CONNECT!ONS Med!aLit moments

In This Issue…

Theme: Media, Morals and Empowerment

A Cherokee moral fable:

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight, and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies and false pride. The other is good—he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

In one sense, "wolves" like these are constantly vying for our allegiance in contemporary mass media. Media literacy education can help children understand the different moral directions in which media lead them. The National Television Violence Study, a three-year assessment of more than 9,000 programs completed in 1996, found that 60 percent of programs contained some physical aggression, and that a typical hour of programming featured six different violent incidents (Wilson, "Media and Children's Aggression, Fear and Altruism," 99). Yet television programming contains significant pro-social content as well. A 2006 study of more than 2,000 entertainment programs found that 73 percent featured at least one act of altruism, defined as helping, sharing, giving or donating. On average, viewers saw about three acts of altruism each hour (Wilson, op. cit., 104). In addition, a 2005 meta-analytic study found that viewing pro-social programming does in fact enhance children's pro-social behavior (Mares and Woodard, "Positive Effects of Television"). A comparison of relevant meta-analytic studies of effects actually shows a slightly larger effect size for depictions of altruism on television than effects of violent television on aggressive behavior (Wilson, op. cit., 107).

The findings on pro-social media effects may come as a surprise, and one of the reasons for this is that violence is an almost universal language in visual media. The film industry in the U.S. has capitalized on that universal recognition to develop a global market for action films. While altruistic acts can be depicted visually, it can be difficult to visually demonstrate other pro-social behaviors such as cooperation or tolerance of others. They're conveyed less through action and more through dialogue (ibid.). As a result, public perceptions of our mass media may be colored by the relative lack of visual "evidence" confirming its moral health.

There is little doubt, however, that we have been feeding the wrong "wolf" in the realms of politics, research and public discourse—the wolf of doubt and fear. With each decade, legislation has been drafted to protect children from exposure to the immoral influences of popular media. Parents, educators and consumer advocates worry that the First Amendment rights of media companies will make true reform untenable, and take a bare measure of consolation in our existing system of ratings. And hundreds, if not thousands of social and psychological studies have been conducted to measure and appraise the anti-social effects of media. In the meanwhile, books and articles on pro-social effects of media number in the dozens, if that many, and studies of the effectiveness of educational programs utilizing pro-

social media are even fewer.

The literature we have suggests that children can learn pro-social behavior from pro-social content, and that effects are strongest when the behavior that is modeled is salient, clearly portrayed, and can be easily incorporated into a child's everyday interactions. Generally, children under the age of eight need training or follow-up lessons to comprehend and demonstrate their understanding of the moral lessons in pro-social programming. Both parents and teachers can provide that support (Kotler, "Prosocial Behavior and Television," and Wilson, op cit., 105). The results we have are encouraging, and it appears that media literacy education plays a vital role in the moral development of children.

Media literacy education should not be approached as an adjunct to pro-social content, however. With media literacy training, children and adults can appreciate the moral dimensions of the media they encounter on a daily basis. Take, for example, the vast body of media narratives featuring hero/villain conflicts. Communications scholar Arthur Raney argues that the emotions which most audiences feel towards the hero are moral—but just barely. Viewers identify with the hero because he or she is morally upright, but anticipation of a just outcome carries an even greater emotional valence, since enjoyment of the entertainment hangs in the balance ("The Role of Morality"). What might happen when an experienced media literacy practitioner encourages students to investigate their ethical thinking about such stories as well as their feelings?

What might happen when that teacher creates assignments and poses questions to exercise their moral imagination? With hero narratives: Is violence the only way presented to solve conflict? Why? How would you feel if what happened in the story happened to you? Why? Live re-enactment and role-playing games in the classroom can complement inquiry into the electronic games they play: How might the game relate to your own life? How do the avatars solve problems and what are their goals? What are your goals? (These examples are adapted from the Catholic media literacy curriculum *Our Media World: Teaching Kids K-8 about Faith and Media*. See our Resources section for more).

In this issue of *Connections*, we demonstrate how awareness of the moral and ethical dimensions of media can empower us – as users of media, as parents, educators and administrators; and as citizens. In our first research article, we discuss how different theories of moral development can be applied to questions about the ethical use of media. In our second research article, we trace the connections between the ethics of media use and the role that media literacy plays in reclaiming our power as citizens. In our resources section, we recommend some engaging sources for further study. And in our MediaLit Moment, your students reflect on their personal code of ethics as they examine the ethics of leading American media heroines.

Research Highlights

Theories of Morality and Media Literacy Education

Theories of morality are as old as Aristotle's first writings on ethics, virtue and the 'good life,' but the theories offered by Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg in his *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (1981) seem to have the widest currency today. Based in part on Jean Piaget's work on cognitive development, Kohlberg proposed that children progressively develop higher quality ethical reasoning, and form ideas about ethical dilemmas that become progressively more complex. Kohlberg's theory is clearly congruent with the goals of media literacy education, which include an emphasis on explicitly articulating the values and beliefs embedded in media and comparing them with students' own.

Kohlberg posited three basic stages in moral development: the pre-conventional stage, in which children adhere to rules to avoid punishment and gain rewards; the conventional stage, in which individuals recognize that rules are necessary to maintain social order and that they can be changed if all agree; and the post-conventional stage, in which rules are the result of intellectual reasoning, and are respected only so far as they appeal to universal ethical principles.

In society, differences between conventional and post-conventional thinking can create significant conflict. The civil rights movement in the U.S. is a classic case. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, ". . .there are two types of laws: there are just laws, and there are unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that 'An unjust law is no law at all.'"

By the same token, some reliance on conventional moral reasoning may be justified. In the MacArthur Foundation report *Young People*, *Ethics and the New Digital Media*, the authors remark that the prevalence of illegal downloading may suggest that online youth feel entitled to what they can easily access online (James et al., 53). Typical justifications by youth might draw on post-conventional thinking: How much can illegal downloading really harm mammoth entertainment corporations or celebrity entertainers? From a "conventional" point of view, copyright and intellectual property laws are over 150 years old, and recognized by courts internationally. Why should a few break these laws at their whim while the majority continue to observe them?

Kohlberg's theory was conceived with a view to society as a whole, and primarily intended to address laws, roles, institutions and general practices. This "macro-morality" addresses relations between strangers, competitors, diverse ethnic groups and religions, not just the micro-morality of family, friends, neighbors and acquaintances (Coleman and Wilkins, "Moral Development," 42). In this model, rights, justice and obligations are the mainstay of moral reasoning. With her book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982), Carol Gilligan challenged Kohlberg by arguing that moral weight should

be given to caring for others, and that the moral adult was the person who could reason about both rights and relationships to others. Kohlberg subsequently revised his framework to include this ethic of care, and many later theories of moral development have incorporated this ethic as well.

Cyberbullying is one of those problems which generates both types of ethical responses. Take, for example, some of the materials on cyberbullying available at the Common Sense Media website. The site's "Responding to Cyberbullying: Guidelines for Administrators" is organized as a procedural flow chart detailing administrators' responsibilities for several different contingencies. Among other things, this document is intended to shield schools from legal liability. In contrast, Anne Collier, editor of the blog Net Family News, comments that the best response to cyberbullying is to change the culture "around" aggressors to one that "supports civility and respect" ("Cyberbullying: What I've Learned So Far," 26 November 2010). While ethics of rights and obligations are relevant to cyberbullying, we agree with Collier that an ethics of care should be emphasized. The CML Empowerment Spiral of Awareness, Analysis, Reflection and Action is itself intended to build a culture of caring and respect, not only in classrooms, but in entire schools.

One of the more perceptive examinations to date of moral learning theory, children and their media use is Karen Bradley's "Internet Lives: Social Context and Moral Domain in Adolescent Development" (2005). Bradley's theoretical position is based on "domain theory," psychologist Elliot Turiel's adaptation of Kohlberg's model. According to Turiel, the moral domain is one of several domains of thought, and he suggests that there are three basic domains: moral, social and personal. Over time, through interaction with others, children develop knowledge about themselves, society and morality (59). Turiel sides with Kohlberg by arguing that some experiences do lead children to arrive at fundamental moral principles. For example, a pre-schooler can observe the harm of pushing someone down (the person cries), and so he understands that it is morally wrong to do so, no matter what the context.

Bradley's interviews with adolescents leads to the observation that many, if not most of their social interactions online take place with people they know in the offline world. She further observes that, though there are not many moral rules in the online world of adolescents, the few they do have are defined by the interactions they experience or hear about from their peers. From there, Bradley makes her main argument: the way in which youth approach the online environment "makes light of adult-defined social conventions and tradition, but preserves a basic sense of morality. In other words, the online social context allows young people to explore social knowledge relatively free of social convention but informed by moral thinking" (65).

Though Bradley celebrates the ability of adolescents to grapple with a wide range of ethical dilemmas online, she acknowledges that risks are still present: "Since adolescent perceptions of social conventions about sexuality and violence are derived as much from popular culture as from role modeling in families and schools, and not all of these conventions are positive, the

lack of adult mediation in the online world may allow cruel and exploitative behavior to take place unchallenged" (66). While Bradley does not explicitly endorse a media literacy approach, her analysis clearly points to a need for education and guidance about both old and new media.

Media Literacy, Civic Responsibility and Power

In an era of globalization, the media have become a critical, indispensable part of our public life. While the mediated public 'square' may be expanding, participation in political institutions in the United States has been in relative decline over the last few decades. On a local level, activities performed out of a sense of civic responsibility are often seen as virtuous, but less frequently perceived as powerful. In this article, we conduct a moral and philosophical analysis to highlight the essential role media literacy plays in reclaiming our power as citizens.

The first responsibility of citizens is simply to render an opinion. The challenge, as 19th century political philosopher John Stuart Mill asserts, is for citizens "to form the truest opinion they can" by seeking divergent opinions and using critical thinking skills to weigh their opinion against those of others (Elliott and Decker, "New Media and an Old Problem Promoting Democracy). Face-to-face discussion and debate may not be necessary for this process, but as 20th century philosopher Hannah Arendt argues, individual reasoning and reflection are not sufficient for accomplishing this task. Opinions must also be grounded in a felt sense of the world, and an awareness of the presence of others in it. Such awareness is the essential "through line" between thought, speech, listening and action in the public sphere. (Silvertsone, *Media and Morality*, 38-43).

News media often break these links: "Thought, speech and action are disconnected, and compromised by the absence of context, memory and analytic rigor, and increasingly, the absence of trust" (op. cit, 41). The task of media literacy education is to empower students to conduct their own analysis—to re-contextualize the news, and to appraise the significance of the past. Discerning the context of news makes true judgment possible.

The absence of trust mentioned in the quote above is worth further examination. According to the authors of *Young People, Ethics and the New Digital Media* (a text discussed in the previous article), one of the challenges of new media is evaluating the credibility of other users. It isn't just a matter of determining accuracy. It involves inquiry into the integrity and motivations of the people constructing the message. Are they who they represent themselves to be? Are they sincere, or are their intentions exploitative? In other words, the moral integrity of those doing the representing cements the connection between speech and act. Mutual trust online creates opportunities for productive mentorship, demonstrations of competence, and respectful criticism and dialogue. All these make citizenship possible.
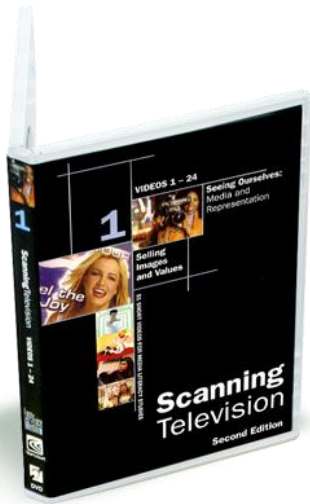
In the same report, the authors demonstrate how managing privacy online presents another set of challenges related to ethical media citizenship. For example, "code switching" involves the construction of online identities or profiles which are partly fictitious. The selective disclosure of

personal information is intended to curb intrusions on privacy. If code switching became common in online spaces, how much would relative strangers be able to understand about each other? The problem has moral, social and political implications.   Arendt argues that a sense of perspective is required for informed judgment: "Imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective, to be strong enough to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice, and to be generous enough to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair" (quoted in Silverstone, 46).

Using the term "proper distance," media philosopher Roger Silverstone argues that citizens of the "mediapolis" need "enough knowledge and understanding of the other person or the other culture to enable responsibility and care" (172). To explain the significance of term, Silverstone discusses the way in which depictions of suffering in news media typically distort our sense of perspective. The representation of the stranger in crisis is immediate enough to enable the illusion that we are fully engaged with him or her, but so fleeting and selective that it creates a safe, even soporific distance for audiences.

While we have been discussing a number of specific or "local" examples to illuminate the moral and political implications of everyday life in the 'mediapolis,' the potential for empowered media citizenship is indeed great. A good case in point is the conflict between game players and game design companies which is briefly mentioned in the MacArthur report. Many game players are creating their own modifications ("mods") to games. When players share mods with designers as possible improvements to original games, the companies typically claim the intellectual property rights to them. Some companies might even conduct online searches for new mods to claim. Many players see these practices as inherently unfair.

What can effectively counter such systemic inequities? It seems sensible to address them by appealing to the authority of large institutions. Perhaps the courts or regulators could intervene. Perhaps the *New York Times* could publish a series of stories which raise public awareness of the issue. Would game design companies co-operate fully? Just as changing the school culture "around" online aggressors is the most effective strategy for addressing cyberbullying, changing the ethical climate surrounding the issue of 'modding' is likely to be the more effective route to safeguarding the intellectual property rights of these individual creators. As Silverstone argues, a responsible and accountable media can be encouraged and regulated, but a responsible and accountable media *culture* is of even greater importance (165). Informed, sincere, imaginative citizens who can critically evaluate the contexts in which media are produced can help ensure that this culture is just and fair.

Scanning Television Special Price

Scanning Television was originally written several years ago by media educators Neil Andersen, Kathleen Tyner, and John J. Pungente, SJ.

The latest edition, with 51 short videos and a Teaching Guide, is still an excellent resource for teaching critical thinking skills in grades 7-12.

Carolyn Wilson, instructor and Past President of the Association for Media Literacy, reviewed the product in 2012:

"The video material is wide ranging and relevant, from news coverage of 9/11and public service announcements on anti-racism, to the evolution of digital technology and the use of pop stars in advertising. The resource is suitable for the secondary level and includes clips that are also appropriate for the elementary level. The collection is a few years old, so don't expect a strong focus on social media, but even so, this is still a classic resource that you will definitely use time and time again, right across the curriculum. "

For a limited time, the complete kit is available for $89 by going to facetofacemedia.ca

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.

www.consortiumformedialiteracy.org

Resources for Media Literacy

Teaching Tip: Keep a running list of movies, messages or media clips that strike you as empowering and civically responsible. Not only will this help you to see where you stand on issues of media ethics, but will provide go-to examples for classroom discussions.

Sources Cited:

Bradley, Karen. "Internet Lives: Social Context and Moral Domain in Adolescent Development." *New Directions for Youth Development* No. 108 (Winter 2005): 57-76.

Coleman, Renita and Lee Wilkins. "Moral Development: A Psychological Approach to Understanding Ethical Judgment." *The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics*. Ed. Lee Wilkens and Clifford Christians. New York: Routledge, 2009. 41-54.

Collier, Anne. "Cyberbullying: What I've Learned So Far." *Net Family News*, 26 November 2010. Web. Accessed 17 April 2013. www.netfamilynews.org

Common Sense Media. "Responding to Cyberbullying: Guidelines for Administrators." Web. Accessed 17 April 2013.
http://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/cyberbullying-response-flowchart

Elliott, Deni, and Amanda Decker. "New Media and an Old Problem Promoting Democracy." *The Handbook of Global Communication and Media Ethics.* Eds. Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. Blackwell Reference Online, 2011. Web. Accessed 11 April 2013.

James, Carrie et al. *Young People, Ethics and the New Digital Media*: *A Synthesis from the GoodPlay Project.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009. Available at MacArthur Digital Media and Learning www.macfound.org

Kotler, Jennifer A. "Prosocial Content and Television." *Encyclopedia of Children, Adolescents and the Media.* Ed. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007. Web. Accessed 11 April 2013.
This encyclopedia, published both in print and on the web, is one of the best reference sources available on topics relating to media literacy education.

Raney, Arthur A. "The Role of Morality in Emotional Reactions to and Enjoyment of Media Entertainment." *Journal of Media Psychology* 23.1 (2011): 18-23.

Silverstone, Roger. *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediaopolis.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007.

Wilson, Barbara J. "Media and Children's Aggression, Fear and Altruism." *The Future of Children* 18.1 (2008): 87-118.

Recommended Sources:

Hailer, Gretchen and Rose Pacatte. *Media Mindfulness: Educating Teens About Faith and Media*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2007. *Our Media World: Teaching Kids K-8 about Faith and Media*. Boston: Pauline Books, 2010.

Many Catholic media educators, including CML founder Liz Thoman, have had decades of experience with investigating the moral implications of media. Hailer's and Pacatte's experience in this field is abundantly reflected in the questions and assignments in both these curricula.   The "media mindfulness" approach can be summarized this way: the practice of using media literacy concepts not only to make wise media choices for oneself, but also to develop a sense of responsibility and respect for others. One of the more useful tools in the curriculum is the "media mindfulness wheel." The wheel is divided into four quadrants which correspond to four essential questions: What is going on? What is really going on? What difference does it make? What difference can I make?   To learn more about the media mindfulness approach, you can read the December 2009 issue of *Connections* on "Faith and Media Literacy."

Video games can present some interesting moral choices for players: empathize with game characters or other players, or focus more attention on the reward structures of the game? Here are two studies which address that dilemma:

Croft, James. "'It's Just a Game'—Ethical Reasoning within Virtual Worlds." Harvard GoodWork Project Report Series, Number 73. Howard Gardner, Series Editor. March 2011. Accessed at: http://www.thegoodproject.org/pdf/73-Its-Just-a-Game.pdf Accessed 11 April 2013.

Hartmann, Tilo, et al. "Just a Game? Unjustified Virtual Violence Produces Guilt in Empathetic Players." *Media Psychology* 13.4 (2010): 339-363.

Here's a more traditional article on video games, moral reasoning, and media effects:

Vieria, Edward T., and Marina Krcmar. "The Influences of Video Gaming on US Children's Moral Reasoning About Violence." *Journal of Children and Media* 5.2 (2011): 113-131 Marina Krcmar, an Associate Professor of Communication at Wake Forest University, has published several scholarly articles on media and children's moral development in the last decade.

Parry, Marc. "Jonathan Haidt Decodes the Tribal Psychology of Politics." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 29 January 2012. Web. Accessed 19 April 2013. Accessed at: http://chronicle.com/article/Jonathan-Haidt-Decodes-the/130453/

Entertaining and informative profile of Jonathan Haidt, whose theories of moral intuition have gained many adherents and garnered the scorn of detractors for the last decade. Haidt directly contradicts Kohlberg by arguing that most moral judgments are quick and emotional in nature, and that people tend to make judgments first and consciously justify them afterwards. He also takes an evolutionary perspective, arguing that people of all cultures access five basic

"mental modules" (Harm/Care, Authority, Loyalty, Fairness, Purity) to make moral judgments, and that particular cultural groups will tend to give greater moral weight to some modules over others.

Media scholars have begun the process of designing research to test the validity of Haidt's theory with regard to the moral of responses of audiences to media content.   Here is one interesting study which compares American and German responses to video games:

Joeckel, Sven et al. "Gut or Game? The Influence of Moral Intuitions on Decisions in Video
     Games." *Media Psychology* 15.4 (2012): 460-485.

Additional sources:

"Media and Morality." *Media Smarts* blog. Web. Accessed 11 April 2013.
    Accessed at: http://mediasmarts.ca/blog/media-and-morality
Short, thought-provoking, well-researched introduction to the topic by one of Canada's best media literacy organizations.

Wicks, Patricia Gayá, et al. "The Role of Commodified Celebrities in Children's Moral
    Development: The Case of David Beckham." *Consumption, Markets and Culture*
    10.4 (2007): 401-424.
The theoretical orientation of the article is not at all satisfying. It's a kitchen sink approach in which any element of children's experience or environment could be a resource for their moral judgment. Having said that, the excerpts of I nterviews with young children presented in this article demonstrate why media are able to engage children in extended inquiry on important social issues. It's fascinating to "listen in" to the interviewees as they wrestle with the moral implications of the commodified nature of celebrity in our media culture.

Med!aLit Moments

The Heroine's Code

Male heroes in media aren't necessarily a dime a dozen, but traditional conventions for the male action hero extend back to at least the 1930s (Superman is now 75), and those conventions can be hard to bend. Heroines may be few, and often sexualized, but they're not expected to fulfill male conventions, and they clearly come in different varieties. For example, Wonder Woman stands for truth and tolerance, while Ripley from the "Alien" series is a hard-nosed survivalist. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will learn how to articulate the moral and ethical codes of media heroines. In the process, they'll gain new perspectives on familiar characters, as well as new perspectives on themselves.

Have students compare their code of ethics with those of various media heroines

AHA!: I like these characters, but I might not want to be just like them!

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

Grade Level: 7-9

Materials: pencil, paper, imagination

Activity: Ask students to name some different media heroines. Here's a sampling: Katniss Aberdeen from "The Hunger Games," Captain Janeway from the "Star Trek Voyager" series; Xena, Warrior Princess; Sarah Connor from the "Terminator" series, Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter series; Buffy the Vampire Slayer. And, of course, Wonder Woman. Do they have any favorites? Do any of these characters seem to fall into particular types? What might those types be? Play clips from selected films/shows if you wish. You may find useful background material in a PBS documentary released this month titled "Wonder Women!: The Untold Story of American Superheroines."

Next, ask students to work in pairs or groups. Ask them to select two heroines, preferably of different types, and ask them to write down the goals of these characters in the stories in which they appear. Next, explain the meaning of the term "code of ethics." Everyone has an underlying philosophy of life, and some people are more "up front" about their philosophy—they "stand" for something. It might help to give them a model like the Golden Rule. Next, ask what is the ethical code that these characters live by? Students should be able to say what those codes are, but allow them to use different modes of expression if they feel like doing so (comics, song, role-play, etc.).

Next, ask, what's their philosophy of life? As students answer, lead a whole class discussion in which students compare their philosophy with those of other characters. Do they like characters more or less after writing out a code of ethics for them? Do any of them identify with characters based on that code? (Boys don't have to closely identify with a female character in order to appreciate their philosophy of life). Do they like a character, but would like to "tweak" their code so it's a bit more in line with their own?