

Leadership Letter for Global MIL

The World According to Data: Taking a Look behind the Marketing Machines **02**

Today, marketers know intimate details about consumers. If marketing companies are using heuristics – or patterns of behavior – to sell products and services, we need to provide everyone with heuristics, or habits of mind, to filter the media messages and be better equipped to decide for ourselves.

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*CML is pleased to introduce two outstanding national leaders in the data protection movement: Brittany Kaiser, co-founder of the OwnYourData Foundation and primary subject of the documentary *The Great Hack*, and Alistair Mactaggart, chair of Californians for Consumer Privacy, which is a force behind the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA).*

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The World According to Data: Taking a Look behind the Marketing Machines

The voice accorded to everyday citizens, and the data that having such voice through social media and through websites yields have upended the advertising, public relations and marketing fields. Today, marketers know intimate details about consumers – details garnered through location tracking, DNA testing, health records, and Tik Tok, among others. Marketers can sway decision-making as never before, through behavioral data that, when compiled and synthesized, can make inferences about our everyday wants and needs, and steer us accordingly to the “right” service or products.

Strategic communication and public relations firms no longer concern themselves with writing, assembling and disseminating “press packets;” now, such firms use real-time research data to inform their insights into consumers and into brand strategies. Whether the client is a politician or a consumer package goods company, brand consultancies stand ready to devise global communication strategies that resonate with everyday people and board members alike; in some cases, through the research now available, they know more about an individual than a family member might. After all, do you know whether your spouse stopped at a 7-11 before going to a doctor’s office?

To get an idea of what communication services are available and how such services are used, it’s worth exploring websites of companies such as Kelton Global, Insites Consulting, International Data Corporation, or Precision Business Insights, all companies who specialize in market research and business strategies that are driven through understanding data and its relevance to cultural and social trends that impact consumer decisions and behaviors. Given the ways through which these companies can guide their clients, it is more important than ever to prepare consumers (citizens) to understand how such marketing works and how we can use our own skills of critical analysis to inform our decision-making. If marketing companies are using heuristics – or patterns of behavior – to sell products and services, we need to provide everyone with heuristics, or habits of mind, to filter the media messages and be better equipped to decide for ourselves.

In this issue, Connections features two interviews with advocates who have made data and awareness around data rights their cause. We invite you to see how these outstanding contributors are adding to the conversations around data use and data regulation – critical topics for navigating today’s data-centered world.



Interview with Brittany Kaiser

Brittany Kaiser is the co-founder of the OwnYourData Foundation, which raises awareness of data rights and promotes digital literacy education. She is also a co-founder of the Digital Asset Trade Association (DATA), a nonprofit lobbying firm that advances legislative reform to protect the rights of individuals to control their own digital assets. Brittany is the primary subject of the Academy Awards and BAFTA-nominated Netflix Originals documentary *The Great Hack*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. She is also the author of *Targeted*, by HarperCollins. The film and the book recount Brittany's experience as the former business development director for Cambridge Analytica, which collapsed after details of its misuse of Facebook data

were revealed to have potentially impacted voting in the UK Brexit referendum and the 2016 U.S. presidential election. She testified about her involvement in the work of Cambridge Analytica before the UK Parliament and in private before the Mueller Investigation.

Center for Media Literacy (CML): In your book, *Targeted*, you point out that human behavior can be understood and even changed through communication.

Brittany Kaiser (BK): Yes. People who work in strategic communications have added in a behavioral lens. They are using qualitative and quantitative research – data collection – in order to understand people's perceptions and worldviews. Specifically, so that they can show targeted media to individuals that is most likely to encourage them to engage and be persuaded. Everybody is persuadable to a certain extent. Some more than others. You can tell who those people are based upon the data you have on them. Then, messages can be constructed specifically to reach and influence those who are most persuadable. The more data you have on people, the more precise you can be with messaging.

The ability to do this is a combination of behavioral science and data science. It enables content producers to figure out what to show to someone who sees the world in a certain way in order to persuade them to act. That was the entire premises that Cambridge Analytica was built upon.

Today, people need to be aware that the media that they are shown is made specifically to affect the way that they think, the way they see the world and to influence the choices and actions that they take. We are no longer seeing the same media messaging as our family, friends or the person sitting right next to us. We are receiving messages that are adjusted specifically for us. Traditional advertising sends the same message to millions of people. We don't see that as much anymore, because it's not as effective as targeted messaging.

CML: That is vastly different from the way that we were brought up to absorb media. How specifically targeted are the messages we see every day?

BK: Capacity exists to create messages tailored for one individual. Obviously, that doesn't scale very well for a company. If you are trying to communicate with everyone in America, you're not going to create 300 million individual messages. But companies may want to communicate with smaller groups of people – hundreds, thousands or tens of thousands.

CML: One of the Center for Media Literacy's key questions encourages people to ask: What does this message include, and what does it leave out. So now, the answer for that may be different for different groups, even if the general topic is the same?

BK: Yes. It really contributes to how divided we are these days. We use to be able to start with the same pieces of information, the same "ground truth," so to say. Probably the most concerning issue is that everybody receives completely differently information now. There has been an enormous proliferation of news agencies and other organizations that produce content. I don't refer to all of them as news agencies because many do not adhere to journalistic standards, undertake rigorous research, or any research at all. And, even if you and I are consuming content from the same news organization or content producer, at times it is shown to us in different ways. Different groups of people that are seeing different headlines and different photos on the same topic, so that it captures their attention based on what that platform knows about them. That's true even if the actual body of the article is the same. That means our first impressions about the content of the article could be completely different. We read the same article starting with completely different biases – biases that were created as soon as we read the headline and saw the accompanying photo.

CML: And, that is intentional?

BK: Absolutely. For the content producer, it makes it more likely that both of us will click on the article, even if we see the world very differently. They're still achieving their goal. We both clicked on the article, but, we got there through totally different pathways, which affects how we perceive the information.

Another issue is that content is unfortunately more "click-worthy" (and divisive) when it uses inflammatory language. So, words with negative connotations like "smash" or "destroy" go to the top of our newsfeeds because they get more clicks and go viral faster. This is why we're seeing more negative news. Also, the content that we are consuming is specifically made to rile us up, because that's when we feel the need to comment, share and click. The concepts that went into designing the Facebook newsfeed are the same as those designed for slot machines. It's meant to be addictive. It's meant to make you engage and get wrapped-up, and it's designed to be difficult for you to drive yourself away.

BK: When I speak, I'm often asked what people can do to protect themselves from this. I say, "actually buy a newspaper." Get your news from a paper every day for a couple of weeks, and see if you feel less angry and incited. Newspapers are blanket communications that are massed produced, so everybody see the same things, regardless of their political beliefs and worldviews. Newspapers cannot gather data on you – such as what articles you read, how long you stay on each page, what you share, etc. So obviously, you provide them with nothing to sell without your knowledge or consent.

CML: In media literacy we focus on teaching people to think critically about the messages they receive – Who sent this message? Why? For what purpose? Do you think we are at a point where we also need to be asking, "As I read this, who is could be collecting information about me? Why? For what purpose? And how is that data being used?"

BK: Yes. That's what I seek to build aware about in the talks I give every day. It's about "risk awareness." Knowledge that every single thing that you do, especially on your device, is being recorded, bought, sold and traded around the world without your explicit consent. If you are reading something about a particular topic, if you're searching for it, if you are even spending a particular period of time looking at a certain paragraph or scrolling down a page slowly or quickly. All of that information is data that is collected – all of it.

CML: So if someone scrolls by an article versus spending four minutes reading it, there is meaning in that?

BK: It will create different data. Then, that's used to re-serve information that's most interesting to that person. If you're sitting in front of a screen, re-reading a paragraph over and over, algorithms and AI can tell that, whatever that paragraph is about, it is important to you.

CML: In *Targeted*, you mention that the laws surrounding use of data and its transparency are different in the US than they are in Europe. What is different? Why, and what can we do about it?

BK: Right now, In the United States, we do not have any protections from companies collecting as much of our data as they'd like without our explicit consent. The legal framework is that we are pre-opted in. That means that we have pre-consented, or there is no explicit consent required, for companies to collect all of our data and sell it to other people who can use it for whatever purpose they want. That might sound shocking, but that is literally what our legal framework says. They have stronger data protections in Europe, due to GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

BK: But, things are changing. California is the first state to put forth a data protection bill. The California Consumer Protection Act becomes effective January 1, 2020. That is the first step to the US actually having a comprehensive legal privacy framework. It only applies to companies that have a \$25 million turnover or above. So, I'd say that it could be more comprehensive. But, it does cover all of big tech.

Right now, I'm spending a lot of time with legislators and testifying in public hearings so that California does not remain the only state to have such legislation. I've just testified publicly for New York's first privacy bill hearing. I'm hoping they create legislation that goes even further than CCPA.

CML: It is an excellent time for the people to be evaluating the California legislation through a critical, media literacy lens, so they can best understand what it means for them. Can you provide some insight?

BK: Yes, a lot of big companies are now working on compliance with the legislation, so we are in the midst of much analysis of the meaning of CCPA. How do they make data portable? Meaning, if a company holds data about me, they need to be able to tell me what they hold, and I can tell them to delete it from their servers and take it with me somewhere else. It's about transparency and control over my own data assets.

CML: So will people have to know to ask for that in order to exercise their new rights under CCPA?

BK: Yes.

CML: So, education could help when it comes to awareness?

BK: Absolutely. Education came into play in Europe when GDPR went into effect on May 25, 2018. GDPR allows anyone in Europe to request from any organization, public or private, what data is being held on them. They also have the right to delete data and the right to portability. CCPA isn't as strong as GDPR, but it's a step in the right direction.

CML: Media literacy education is in a similar place in the State of California, and elsewhere. Just last year, California enacted its first media literacy legislation, with SB 830. While it stops short of ensuring every student accesses media literacy education, it is a good first step in the right direction, and it provides some foundation for other states who are working on legislation.

BK: With both data protection rights and media literacy, we need to start somewhere. It makes a difference. We see exciting thought leadership coming out of the implementation of CCPA. Big companies like Microsoft and Wells Fargo have said that they are going to implement new consumer data protections. Companies like those would not have done that without legislation. There is no use hoping that companies will do something good with our data. There's no hoping that companies will voluntarily be transparent and give us power over how our data is used. They have no incentive to do that. It needs to be legislated and regulated.

CML: As the information and data landscape changes, what do you think media literacy can do to help people become more aware of how their data is used, and to know their new rights to data privacy as legislation evolves?

BK: Most people don't understand how much data they're producing on a day-to-day basis. They don't realize what data is used by companies to target them, and how that data is collected. So, when you teach media literacy, and you explain to people that they need to think critically about what they're seeing, they're not starting from a place where they already understand that everything they do online every day plays into the types of content that they see. It's hard to know exactly what data points we've provided and what actions we've taken that have contributed to that content coming to us. We need more education about that.

CML: Certainly, we're never going to have a world where everybody is a data scientist and can figure that out. However, we can make them aware of what is happening and teach them to ask the right questions and think critically about it. That alone can encourage people to consider what data they are providing, to whom, and their rights surrounding that. Do you see that as beneficial?

BK: Yes. I would say that's one of the most important things that people should be learning today. Media literacy can give people tools to be more inquisitive about what data is being collected about them, how targeted the content they see is, and what the intention of the producer might be. You don't have to be a data scientist to understand the basic concepts.

CML: Would a more media literate population make it more challenging for companies to partake in things that some might consider manipulative?

BK: Of course. The more informed we are about what is going on, and why we are seeing what we're seeing, the more we can protect ourselves. Media literacy and digital literacy are ways to equip people with skills to be a better citizens and to be more in control of their lives, thoughts, emotions and actions. When people have the ability to take a step back and realize that messages are tailored by people that that have an end goal in mind, they're able to make more responsible decisions in their day-to-day lives. It's important to start young. I'd rather see people learn these concepts before they are ever given a smart device.

CML: That's always been important, and even more so today. What are you currently working on to achieve that now and in the future?

BK: A couple of months ago, I co-founded the OwnYourData Foundation in order to provide digital literacy training. That includes understanding what your data rights are and how your data can be protected. We want people to be more knowledgeable about cyber security protocols, ways to identify disinformation and how to protect themselves from cyberbullying. All of these different concepts together feed into a concept called

“DQ,” or digital intelligence. It's a framework that was developed by the DQ Institute, the World Economic Forum and OECD. I'm working on building out the network of trainers for digital literacy and the number of schools that are implementing this into their curriculums. Next, I hope to incorporate it into corporate trainings, and for legislators especially. Ultimately, our goal is to contribute to a more aware and empowered society.



Interview with Alastair Mactaggart

Alastair Mactaggart is a real estate developer and investor based in San Francisco. In 2016, as chair of Californians for Consumer Privacy, he authored and sponsored the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) ballot referendum, which was signed by 629,000 Californians and qualified for the November 2018 ballot. He then worked with the California State Legislature to pass groundbreaking consumer privacy legislation in June 2019, which was signed into law by California Governor Jerry Brown. The CCPA gives nearly 40 million people in California the strongest data privacy rights in the country. In November 2019, Mactaggart filed a new initiative to appear on the November 2020 ballot – the California

Privacy Rights Act. He is also a past board member of Room to Read, the San Francisco Mission YMCA and former board chair of the Sutter Physicians Foundation at California Pacific Medical Center. Currently, he serves on the Harvard College Fund Executive Committee, is co-chair of the Harvard West Coast Committee and Board Chair of Californians for Consumer Privacy.

Center for Media Literacy (CML): Media literacy starts with asking the right questions. One of those is: “What is the purpose of this message?” More and more, that purpose is to collect and sell information about media consumers. But often, that purpose is not transparent. You launched an initiative that led to the passage of the California Consumer Protection Act (CCPA), which went into effect January 1, 2020. It gives people more control over whether or not their data can be collected and how it can be used. Can you shed some light on how much companies know about people and how they are obtaining the information?

Alastair Mactaggart (AM): Data collection as it is done today is based upon technology that is brand new in human history. The internet has existed for a while. But, the ability to track people and create deep profiles on who they are – that didn’t start until Google really got going. Then, the smartphone basically “turbo-charged” the process. Just by carrying a smartphone, you enable companies to track everywhere you’ve been and how long you’ve been there. You also enable companies to know who you’ve been near, because your phone recognizes the other phones that are near you. Your phone can decipher a lot about who your friends are, as well as information about your workplace. It knows if you are in rehab, if you’ve been to an abortion clinic. It can ascertain if you’ve been to the gym. And, that’s just smartphones. There have been cases where children’s “smart toys” have scraped data about children and sold it to data brokers. Communication technology in new cars may be able to access the contacts on your phone. So, all of a sudden, Chevy can have all of your contact information and that of your friends. Newer cars also know how much you weigh, how fast you break, whether you have broken the law, if you are late for work and more. A Fitbit knows how much exercise you’re getting. It can also ascertain information about the health of your closest relationships.

CML: How does a Fitbit know that?

AM: Because it knows your location anytime you are wearing it. If you and your spouse usually sleep together in one place, and now you're sleeping in one place and your spouse in another, Fitbit will know before anybody else that your relationship could be in trouble. Add to that everything you're reading on the internet (for example articles about divorce) how long you're reading it, everything you're searching for on the internet, etc. Imagine you have a health problem or a life problem. You may not tell anybody, but you're going to tell Google as soon as you being searching for information about that issue. It's not an exaggeration to say that big companies can know as much about you as it's possible to know without the ability to actually read your mind.

CML: For generations, we have lived with regulations about messaging in traditional media. For example, truth in advertising, limits on strong language, nudity, violence, etc. The evolution of the information age has brought up new challenges. You've spoken about the difference between "contextual" versus "behavioral" advertising. What is the difference between the two?

AM: Twenty-five years ago, you picked up the New York Times, and you saw an ad for a Presidents Day sale. Whether you were interested in that sale or not, you saw that ad. Google and Facebook "turbocharged" those ads by personalizing them. So, if you were on a website reading about Rome, you saw might see an ad for Alitalia on the side of the article. Or, if you were reading about the Indie 500 on the internet, you might see an ad for a hotel in Indianapolis. This was an exponentially more effective way to advertise. And, there's actually nothing wrong with using that technology in that way. A media company may know you are reading an article on a specific topic and respond with an "appropriate" ad. BUT, none of your personal information is collected and transferred to any other company. If you clicked on the ad's link, maybe some more of your information would get transferred. But, that is pretty benign from a privacy point of view. Those are all examples of "contextual advertising."

Here's where things cross over into "behavioral advertising:" A company is able to buy data about you from many sources without your knowledge or consent. So, can they glean from a variety of data brokers that you spend a lot of time in yoga studios, and that now you are reading articles about New Zealand. They also know you are having marital difficulties right now, because you've searched for information about divorce a bunch of times recently. And, your and your spouse's phones have not been in the same place for a couple of months. A company can then show you an ad for a yoga spiritual retreat in New Zealand the next time you read an article about travel. The ad will use specific language that is likely to trigger action on your part due to your personal circumstances – for example a yoga retreat in New Zealand with messages about healing during tough times. That ad is targeted directly to you based upon a whole bunch of information that has been gathered on you from different sources without your knowledge or consent. That's when it starts to get creepy.

AM: There was a settlement in 2017 that the Massachusetts Attorney General won against an advertising firm. On behalf of their clients, the firm was tracking women who went into abortion clinics. Not just any women, because a lot of them were nurses, and advertising to them would just waiste their clients' money. They identified the women who were new visitors to the clinic, and they showed them right-to-life live chat ads. Clearly, that is very invasive, and it violates existing regulations, like HIPAA.

Just think about how valuable that information is. Companies monetize it when they were never given our authorization to use it in the first place. The same methods are used politically. Data can be purchased and/or collected to help determine what messages a person should see to increase their chances of becoming more liberal or more conservative, or to choose one candidate over another. If your intention is to influence the outcome of an election, you could do it. It's been completely legal. There has been no disclosure required.

So, behavioral advertising is what my initiatives aim to control, in terms of giving consumers more power over their personal information, and whether it is collected or sold.

CML: One of the media literacy's key questions is about authorship: "Who created this message?" Today, we also have to be asking: "Who is gathering information about me through this message? Who is tracking this information? Who owns it? How are they using it?"

AM: We may have a sense of owning our own experience in society. Yet it's becoming apparent that, in reality, we don't. CCPA takes action to reclaim that ownership. There is certainly no issue if people voluntarily enter into arrangements where they are exchanging personal data in return for services. The problem right now is that you don't have any choice. People essentially need cell phones to live in today's society. You certainly need one to hold most jobs today. There are some positive things about having that type of technology available – we essentially live with an encyclopedia in the palms of our hands. But, the bargain is loss of control over who holds data about you.

CML: What does CCPA do about that?

AM: The first thing CCPA addresses is transparency. You have the right to request the data a company has on you. Next, CCPA addresses control. You have the right to tell a company that they may not sell your information. Finally, CCPA addresses keeping data safe. If a company collects personal information about you, they are obligated to keep it safe through good data management practices.

I believe that privacy is a human right that must be protected. Before the smartphone, very few people could afford to surveil others constantly. Also, in the U.S., we have the fourth amendment, which protects us against unreasonable searches and seizures. Right now, it's relatively easy for giant corporations to surveil you. The techniques are very sophisticated. Not only can they tell where in are physically in the world, but also approximately what you're thinking about at any given time, your state of being, who your friends are, who you're spending time with. It's really extraordinary.

CML: Media literacy education is about empowering people to make their own decisions about use of media. For CCPA to add to that empowerment, what do you think is most necessary in terms of education?

AM: Awareness. If you can actually show people what's happening with their data, that's the first line of defense.

CML: Now that CCPA is in effect, you are working on a new initiative. Can you tell me more about that?

AM: The new initiative is called the California Privacy Rights Act (CPRA), and it strengthens CCPA. It will be on the ballot in California and, if passed, it will ensure that CCPA can only be amended if it furthers the intent of the law – which is consumer privacy. It creates an “internet privacy bill of rights,” which ensures that the law cannot be touched unless it is to update the legislation if there are changes in technology that demand it, or if the legislation produces unintended consequences. Ultimately, if someone comes along with an idea to amend the law in a way that decreases consumer privacy, it will be almost impossible to implement it absent another initiative.

Secondly, the new initiative expands some consumer rights. It limits how long companies can store your information. It demands that companies clearly disclose to consumers why their information is being collected, and it enables consumers to demand that companies do not collect information beyond what is absolutely necessary to conduct business.

CML: How will all of this be enforced?

AM: Currently the attorney general is in charge of enforcement, and I have no reason to think he's doing anything other than a fine job. But, he's only got \$5 million in funding for this purpose for the next two years. This initiative establishes a Privacy Protection Commission, which will be funded with \$10 million a year. So, California will have one of the most powerful privacy regulators in the world.

CML: Will people be able to report to the commission if they suspect they are victims of privacy violations?

AM: Yes. And business will be able to consult with the commission, too. They can call and ask – “We want to do ‘X,’ is that ok under the privacy law?”

CML: What is the timeline for CCPA, the law that's already passed, to go into effect?

AM: It went into effect on January 1, 2020, although the regulations have not yet been finalized. The draft regulations were published in November. The law says they have to be finalized by July 1, 2020. That's when enforcement goes into effect.

CML: You are a real estate developer by profession. So, creating legislation is not an area where you have much experience. What compelled you to work on this legislation and make such a significant investment in its passage?

AM: You never know where life is going to take you. I'm very fortunate – I've had a very successful real estate career. I've never been an activist. But, at some point, I asked myself: "Well, what can I do to make the world a little bit better?" I found myself becoming more and more passionate about privacy rights. Little by little, I got deeper and deeper into the cause, and eventually working on legislation was to be the next logical step. I get that it might not be everybody's vision of making the world better. But for me, it feels like a good use of my time and abilities.

CML: It is a very timely way to be of service to society. CCPA covers the State of California. Do you think it can become a model for national privacy rights legislation?

AM: Yes, I do. It's about time. Internationally, Japan, Canada, Europe, New Zealand – a lot of countries already have data privacy laws. We are way behind. The reason for that is, in the US, the technology industry is very powerful. For the past three years, the industry has successfully convinced Congress that it can regulate itself. But now that CCPA is becoming law, things are finally shifting. Microsoft just announced that they will extend CCPA rights to the entire US. Other tech companies are following suit. I think we will see more and more of that, because it's going to be very difficult for American companies to extend privacy rights to Californians but not to people in other states. I am counting on California to lead the nation in extending our rights to data privacy.

CML: Like media literacy education, teaching people about their privacy rights will be key to creating a society that is empowered to make their own decisions.

AM: That is what I think is so vital about media literacy education. In some respects, what CML is doing is more important than what I'm doing. There is a lost generation that has grown up with so many unrealistic images in every aspect of their lives. They are being served a fake vision of a perfect world that doesn't actually exist for anybody – not even for the "influencers" posting it. I don't think it's a coincidence that this generation is now confronting unprecedented rates of anxiety and depression. Media literacy can help them to think critically and not let unrealistic images and messages damage their self-esteem. It teaches them to consider how to think critically about those messages, and how do determine if something is actually the truth. No one is perfect. But people with media literacy skills have a foundation that enables them to look at images and messages in a more balanced way.

CML congratulates Charlie Firestone, long-standing leader of the Aspen Institute's Communications and Society Program, upon his retirement. Charlie has been a steadfast supporter of media literacy, advocating for the field amongst policy makers and lawmakers. He is succeeded by Vivian Schiller. Charlie, we salute you!

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 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 communications that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for democracy: <http://www.consortiumformedia literacy.org>

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Media Literacy Resources

Targeted: The Cambridge Analytica Whistleblower's Inside Story of How Big Data, Trump, and Facebook Broke Democracy and How It Can Happen Again, by Brittany Kaiser. <https://www.amazon.com/Targeted-Cambridge-Analytica-Whistleblowers-Democracy/dp/0062965794>

The Great Hack, documentary available on Netflix.

Trailer at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iX8GxLP1FHo>

Med!aLit Moments

Media literacy in motion!

Rosemary Smith, Managing Director of the Getting Better Foundation in Livingston, Montana, was asked to serve as a guest teacher for the Sleeping Giant Middle School's "Cougar Friday" in Livingston. Rosemary and her teaching partner, Kelly Miller, decided to create a "MediaLit Moment" by conducting a scavenger hunt, to combine some physical and mental exercise. Here is an overview of their classroom experience:

AHA! I can ask pertinent questions of ANY media that I come across.

Key Question # 1 Who created this message?

Key Word: Authorship/Construction

Core Concept # 1 All media messages are constructed.

ACTIVITY:

Rosemary and Kelly collected newspapers and magazines leading up to Cougar Friday, and librarians and teachers provided outdated publications to spread out on the gymnasium floor. Students got to pick 1 publication to sort through at the start (for "payment" of 10 pushups, they could exchange or buy a 2nd or 3rd journal for different ad inventory).

Kelly and Rosemary chose 12 different advertisers' goals to headline on 12 poster-boards they hung throughout the gym and bleachers. Students sorted through their magazine for ads that target each headline with the goal of pasting at least one ad under each headline in a 20-30 minute timeframe. Healthy nutritional snacks were distributed as rewards for 1st, 2nd and 3rd finishers. Then, everyone "hiked" to each poster-board together, asking leading questions to apply the 5 Core Concepts and 5 Key Questions:

1. Who created this message?

Students were taught to look all around the advertisement to determine if the ad was sponsored by a major company or local organization... sometimes the answer wasn't evident and the students had to research further.

2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

1. Fashion models – used to tell people that if they used those products, they'd look like and be popular like the models. Students were further asked "What if you do or don't use this product?"
2. Celebrities – ditto above.

3. Bright, colorful pictures of fast cars or fancy trucks were used to sell them or insurance for them. Advertising created the sense that a corporation cares about the safety of drivers or insureds more than others (interesting to note: there were 10 ads posted under this headline – reflecting 10 different insurance companies – all implying they care more about their insureds than the next).

4. Rugged bows, ATVs, hunting equipment and “macho” camouflage attire were used to equate masculinity with hunting, camping and outdoor activities.

3. How might different people understand this message differently from me?

1. Race – students discussed how people of different races or ethnic backgrounds might interpret the ads differently.

2. Gender – This was a big topic of discussion for the group. They talked about how cosmetic companies target girls much more than boys, even with new main stream gender-neutrality messaging. The kids thought girls are more susceptible to advertising than boys.

3. Age – students thought younger people are more susceptible to ads than older people. They discussed studies reflecting 55+ year olds being more apt to disseminate “fake news” and social media posts. The kids were delighted to talk about their parents and grandparents “always being on their smart devices”.

4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

1. Money (and buying this product) makes people happier – all ads positioned smiling, happy people – even ones for arthritis or health insurance. Kids were quick to get the message that people on medicine might not be feeling well or are grumpy.

2. If you work hard, you might be able to afford the lifestyle portrayed in ad.

3. Omitted –

a. People taking this product might not be feeling well.

b. This product might lead to other issues or health ailments.

c. Some people might not be able to afford to take this medicine or buy this product.

5. Why is this message being sent?

1. Initially, the students thought some of these ads were created to help them look or dress beautifully or cook nutritious foods. Then, began to uncover the fact that the ads were still trying to manipulate them to buy THAT advertised product (over other products on the market, or to create a need in their minds that may or may not have existed prior).

2. Kids were then able to discern that all ads are created to sell/profit from getting them to do something. It's up to each of us to decide whether we actually need, or want to buy something.

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<https://www.gettingbetterfoundation.org/>