence on society as a whole, as well as our individual lives. The media plays a big role in how we interpret, understand and learn about ourselves and the world around us. It sends us a ton of messages every day, many of which are messages that we usually do not even know we are receiving. The media is one of the biggest contributors to culture in our society, and it is important that we understand its effects.

The purpose behind this we hope this guide will help you understand how to analyze and evaluate media so that you can begin or continue to develop media that is effective, responsible, and creative. It will help you to understand the importance of representation, especially in advertising, and why equitable and inclusive media is so important to you, to the event you're advertising, and to society as a whole. There is a lot of information in here, so use the table of contents at the beginning

to figure out what you already know and what you still need to figure out. The guide has four major sections:

- 1. Media Literacy: What is it, why do we need it, and how can it help us create our own media?**
- 2. Diversity and Accessibility: What do you need to know about the social systems that we operate within in order to understand how to create media that is inclusive of diversity and makes positive social contributions, while still getting your message across and people out to your event!**
- 3. Creating Your Own Media: How do you connect concepts of diversity and inclusion into the media that you create? What are some ways to do this, as well as some key things to avoid?**
- 4. Moving Forward: What should you take away from this? What are some further resources?**

# Media Literacy

## How do we Analyze Media?

When you learn to read a book, it's called literacy. When you learn to read the messages the media sends and how they send them, it's called media literacy. Critically analyzing, understanding, and evaluating the messages that the media sends is the first step to being able to construct effective and creative media yourself. There are a few important things we need to understand in order to "read" media:

- 1. All media is constructed.** This means it's made up! Media is shaped and formed in different ways, it doesn't accurately reflect reality, but rather makes its own versions of reality. Each message is the result of a number of careful decisions on colour, lighting, text, etc., so nothing is an accident. However, this made-up reality can be very powerful in influencing the way we *think* things are or "should be" in the world.
- 2. Media is dealt with differently by every individual.** Not everything we see or hear is interpreted the same by everyone. Depending on different aspects of your identity or life experiences, the way you interpret and negotiate the media you come into contact with will vary. The same goes for the media you create. Since people with different life experiences will interpret it differently, this is something you should take into consideration when you're creating public media.
- 3. The media contains ideological and value based messages.** The media is always trying to tell (or sell) you something, whether it's commercial, social, or political. Sometimes this is explicit and sometimes implicit, but ideological values drive media production. It's up to us to decode these messages.
- 4. There are political, social, and commercial implications to media.** The media is influenced by commercial interests, political

interests, and social norms. All of these help to determine the type of media we see and where and how it is targeted, as well as the amount of control we have over what we see, read, and hear.

**5. The medium is the message.** Content and form are very closely related. How messages are sent changes the message of the media itself. Always remember to consider the medium, and that every medium is aesthetically unique. This means something!

In order to read media we need to look at a number of different aspects and these aspects differ depending on what kind of media you're analyzing. For instance, looking at a commercial is very different from looking at a print ad because you have to consider camera movements, lighting, sound, etc., that you might not necessarily consider when you are considering a print-based medium. Appendix A and B both offer excellent tips on how to deconstruct (or take apart and examine) different types of media. [Let's include some of this here. Where is it]

We will mainly examine visual media with some focus on print media. Here's a list of some good starting questions to consider when looking at most media forms (remember, this can be considered for media that is made up of just words, just pictures, or both!):

- Make observations. Who is represented and who isn't? What genders, races, abilities, ages are represented? How are the people portrayed? How are they positioned?
- What are the technical aspects of this media (sound, lighting, camera angles)? How do these change the message being relayed?
- Is there text or dialogue in the ad? What is it saying? How is it being said? Where is it positioned?

*This may seem like a whole lot of fuss over something that's supposed to "just be fun". But fun needs to be responsible too.*

- What is the purpose of the media? Is it trying to sell a product? An idea? How does that influence the way the ad looks or what it's trying to say?
- What assumptions does the ad make about gender, race, class, ability, age, or sexuality? How are these shown in the ad, explicitly or implicitly?
- What are some of the long and short term consequences of the representations in this media? Does it create unrealistic expectations of what we should be? Does it promote dehumanizing stereotypes? Is it socially responsible?

Once you can answer some of these questions, you can decide what the piece of media as a whole is trying to say, as well as its implications. But there's still one important question we need to answer before we can move on...

### **Why is media literacy and equitable media so important?**

This may seem like a whole lot of fuss over something that's supposed to "just be fun." But fun needs to be responsible too. That's why people get arrested for getting into drunken brawls or shouting hateful words at others. In order to build responsible, respectful communities, we need to be committed to learn to read what we see, so that the media we create and consume is as inclusive as possible.

There's a common idea that people who are part of a marginalized group (such as people with disabilities) are responsible for any issues concerning that group. That it is solely the problem of that group alone. However, there should be a change in our culture where that responsibility lies with whoever is helping to perpetuate oppression, whether consciously or not. We all play a role in reframing how we use

media. We need to take ownership for the care and respect of our peers and our community because if we will not, no one else will.

If we understand how the media shapes certain ideals and social norms, we can reduce its power over us. We can become more independent and creative. We also have to remember that we're accountable to all the media we create. Even though our intentions may be innocent, we're still responsible for their effects, regardless of whether we intended them or not. The more inclusive the media we create is, the more people it will reach, and the more marketable becomes. That way, we can sell our events, products, and ideas without selling ourselves, or anyone else. By demonstrating a dedication to diversity, our media and events are more appealing to a wider range of people, as more people feel included. Not only does this foster a sense of community with our media, but more people will come out to our events, buy our products, and read our articles. Bonus: this means they'll probably even ask us for more!!!

## Diversity and Accessibility

As much as talk about the media seems like a whole lot of hype, stuff like “diversity” and “equity” can sound like buzzwords. But the truth is, diversity and equity, and their opposites, oppression and marginalization, are things that are lived out every single day, and have real effects on real people that we might not even realize, including our friends, family, classmates, professors, and peers.

The following is a brief primer on issues of diversity and the “isms.” Try to keep an open mind, and remember: although it sounds overly “politically correct”, this is real for a lot of people.

In order to understand social justice and equity, we have to understand privilege and oppression: what these words mean, and their effects.



**Privilege:** Privilege is sometimes a difficult experience to understand. Basically, it means that society is set up in a way that makes it easier for some people to succeed socially, politically, financially, culturally, etc. based on the way they were born. This can be based on a lot of different aspects of someone's identity, including race, gender, class, age, sexuality, and ability. Sometimes privilege is hard to acknowledge because we'd all like to think that we get what we deserve based on our personal achievements. While this might be the case for some people we need to start acknowledging that there are systematic barriers in our society that bar people from participating equally in all aspects of life. Acknowledging your privilege doesn't mean you can't do things, or that you aren't deserving of your accomplishments. It means that you support others who may have a more difficult time because they are consciously or unconsciously discriminated against, and help them to succeed as well!

A professor once told me an excellent story about social privilege. He always used to ride his bike home every night, approximately a 45 minute ride. One night, however, he got home, checked his watch, and saw that the ride had only taken 20 minutes! He was utterly perplexed. Was his watch broken? He checked the other clocks in the house, and saw that it was not. Still confused, he went to bed. When he read the news the next morning, he saw that there had been a huge windstorm the night before, and the force of the wind behind him had helped make his cycle home quicker and easier. He realized this was a lot like privilege. Privilege, he said, is having the wind at your back, and not even knowing it.

**Oppression:** Oppression is the opposite of privilege. It means that the same social systems that allow some people to succeed socially, politically, financially, culturally, etc. based on the way they were born, don't allow others the same opportunities for participation and success. This is again based on many different aspects of someone's identity,

including race, gender, class, age, sexuality, and ability. Oppression can manifest itself in a number of different ways, from overt discrimination, to lack of representation of people with marginalized (or non-privileged) identities. Imagine being called a special-interest group by a member of a dominant identity group, when you are in fact just trying to explain how your experience is different. This can be demoralizing and scary. In terms of the media, lack of representation (i.e. seeing all white people in an ad can be alienating to people of colour) or objectification (think sexy women and the implicit promise of their bodies used to sell something) are probably the worst. There are an infinite number of experiences that can be oppressive or marginalizing, and we'd never have the time to talk about them all here. However, it is important to note, that not everyone who experiences oppression accepts that oppression. Many want to and do reclaim their power, and are fully successful individuals. However, there are others that do not, and the focus here is on the *system-based oppression* that allows for marginalizing power imbalances between people based on their identities. Imagine biking head-first into gale-force winds. You may get home eventually, but it takes a lot more effort, and your muscles may be sore the next day.

*“No one is ever just privileged or just oppressed. Oppression doesn’t work that way. Oppression and privilege intersect in different ways and diverse sets of experiences that make it different for everyone. Remember, this shows up in our media too!”*

There are bunches of different ways that privilege and oppression manifest in society. Here are a few ways:

**Sexism** – Sexism is a type of oppression based on gender and/or sex and the belief that one sex (specifically women) is inferior to or less valuable than the other. This type of discrimination is seen in many different institutions in our society such as the government, law, medicine, the family and the workplace, where women may not have equal salaries,

access to jobs or resources, or may have more responsibilities for less rewards than their male counterparts. One of the ways in which sexism manifests in society is through the form of the objectification of women. Why is this issue? Well, researchers have attributed the objectification of women to gender violence. For example, women are twice as likely as men to experience violence in their lifetimes, whether physical, emotional or sexual. Due to the fact that women are largely devalued by sexism in society, this violence is seen as inevitable. This inevitability and lack of action on the part of the law, government, and society more generally is actually the result of oppression based on gender. Another way sexism manifests is through gender norms or stereotypes. These are societal ideas of what or how “real men” and “real women” should be or should act in our society. For example, stereotypes might include men liking the colour blue, into sports, and being tough, while women are largely attributed to liking the colour pink, high heels, and being soft-spoken. What’s wrong with these stereotypes? Well, they limit people’s personal expression and can make them feel guilty, or even ridiculed for expressing who they are especially when it is considered "different" from the stereotypes that exist. This is a way in which sexism hurts everyone, no matter what their gender, by limiting who they can be and what they can do in the world.

### ***How do we see this in the media?***

- *Stereotypical gender roles (for children and adults)*
- *the sexual objectification of women, using women’s bodies to sell everything from machinery to beer to clothing*
- *sexual violence in media imagery, especially combined with alcohol (such as men in sexually dominating positions in relation to women, women in sexually submissive or available poses)*

- *ideals of femininity and masculinity that are often unobtainable, unreachable beauty ideals*

**When:** Friday – 9pm until Blackout Occurs

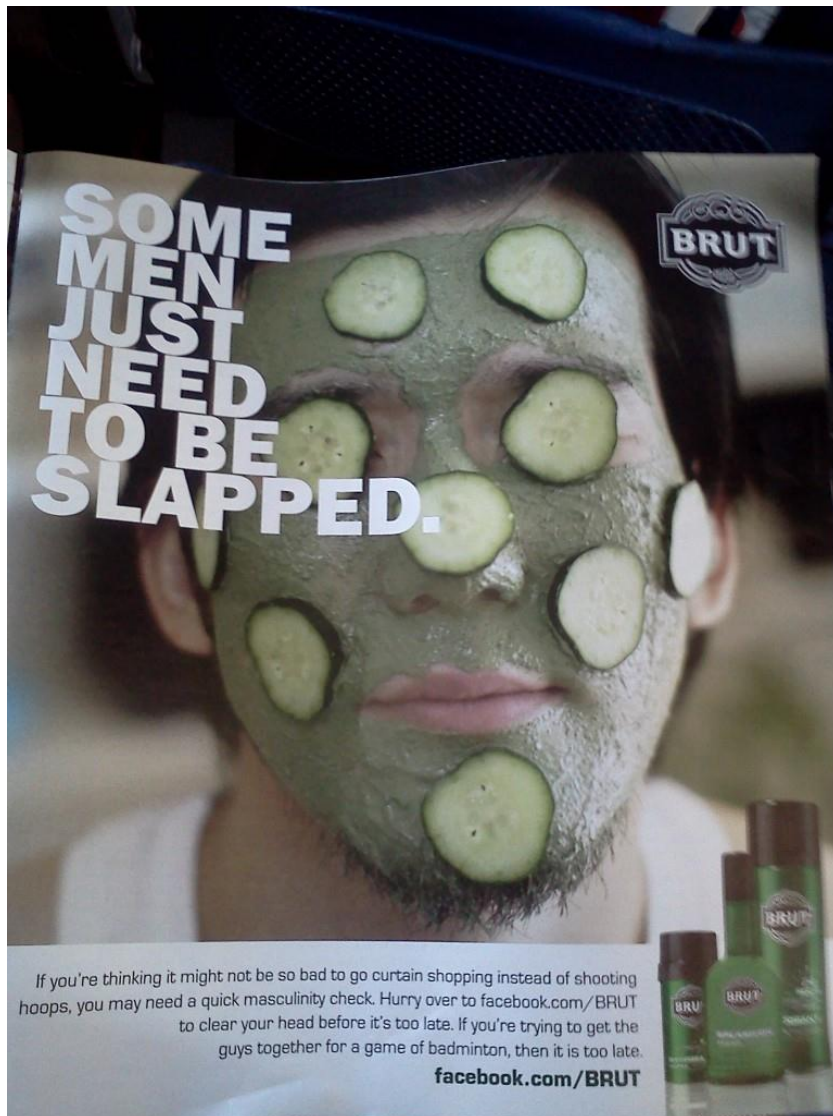
**Cover:** \$10 BUT THERE'S NO TICKETS AT THE DOOR SO GET A FUCKING TICKET!

**Tickets?:** Get 'em from Omri (604-649-7473). He's a baus.



**Why:** I can't stress how much I want you to attend this party so I can yell in your drunken face. The boys at Alpha Delt are top notch and always throw great events, so I highly suggest you get a ticket and let's hit the blackness together. You'll probably find me in the parkade being awesome in my usual manner. One other side note: A good many Alpha Delts have girlfriends, so they are off the market. Which means most of the girls in attendance will be yours for the picking. Just sayin'...

Source: <http://baldtruth.ca/page/2/>



Source: <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/04/27/some-men-just-need-to-be-slapped-policing-masculinity/>

**Homophobia/Heterosexism** – Homophobia discriminates against people based on their sexuality. This can range from a denial of rights to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer) people, such as Proposition 8 in California, to gay bashings (both verbal and physical) to more subtle marginalization, such as heterosexism. Heterosexism is the (often unconscious) assumption of heterosexuality that LGBTQ people often face, such as being asked whether they have a partner of the opposite sex, or having to come out as “not-straight” to their friends and family because general social “norms” assume heterosexuality.

### *How do we see this in the media?*

- *Portrayal of only heterosexual pairings or families*
- *Tokenization of gay characters, using them as props for straight characters (think of the “gay best friend”)*
- *Use of the word “gay” to mean “stupid”*
- *Pretending to be queer in order to garner laughs*
- *Outright homophobia, like use of the term “no homo” in some pop and hip-hop music, use of the word f\*\*\*\*, any media that suggest that queer people or queer families are “dangerous” or “immoral”*



Sticker on a van seen November 7, 2008

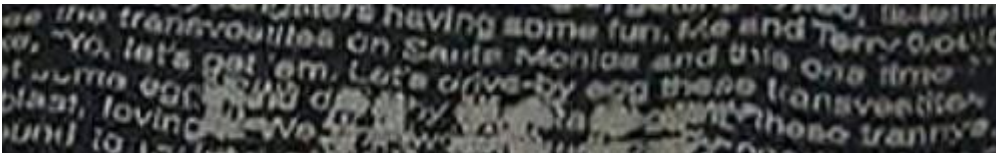
Source: Sociological Images

<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2008/11/07/straight-pride/>

**Transphobia** – This is the oppression and marginalization of trans people based on their expression of their internal gender identity. “Trans” is a broad category that can encompass people who have transitioned from male to female or female to male, individuals who don’t identify as any gender, or who like to play with their gender; who have multiple genders, who are genderqueer, bi-gendered, or two-spirit; who identify as a cross-dresser, androgyne, trigender, or intersex. Trans acts as an umbrella term for a very diverse set of experiences with gender/sex identity or expression. It’s a good idea to educate yourself about trans issues, and there are some resources available in the resources section of this guide. Trans oppression, again, has many manifestations. This includes struggles when filling out forms that only have “male” and “female” options, applying for passports and visas, having to choose between “men’s” and “women’s” washrooms, or not having access to “women’s only” spaces, despite identifying as a woman. Often, people who identify as trans or who are visibly gender non-conforming face an enormous risk of violence. In the last decade, more than one person has been killed every month due to anti-trans hate and prejudice.

***How do we see this in the media?***

- *Very rigid gender roles for men and women (ie. blue and pink, aggressor and passive receiver)*
- *Very little trans representation in media*
- *Portrayal of trans identities as inherently funny or disgusting or dangerous*
- *Mocking any type of gender variance (such as men in skirts), using gender variance as the main punchline in advertising jokes*
- *Perpetuating the stereotype that trans people don’t out themselves so that they can “trick” people (sexually or emotionally)*
- *Use of derogatory terms such as “tranny” and “queen”*



A t-shirt for boys produced by X Games Clothing, a brand of ESPN Consumer Products.

The close up reads "Yo let's get 'em. Let's drive-by egg these transvestites"

Source: Sociological Images

<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2010/09/18/mainstreaming-gender-policing-in-a-kids-t-shirt/>

**Racism** – This is the type of oppression that support the ideology that race is a prominent determining factor of human capacity and nature, and that (consciously or unconsciously) places whiteness above all other races or ethnicities. Racial discrimination can be institutional, where certain racial or ethnic groups are systematically denied rights or benefits. However, much more common is what is known as “common-sense racism,” or the belief that the stereotypes one holds (whether positive or negative) about individuals are “just true,” rather than based in stereotypes and preconceptions. This is still very common in our society. Violence against racialized people of colour is also a huge issue, as men of colour are often falsely seen as overly violent, and women of



colour falsely seen as victimized or somehow deserving of violence, when these assumptions are based purely in racialized stereotypes.

***How do we see this in the media?***

- *lack of representation, tokenization of people of colour*
- *negative stereotyped portrayals of people of colour (such as aggression and violence being associated with men of colour, or animalistic, wild, or jungle imagery being associated with women of colour)*
- *beauty ideals that are often based on whiteness*
- *using people of colour as background props*
- *only portraying people of colour in specific, stereotyped jobs*
- *Portraying racialized identities as “costumes” (blackface, Halloween costumes that are merely cultural dress, etc)*

**Racially Inclusive sign**

<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/03/20/racially-inclusive-signage/>



Dove advertisement in Oprah magazine, March 2011

Source: Sociological Images <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/03/21/the-pitfalls-of-marketing-race-and-beauty-in-a-dove-ad/>



Eastern Michigan University, October 2010

Cartoon that ran in Eastern Michigan University's student newspaper, The Echo

Source: Sociological Images

[http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2010/10/08/dismissing-claims-of-racism-emus-  
kkk-cartoon-trigger-warning/](http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2010/10/08/dismissing-claims-of-racism-emus-<br/>kkk-cartoon-trigger-warning/)

**Colonialism** – Colonialism is a systematic form of oppression with historical roots. Colonialism was the policy of (mainly European) power to conquer and acquire land and subjects to maintain and exploit for economic and political benefits. This usually involved the systematic killing or exploitation of the indigenous peoples of a land, and had and continues to have huge impact on their social well-being. In Canada, Aboriginal peoples were not only killed by colonizers, but they also experienced a cultural genocide, in which their traditions, lifestyles, communities, and values were attempted to be wiped out by European colonial powers. Some of the institutional tools used in this project (whose legacies continue today) include the residential school system and the Indian Act. The racism and economic consequences that result because of colonialism persists today, and their legacies continue to oppress Aboriginal peoples both in Canada and worldwide.

***How do we see this in the media?***

- *Cultural appropriation, such as using Aboriginal peoples as sports mascots (ie. the Chicago Blackhawks or the Cleveland Indians), or wearing Aboriginal dress (ie. feather headdresses as a popular and trendy fashion choice)*
- *Historical erasure (such as ads about the founding of Canada that pretend that it was “empty land” before white settlers came)*
- *Media that implies that westernized models are “better” than non-westernized ones, such as ads for skin lightening cream, ads that sell maxi-pads to women in sub-Saharan Africa and treat them as “primitive,” etc.*



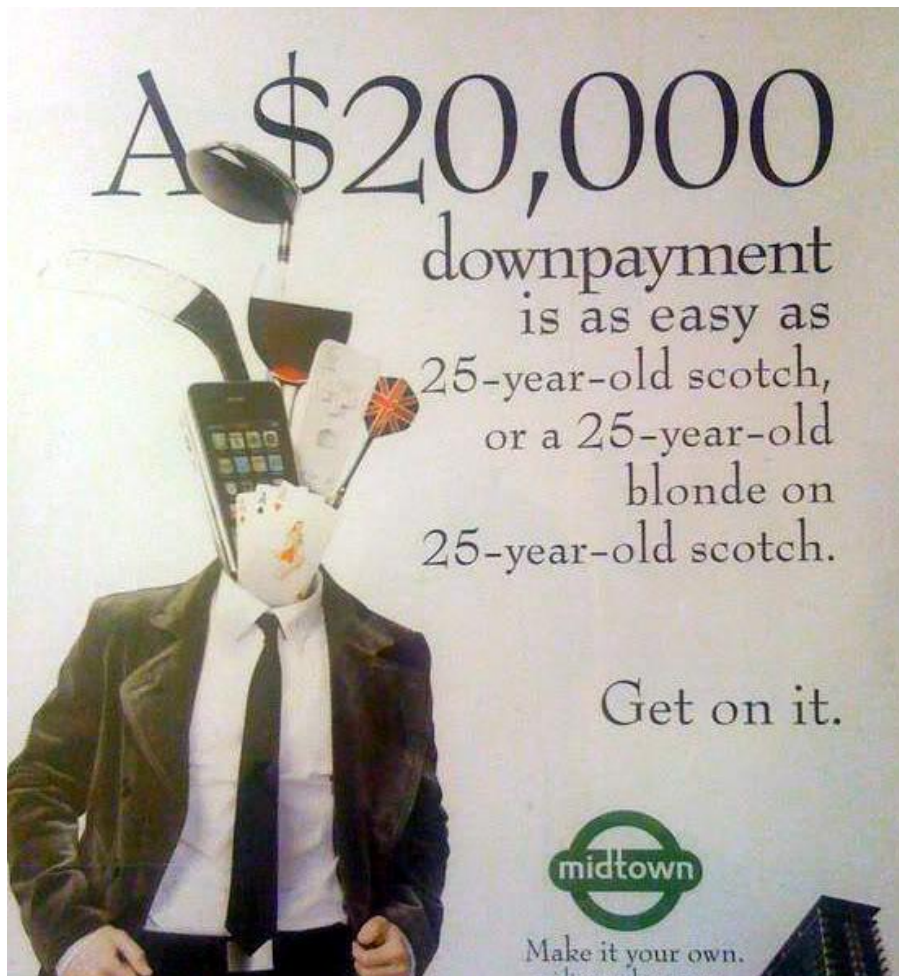
- 
- Harvard University , October 2010
- Poster for a Harvard University fraternity Sigma Chi Columbus Day “bros and hos” party titled “Conquistabros and Navajos”.
- Source: Sociological Images  
<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2010/10/26/columbus-day-themed-bros-and-hos-party-at-harvard/>

**Classism** – Classism is a form of oppression that devalues people who aren’t “middle-class” or who are poor. Poor people are often blamed for their own soci-economic marginalization, when in fact; the economic systems we function in can make it very difficult to succeed, even when individuals are very hard workers. This type of discrimination includes policies that benefit the rich while further marginalizing the poor (such as gentrification), as well as prejudice or fear of people who are poor, and negative stereotypes against them (such as “criminals,” “drunks,”

or “welfare queens”). It is important to remember that an individual’s humanity should not and cannot be judged based on the amount of money they have.

***How do we see this in the media?***

- *using poor people as background imagery (ie. homeless people) or to reflect someone else’s economic privilege*
- *lack of representation, not portraying people living in poverty as being nuanced, complicated, involved individuals*
- *mocking poverty or poor people*
- *using stereotypes of poor people as a joke or as the only facet of their personality*



Advertisement for condominiums March 2010 in Calgary

Classism and sexism

Source: Sociological Images

<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2010/03/26/buying-condos-and-sleeping-with-drunk-chicks-both-super-easy/>



Homeless Chic: Part of Milan Fashion Week, Vivienne Westwood's Collection January 2010

Source: Sociological Images

<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2010/01/19/homeless-chic/>

**Fatphobia** – This is a form of oppression that treats thinness as the only acceptable form of beauty and demonizes people who do not fit into a perfect ideal of thin, or at the very least the desire to be thin. This is often medicalized or framed as a “health issue,” instead of accepting that bodies come in different and beautiful forms, and that “healthy weight” is different for every individual.

*How do we see this in the media?*

- *the portrayal of a beauty norm that is extremely thin (even plus-sized model are thin by most standards!!!)*
- *excessive photoshopping of bodies to make them appear thinner than physically possible*
- *no representation of a variety of body shapes, or the idea that only thin bodies can be sexy*
- *constant barrage of weight loss ads and the scrutinization of people’s bodies*



Louisiana State University – November 2010

Banner on display at an apartment complex near the Louisiana State University (LSU) campus in Baton Rouge presenting two supposed LSU fans in blue and one University of Alabama fan in red. This was hung in anticipation of a football game between the two teams.

source: Sociological Images

<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/?s=%22Louisiana+State+University%22>

**Ageism** – This is a form of oppression based on age. Many people judge an individual's mental capacity based on their age. Think young people's ideas and voices and experiences not being listened to because they are young, or old people always being considered senile. Another way ageism manifests is in the extreme fear of aging perpetuated by companies and society.

***How do we see this in the media?***

- *Most media featuring only young adults and middle-aged people*
- *Middle-aged people portrayed as being the only people who can make sane, intelligent decisions*
- *Portraying old people as ugly, frightening, or senile*
- *Negatively representing relationships with an age difference (ie. "cougars" or "sugar daddies")*
- *Instilling a fear of aging through beauty products that "fight aging"*





Advertisement for eye care

Source: Sociological Images

<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2008/10/21/banal-stereotypes-inspector-360-ad/>

**Ableism** – Ableism is a type of oppression that discriminate against people based on the physical, mental, or emotional ability of their body. This means that society thinks of fully able bodies as “normal” and that disabled bodies are somehow insufficient or abnormal, when in fact they are just another type of body. It is instead the types of activities or the built environment that is made only to accommodate able-bodies or minds that is the problem, as it excludes anyone who is not fully able.

*How do we see this in the media?*

- *Lack of representation or invisibility*
- *Using the word “retarded” or “lame” to signify stupid or dumb, using the words “insanely” or “crazy” (ie. insanely cheap), to signify “very.” These words devalue people who may have a mental illness or cognitive disability*

- *Portraying disabled bodies as deficient, ugly, or grotesque*
- *Portraying disabled bodies or minds as un-able, rather than as fully functioning and participatory*

## **Why question privilege?**

*“We need to remember that we can unlearn all the oppressive things society has taught us, but it takes a bit of time and effort!”*

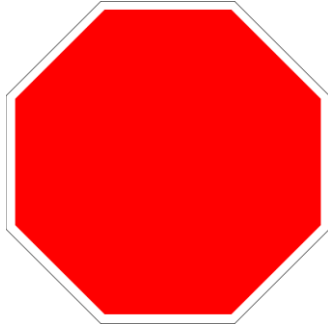
This can all seem quite overwhelming, and understanding different ways that privilege and oppression exist and manifest is a long process. In fact, it never ends – as with anything else, we are always learning, and will always continue to learn. But why are inclusivity and diversity so important? Well, there are a few reasons. It’s important to build an equitable society that everyone can participate in equally because it’s just and fair. We also need to remember that privilege and oppression isn’t static. Just because we embody a certain privilege at one moment doesn’t mean we always will, so it’s important to stick up for all oppressions, so other people who are our allies will stick up for us as well. That’s how you build healthy and fun communities. We need to remember that we can unlearn all the oppressive things society has taught us, but it takes a bit of time and effort! Remember! Everyone has the right to be represented fairly and on their terms. We’d expect the same for ourselves, wouldn’t we?

## **Creating Equitable Media**

### **Symbols and Signs**

We see symbols every single day of our lives. They become so normalized that they seem to be a part of our language, something that we read just as we would read the words on this page. Symbols are

images or signs that stand in for something else, and represent a particular meaning or thought. The signifier (what is being represented) and the signified (the meaning being conveyed) make up the sign (what is being shown). An example of this would be a stop sign.



Even without words, we know that this is a sign for something. The signifier is the shape itself, a red octagon. The signified is the meaning the shape is meant to convey: stopping your vehicle and waiting until the coast is clear before continuing. Together, these make up a sign, in this case a stop sign, where, with one glance, the meaning of the symbol represented is well known by almost everyone who sees it.

These symbols are presented everywhere in our media, and we read the hidden meanings and values conveyed by them sometimes without even realizing it. And these symbols can be many things, even people. It gets a lot more complicated than just looking at media and trying to find shapes. We have to look at *who* is being represented and *how* they are being represented in order to find the signified, the meaning and values and messages that the symbol may hold. We have to think about this when we are making media too: what meanings can be interpreted from the images or words in this media? How will different people interpret it differently? Why? Remember, all images hold meaning as symbols even if it is unintentional, so it's important to be very aware of the multiple messages an image is sending.

Doing this with regular advertisements, tv, music, etc. that you see is a great way to start thinking about how you could do it with your own media.

*“We have to look at who is being represented and how they are being represented in order to find the signified, the meaning and values and messages that the symbol may hold.”*

## **Do you see who I see? – Representation**

There are many layers of meaning in the media, this we can see from the discussion of symbolism. However, one of simpler ways that media can be inclusive is in thinking about *who* it represents in its images (*how* they are represented is something we’ll come to later). Look at a poster or advertisement that features people in it. What kind of diversity do you see? How many of these people are white? Able-bodied? Young? Conventionally attractive?

Representing a diverse range of identities in our media is very important. It’s important to include people who we don’t normally see represented much in the media. It can be hard to look at visual media and not see yourself represented. Suddenly, whatever is being advertised or promoted seems to no longer apply to you. Including people whose identities are often not publicly visible is a great way to increase the inclusivity of our media.

However, it is very important that we don’t tokenize people when we are doing it. Tokenizing means

**DON’T TOKENIZE.**

## **But HOW?! – Tips on making inclusive media**

*Language*

*Representation and balance*

*Objectification*

*Think of the impact*

## *Stereotypes*

**Sex sells! So how do we make it fun for everyone?**

*Trigger warnings?*

*Sex equuuaaality.*

*Objectification vs. Genuine enjoyment?*

## **Writing it all down**

A lot of media is visual, and we've focused a lot on that in this guide. However, it's also important to remember that print media has a huge impact about the ways we understand the whole as well. With that, I think a note specifically on written media (such as newspaper articles) is important.

First of all, it's important to be accurate in our reporting. A lot of media will sensationalize a topic with a glaring headline that is actually inaccurate. This is understandable. But there are ways to go about creating grabby, catchy headlines without being sensationalistic. Follow some of the same basic rules as above, under

## **How to make inclusive media:**

- Don't rely on stereotypes to get your ideas across.
- Don't use incendiary or insulting language.
- Don't generalize one particular group's experience to get your point across.
- Do be accurate especially when referring to someone else's words or another source. This will help you avoid false or damaging reporting!

It's also important to be inclusive and representational in our stories. Who are we writing about? Who makes headlines? Try to be aware of diversity and inclusivity in the stories you are writing. This is applicable across all disciplines. For instance, are you a sports writer? Try balancing your coverage between men's and women's sports for instance. What about an opinion-based columnist? Try writing about a social justice issue. Diversity applies to every aspect of writing.

Another important tool we can use in writing to help make it more accessible is trigger warnings. Trigger warnings are short lines that tell a reader that what is about to be discussed may trigger an emotional or psychologically damaging response in them if they've had particular experiences. Some common examples of trigger warnings would be before articles that discuss sexualized violence, abuse, self-harm or suicide. Trigger warning are usually written at the top of an article in bold, so that they're easily visible. They are usually phrased as follows: "Trigger warning for sexual assault," "Trigger warning for discussion of self-harm," etc. Trigger warnings are a simple and brief way to ensure that written media is safe and inclusive for everyone.

Satire is an incredibly popular form of journalism for a lot of print media, especially on university campuses. And why not? When done well, satire is hilarious and appeals to the jaded students in all of us. Satire is a type of writing that uses humour in the form of veiled irony and wit to comment on a social situation. It uses exaggeration, sarcasm, or double-entendre to make people both laugh and think, and bring them to constructive social criticism through humour. However, there are a few important things to think about when writing satire.

First, consider the power dynamics in satire. Who is writing? From what perspective? Who or what is being satirized? UBC School of Journalism Professor Joe Cutbirth discusses this when he states that

“satire works best as a tool of the powerless against the powerful.”  
When the “powerful belittle the marginalized that’s called bullying.”

Another important element to consider in satire is the context. Context is what grounds satire in a particular social situation with particular power dynamics. Context is what allows satire to be understood, both as a joke and as a joke based on particular power imbalances in a given society. In other words, context is what shapes satire to be social commentary and a tool of the powerless rather than straight up bullying.

So, just as satire can be really entertaining and effective, it can also be pretty harmful. When writing satire it is important to not only the power dynamics and context, but also how a humorous take on something highly personalized or traumatic could affect people who see or read your media. It can be easy to say “it’s just a joke, it doesn’t MEAN anything!” But remember, we come to understand our world and the people around us primarily through the media, and the underlying messages in the media always mean something, even if we’re not aware of them right away. Some things, although they may seem funny at first, are not, if we take the time to think about it. Remember, quality satire (and irony for that matter) is the kind where the status quo is questioned, and when it is used as a tool for societal change.



