

## Why Media Literacy?

Media are omnipresent in the lives of American youth. According to D.F. Roberts<sup>1</sup> children spend an average of more than 6 and a half hours each day with combined various media. Children spend about 28 hours per week watching television, twice as much time as they spend in school over the course of a year.<sup>2</sup> Sixty-six percent of 8- to 18-year-olds have television sets in their bedroom.<sup>3</sup> American teenagers listen to an estimated 10,500 hours of rock music between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades - just 500 fewer hours than they spend in school over 12 years.<sup>4</sup> And 72 percent of youth ages 8 to 17 use the Internet from home at least every few days.<sup>5</sup>

Despite recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and other health advocates that parents closely monitor their child's media consumption, research shows that many parents do not see their child's media use habits as an issue of concern. A YMCA pool found that while 85 percent of parents say they frequently monitor what their kids watch on television, 61 percent of children say they are watching television without any parental supervision. Moreover, 71 percent of parents assert that they frequently monitor their child's use of the web. However, 45 percent of teens say they surf the Internet "all the time/often" without a watchful parental eye.<sup>6</sup> In addition, 26 percent of parents worry they aren't able to explore the Web with their children as well as other parents do.<sup>7</sup>

Media literacy helps children and adolescents gain skills to intelligently navigate the media and filter the hundreds of messages they receive every day. Simply put, media literacy is the ability to "ask questions about what you watch, see and read." Media literacy can help youth understand how media are developed, the approaches used to increase persuasion, the commercial sources and beneficiaries of advertising and the ideology of messages contained in commercial and news media.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to providing youth with "protective skills against the negative influences of the media, media literacy may equally offer young people positive "preparatory" skills for responsible citizenship. For example, media literacy can empower youth to be positive contributors to society, to challenge cynicism and apathy and to serve as agents of social change.

Four key concepts central to media literacy are that all media are constructed, have codes and conventions, convey value messages and have commercial interests.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D.F. Roberts, U.G. Roehr, V.J. Rideout, and M. Brodie, "Kids and the Media at the New Millennium: A Comprehensive National Analysis of Children's Media Use," Menlo Park, Ca: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation Report, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>. "Facts About Media Violence," American Medical Association, 1996, as cited in "Popular Culture & the American Child," 1999. Issue briefs, Studio City, CA. Mediascope Press.

<sup>3</sup> L. Goodstein and M. Connelly, "Teen-age Pool Finds Support for Tradition." New York Times, 30 April, 1998.

<sup>4</sup>*Entertainment Monitor*, December 1995, as cited in "Popular Culture & the American Child."

<sup>5</sup>Joseph Turow and Lilach Ner, "The Internet and the Family 2000: The View from Kids," Report Series Annenberg Public Policy Center, The University of Pennsylvania, 2000.

<sup>6</sup>"Talking with Teens," YMCA Parent and Teen Survey, Global Strategy Group, Inc., April 2000.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Simons-Morton, Donohew, and Crump, "Health Communication in the Prevention of Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Use," *Health Education & Behavior* 14 (1997): 544-544, as cited in "Media Approaches to Prevent Substance Abuse," unpublished, PEPS Series, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, December 1997.

<sup>9</sup>Stephanie Doba and Ellen Doukoullos, Media Literacy for Drug Prevention, A Unit for Middle School Educators, New York Times Newspaper in Education program, no date, 5.