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Who Wants to be a Media Literate? Locating Media Research Methods and Applying them to the “Media Literacy” Concept

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SUMMARY

The field of media studies deals with issues involving the complex process of consumption of mass media and its relation to audiences' meaning-making practices.

One of the enduring concerns in media studies is the ongoing question regarding the power of mass media, their effects, and their roles as vehicles of culture. For example, in some media approaches, mass media are analyzed simply as propaganda machines that have direct media effects. In more sophisticated versions they are seen as forces that shape public knowledge through defining what counts as news and framing the stories that are presented, as well as by providing audiences with specific ways of interpreting the world. The present paper describes the major methodological approaches that have shaped the way that media scholars analyze audiences and the role of the media in their everyday lives.

In the second part, the paper describes the qualitative research project designed to assess the need for audience studies and media literacy. The study offers a comparative international view on the need to teach media literacy to students, and tries to apply one of the described qualitative methods to a particular case-study. The paper explores the meaning that media literacy has for the informants, young students. Through detailed in-depth interviews with 12 students from four different countries (United States, Norway, Canada and Ja-

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pan), an attempt was made to attach a normative definition of "media literacy" to people's subjective perceptions of the mass media, whereby I closely analyze my informants' "media literacy" discourse.

I argue that there are two dominant interpretative frameworks of the meaning media literacy, i.e., explicit and implicit, and I suggest that media literacy was perceived by most of my informants as a positive quality and that participants would make every attempt to showcase their own degree or explain their own interpretation of what it means to be "media literate."

Key words: media literacy, mass media, role of media, media research

Introduction

The large penetration of mass media and the new technologies within every sphere of any society is fundamental in the restructuring of the global economy, broadly characterized by the decentralization of mass production processes, the rise of transnational corporations and the development of more flexible markets along with management strategies. Media ownership, production and distribution have become increasingly internationalised and even globalised. Developments in media and communications in the 1990s especially are contributing to a radical transformation of the cultural spaces.

These changes have affected not only the economic but also the cultural and social realms of individuals' everyday life. In particular, debates around cultural homogenization and/or imperialism, around information overload, access to knowledge, consumerism and loss of identity, are just few that have emerged in the academia in relation to the harms of an increasingly mediated contemporary society.

The common denominator of the majority of media debates is the necessity to develop theoretical and methodological approaches able to understand these topics, and to further, create an educational framework that would create specific knowledge skills. In particular, when dealing with a society characterized by an on-going interaction between real and virtual spaces, material practices and discourses, visual and interactive experiences, it becomes rather legitimate to question the role of mass media and the new technologies within the life of individuals (especially) from the audiences' perspective.

But educational responses have not kept pace with the changed media developments. For example, there has been much rhetoric but little research about Media literacy as a project that would educate and inform us about the media. There is therefore a pressing need for comparative studies, so that local

research can be examined in a global context and further recommendations can be made.

An important consequence has been, for example, the construction of new transnational communicational and cultural spaces in and across Europe. In this new media order, technological developments have led to significant changes in the ways in which young people interact with the media. Various forms of deregulation have led to the increasing availability of specialist services which no longer fit the traditional models of broadcasting. There is, however, increasingly creative participation in media processes and interactions with media products. I suggest here that research into contemporary forms of media use and cultural practice can provide an excellent focus for grasping the changing dynamics of identity formation within different communities, and also the need for specific (media) skills.

There is no doubt that mass media are an essential factor in the lives of children and young people. *Media literacy* as a project, and as a movement, attempts to work towards the establishment of an environment for public communication through an active, negotiated understanding of contemporary media practices and its politics of representation. However, how do young people themselves regard media literacy as a necessary knowledge remains unknown.

This paper will first offer an historical overview of the field of media qualitative audience research in relation to issues of media consumption and audiences' meaning-making practices in the context of their everyday lives. It will show how different theorists, within the critical/cultural studies theoretical traditions, have approached such topic; and how the development of such area of investigation has been gradual and constructive, building upon each study in terms of questions investigated and methods utilized. I will deal with some of the methods in media studies, while offering a short summary of the field of qualitative audience research that is presently very active due to the growing recognition of such area of inquiry within the larger field of media studies.

In the second part, I ground the above debate while the in-depth interviews will be applied to this study. The questions of how do undergraduate and graduate students themselves define the notion of media literacy will be addressed. Do they consider to be themselves media literate? Media literacy here is defined as the ability to analyze, critically evaluate, and produce media content (in all media: print, radio, TV, computer), as well as to foster the development of skills and practices integral to the practice of participatory democracy.

Mapping the field of media qualitative audience research

From texts to audiences

Qualitative media audience studies developed in the second half of the 20th century as a reaction to the predominance of media effects research based on the idea that audiences were passive recipients of the univocal messages transmitted by media. The origins of this area of media research are usually associated with the work and ideas produced by the members of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham, England. This Center is also considered the place of birth of the Cultural Studies theoretical tradition. During the 1970s, the CCCS was trying to apply neo-Marxist theories of ideology and hegemony (Althusser and Gramsci), Freud's psychoanalysis, Lacan's ideas on subjectivity and the methodology of literary criticism to the study of media texts. For example, scholars such as Colin McCabe and Stephen Heath (1971) in *Sign of the Times: Introductory Readings in Textual Semiotics* applied psychoanalysis to explain how cinematic images constructed a particular viewer and, in so doing, participated in the reproduction of the social relations imposed by the capitalist system. Indeed, the authors argued that individuals' subjective positions were inscribed within the media texts because the latter were written with the same ideological language as the world in which we live in. Media institutions, after all, were the main vehicles for the maintenance of the dominant class' ideology (McCabe, 1981).

As a reaction to such deterministic theory, which reflected the larger perception of mass media as instruments of propaganda and manipulation, a series of work appeared at the Center devoted to subvert the primacy of the text and turn the attention to its readers. Stuart Hall's *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (1973) is the first work that stressed the limited power of texts in influencing individuals' interpretations by hailing them in particular subjective position inscribed in the message. Further, Hall argued that the effectiveness of a text could not be understood only by focusing on one node of the process of communication, i.e. the production phase, the text itself or the reception phase. The construction of meaning is a joint venture between producer and receiver and it is held in the text.

In addition, though people's interpretations of messages can never be fully predicted, because deeply related to social and cultural factors affecting the process of decoding, these interpretations are not endless and the producer of the message can fix certain parameters, within which they can be ascribed.

In particular, Hall pointed out three different ways of decoding a message that reflect the level of agreement between the intention of the sender and the interpretation of the receiver. The "dominant reading" occurs when the re-

ceiver decodes the message as intended by the producer. The "negotiated reading" indicates when the receiver agrees in general with the intended message but personalizes it in some way. Finally, the "oppositional reading" is when the encoding and decoding processes use completely different codes and, therefore, the message sent and the one received are completely different.

Hall's theory originally addressed concerns related to the meanings inscribed in a text as well as to the complexity of individuals' meaning-making practices. The scholar derived his approach from the ideas on social semiotics of Valentin Volosinov. According to the Russian scholar, linguistic signs do not possess fixed meanings because the latter are continuously modified by social subjects inscribed in particular class positions. By applying these ideas on media texts, Hall demonstrated how people had the possibility to interpret messages differently from the meaning intended by their producers. Further, Hall's article introduces also the idea that individuals have different cultural competences that derive from their social and cultural backgrounds and, in turn, affect their interpretations. As Graeme Turner (1990) concludes, "Where the earlier notion of 'effects' of the media localized the meaning (and the effect) of the message in the individual reader, the encoding/decoding model defined media texts as moments when the larger social and political structures within the culture are exposed for analysis" (p. 94).

In the same vein, another scholar who stressed similar ideas in those years was the Italian sociologist Umberto Eco (1972). The latter also pointed out that the interpretations of media texts occur through the cultural, ideological, and ethical frameworks in which audiences are imbedded.

Parallel to Hall's article, a series of books appeared on issues related to the 'reading' of cultural texts, pleasure, meanings and methodologies. Among them, John Fiske's and John Hartley's (1978) *Reading Television* questioned the validity of textual analysis to the study of television programs. They compared the medium to a 'bard' (p. 15) because closer to the oral tradition of storytelling than to a literary work.

Furthermore, Hall's encoding/decoding model motivated the first large qualitative research project interested in looking at audiences at the end of the 1970s. This research focused on the reception of a news program in the U.K. called "Nationwide". Charlotte Brundson and David Morley (Morley, 1980) were the main authors of this large project. The latter involved a content analysis of the program followed by a qualitative audience study that looked at how people from different educational and occupational backgrounds interpreted the program. The researchers showed tapes of "Nationwide" to twenty-nine groups that after the screening were invited to give their opinion. The study helped understanding that Hall's model was not completely adequate.

Indeed the respondents' reactions indicated how interpretations are related to individuals' social and cultural background rather than to a particular disposition toward the "preferred" meaning inscribed in the text. Morley (1980) concluded that "The meaning of the text will be constructed differently according to the discourses (knowledge, prejudices, resistances etc.) brought to bear upon the text by the reader and the crucial factor in the encounter of audience/subject and text will be the range of discourses at the disposal of the audience" (p. 18).

However, the "Nationwide" study was not free of criticism. Indeed, the same Morley in an article published a year later realized the methodological limitations of his research in terms of the artificiality of the place of investigation utilized, the respondents' limited demographics and, above all, the rigid assumptions that the people investigated would normally watch that program. In addition, Morley (1992) will subsequently write that the value of Hall's model lies in the notion that if the text is open to different interpretations, yet the latter are contained within the conditions supplied by the text, its producers and the social structures in which the readers are inscribed. Finally, the 'Nationwide' study still implied the presence of a particular encoded message within the text that could have been deconstructed and analyzed in its codes and discourses.

Within the wave of the rediscovery of the individual and its active role in the construction of meaning, there are also those scholars who devoted their work to support the audience's agency by articulating concepts such as pleasures, tastes and appropriation in order to draw the attention to media consumption as primarily a subjective practice. However, in so doing they have neglected to address issues related to power relations, and to social and cultural structures, in which the same cultural forms and audiences that they mention are part of. An example of this view is offered by the work of the American scholar John Fiske. In *Television Culture* (1987), the author focuses on the problematic of audiences' interpretations of television texts constructed to convey a preferred meaning that reflects the ideas and values of the dominant ideology.

Fiske distinguishes between program and text. The former is created, distributed and defined by the industry; the latter is the product of its readers. Therefore, a program becomes a text in the reader's processes of interpretation. It follows that the same program can produce different texts according to who is engaged in the act of reading. Furthermore, the process of interpretation of television programs is determined by the "discursive practice" used by a particular individual. According to Fiske, whether we interpret a television program or a social experience, we rely on our repertoire of discourses made

available by the society we live in and our cultural and social make-up. Therefore, if a critical analysis of a television program can identify the discourses which have produced it, it can not predict the discourses that the viewer will use when interpreting and transforming it in a text. Texts are unstable and undetectable as opposed to the determined and delimited program. A text, since related to the act of reading, can be composed by the interpretation of different programs or even different materials, which are combined in the same process of interpretation.

It follows that readers cannot be identified as a homogenous group but rather as products of the intersection of social factors such as age, class, race and nationality. In the case of television, Fiske argues that the term "viewers" instead of "audience" better reflects the social differences inherent in the individuals that contribute to the variety of possible meanings and modes of reception of television programs. In particular, Fiske argues the acts of making meanings and receiving pleasure out of texts are strictly related to the readers' cultural capital and competence. The cultural capital is a reflection of the economic one within the sphere of culture; it represents the attempt of the dominant classes to control cultural practices and values as forms of social power. The cultural competence refers to the codes and conventions that people utilize when interpreting texts as well as social experiences. Hence, for Fiske (1987):

Pleasure results from a particular relationship between meanings and power. Pleasure for the subordinate is produced by the assertion of one's social identity in resistance to, in independence of, or in negotiation with, the structure of domination. [...] Pleasure results from the production of meanings of the world and of the self that are felt to serve the interests of the reader rather than those of the dominant ones (p. 19).

The encounter between the reader and the text becomes a reflection of the individual's encounter with the structure of society. The author identifies both elements as sites of struggle for the acquisition of social power. Further, Fiske stresses the use of television texts as material for conversation or, as he puts it, for gossiping. He argues that by using the content of television programs as subjects of interpersonal communications the relationship between the viewer and the program itself becomes more active. As he writes, "Gossip works actively in two ways: it constructs audience-driven meanings and it constructs audience communities within which those meanings circulate" (Fiske 1987: 80). This characteristic makes television consumption closer to the forms representative of oral culture which, according to Fiske, are more likely to resist ideological control. Indeed, they promote cultural diversity because their conventions and codes are extremely sensitive to the changes of the social environment and the community that is employing them.

His work has been often criticized for being blindly celebratory of the active audience. Indeed, while attempting to redeem the role of the individual in meaning-making construction, Fiske concentrates primarily on the ideas of personal pleasure and cultural codes to explain the relationship between media texts and their audiences. Thus, he neglects any participation of social and cultural structures to the meaning-making process, and does not articulate how, if so, common interpretations can be possible.

Finally, another strand of reception studies has focused on the investigation of audiences of news programs in order to assess the level and type of understanding of information and subsequent uses of it in the context of everyday practices. Among such studies, is the work of Klaus Jensen (1995). Indeed, his research on news' audiences was primarily interested in exploring how individuals' interpretation of the news affect the way those information are used in their social environments. From the data collected, the scholar developed a set of 'super-themes' through which audiences interpret television programs in particular social contexts.

Super-themes are simultaneously very general and very concrete categories of understanding, simultaneously a strength and a weakness of reception. They are general, or flexible, to the extent that they accommodate a variety of perspective on, domains of, and propositions about social reality [...]. Super-themes are a strength in that they allow viewers to make personally relevant sense of news, but a weakness in that they do not empower viewers to act on that sense in political contexts. [...] At this point, one may summarize the nature of super-themes through an abduction: Viewers' categories if news are generalized categories of social reality. All forms of everyday experience are generalized categories of social reality. Conclusion: Viewers' categories of news are forms of everyday experience. (1995: 156-7)

Jensen (1993) defines his reception theory as "a qualitative form of audience-cum-content analysis" (p. 21), because based on audiences' discourses around media as well as media content within specific socio-historical contexts. The author explains that discourse does not necessarily relate only to language but "[it] is said to include everyday interaction and forms of consciousness, constituting the medium of social construction of reality" (1995: 64).

His theory of the relationship of media consumption and identity-formation is rather original in that it is based on the assumption that language and individual agency are necessarily interrelated. Both discourses and actions create the realm of meanings in which individual lives. Hence, the self exists not just in interaction but as interaction in which meanings and actions are always context-dependent.

Audience research in the domestic sphere

Following the publication of Morley's research, reception studies conducted within the domestic, private sphere appeared in the media field. In particular, the work of James Lull and Dorothy Hobson can be seen among the pioneers of the type of audience investigation that considers media consumption within the context of everyday life. The micro-realities in which individuals act are considered within the macro-context of social structures with which they interact. Indeed, in 1980s the attention to the household as primary site of media consumption is moved by the proliferation of more affordable technologies and the appearance of VCRs, play stations, personal computers along with larger and multiple television sets within the private space of the house.

In 1980, James Lull published "The social uses of television." His research involved in-depth interviews and intense participant observation of 200 American households over the space of three years, and drew attention to the social practices that individuals accomplish with television. If the uses and gratification theorists already pointed out that people were active agents in their consumption of communication technologies, they had not considered some of their applications, in particular of television, that are imbedded in the everyday life. Lull argued that individuals use television for social and interpersonal purposes. He divided the social uses of the medium within the household in two categories, structural type and relational type, which referred to they ways people would schedule their time around favorite television programs or use the latter for socialization purposes.

The importance of Lull's work lies in his contribution to the ethnographic study of media consumption. In methodological terms, his research highlights the potentialities on qualitative methods for the analysis of media audiences; it represents a practical guide for subsequent studies; and, finally, it stresses the importance of the household over the individual as central and necessary unit for the study of media consumption within the social context of everyday life. Theoretically, his work still reflects uses and gratification perspective. If on one hand, Lull positively stresses individuals' agency – by showing the consumption of media in social and personal contexts – on the other hand, he neglects to analyze the impact of social and cultural factors on the uses and selection of media. Furthermore, he does not account for issues of power and their influence on families' habits of consumption within the house; nor he concedes to media the benefit of participating in meaning-making practices as resources for identity-construction.

On the same methodological strand but with rather different theoretical underpinnings is the work of Dorothy Hobson (1980; 1982). In particular, her re-

search has focused on issues of power within the household and their impact on media uses, and on looking at housewives as a subculture with their own pleasures and motivations underneath their media consumption, different from the ones of their husbands. In her study of the English soap opera *Crossroads*, she investigated the relationship between audiences' pleasures and producers' decisions and expectations on viewers' choices. She also analyzed discourses around television programs and media consumption as reflecting cultural, social and gender differences among family members.

Finally, her work is also representative of a strand of studies that appeared within the umbrella of Cultural Studies at the end of the 1970s, and that focused on investigating the cultural practices of subcultures. The intent was to stress how the multiplicity of groups with their distinct cultural and social practices, relations and symbols was synonym of the complexity of culture and multiplicity of meanings available within it.

In relation to the study of women and media consumption,¹ and similar to Hobson findings are the ideas presented by Margareth J. Heide (1995). In *Television Culture and Women's Lives*, the scholar explores how prime-time television portrays issues of gender and family in programs intended to attract 'baby-boomers.' Through in-depth interviews and textual analysis of the show "Thirtysomething," Heide highlights the importance of television as an incredibly rich source of reference for women in interpersonal and gender relationships' matters, regardless of their social status. In fact, she argues that the main function of television programs is to offer to its female viewers symbols, feelings and positions to identify with. Heide derives the term 'identification' from studies on female viewership, such as Ien Ang's analysis of the audience of the show "Dallas."² The author concludes that "Viewers enter imaginatively in the world of a fictional character or characters; and characters become emotional reference points in the real life of viewers" (Heide, 1995: 12).

Finally, Heide's findings regarding the different women's relationships with the show have opened the field to further investigations on similar topics. In addition, she offers her personal explanation of the success of the show "Thirtysomething." Though explicitly representing a very specific social class of people, the show succeeded in attracting a larger segment of the population by focusing on the emotional situations.

Moreover, a step further within the development of the field of reception analysis interested in looking at media consumption within the household is represented by David Morley's *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (1986). In his book, the British scholar focused on the relationship between people's interpretations of television programs and the social context in which the viewing process was conducted. He pointed out how in-

dividuals' reception and selection of television programs is strongly influenced by the place of consumption, the house in this case, and the people present during the act of watching. In addition, consuming television is also theorized by taking into consideration other leisure activities in which the viewers are usually engaged. Indeed, the same individual can experience in different ways the same program due to changes in the social context of their consumption.

Further, the scholar raises the argument that television viewing is a social activity and therefore cannot be isolated from other form of social behavior, and cannot be analyzed outside the domestic sphere where most of the viewing experience takes place. Moreover, similarly to Lull, Morley noted how the consumption of television was related to other forms of social clusters such as co-workers or classmates. Individuals might decide to watch certain programs in order to be able to talk about them with others. However, Morley distinguishes himself from Lull by refusing to categorize families according to the typology of uses that they primarily employ the medium for. He writes on the subject that " It might rather be the case that any given family uses the television for different purposes at different times, and indeed that different members of the same family may well wish to use the television set for quite different functions" (1986: 34). The process of program selection is always influenced by social and temporal constraints as well as by the number of television sets available within the household.

Another important factor to consider when analyzing audiences' interpretation and selection of television programs is the level of the individuals' competence in understanding codes and conventions related to certain genres or type of material. Morley, similarly to Fiske and Hobson, noted that some people might not have the cultural competence to understand or enjoy certain programs because of their social and cultural background. Therefore, when analyzing people's responses to certain material the researcher has to consider first what type of material the interviewees would find relevant. He underlines how gender and power issues are articulated in media habits and discourses. Although, he believes that consumption patterns reflect more differences in social roles within the house than actual gender identification. He describes, for example, the different ways husbands and wives conceive of their home as a place for leisure or work, and how they present a different viewing style: concentrated versus distracted by other activities (pp. 150-151).

Finally, Morley's stresses several fundamental elements that need to be considered when doing audience research, such as power issues related to family members, gender differences in consumption patterns and tastes, the importance of the social context of media use, and the immersion of such

practices within the context of everyday social and personal activities and meanings.

Around the same time of Morley, in Germany, Herman Bausinger (1984), Jan-Uwe Rogge and Klaus Jensen (1988) conducted ethnographic studies of media consumption within the family's structure. In particular, Rogge and Jensen applied to their research the concept of 'system theory' borrowed from family therapy approaches. They intended to look at family's activities including media consumption as having a systematic nature (p. 86). This type of approach stressed the influence of interpersonal relationship that occur among family members and their impact on media habits and discourses, a process that Morley did not spend too much time on as himself admitted at the end of his book on families (1986). Though, unlike Morley, the German researchers did not present any clear discussion on issues related to power or gender differences and their impact on families' media practices, attitudes, and other domestic activities.

Audience research, Domestic Consumption and New Media

Media reception studies have tried also to address issues related to the impact of media within individuals' space as objects and not simply producers of particular texts, such as the Internet, e-mail, CMCs, but also satellite TV. In fact, it is possible to question the role of these means of communication in blurring the boundaries between private and public spheres in a larger and more drastic way, which in turn has affected social relations and practices. This is, indeed, one of the arguments raised by Shaun Moores' study on the introduction and diffusion of the radio within British households, that showed the parallel change in perception of the medium from an intruder to a companion (Moores, 1993: 76). It is also present in Lynn Spigel's (1992) analysis of the introduction of the television set in American living-rooms, in which she discusses the disruption of previous households' habits and rituals of family members; and also in the research by Ann Gray (1987) on the use of video-recorders by thirty British women and its relation with their domestic duties, habits and spaces.

Nevertheless, the first most celebrated and extensive study on the introduction of new technologies in the household and their impact on meaning-making and everyday life is represented by the "Household Uses of Information and Communication Technologies" project directed by Silverstone. From this project a series of interesting essays emerged all published in the same collection edited by Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch (1992) under the title *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*. The entire

project aimed at investigating the household as a moral economy; an economic, cultural and social system involved in the consumption and production of commodities and meanings. Within this economy, the use of and meanings derived from media technologies are influenced by the material and cultural repertoires available to the members of each family. Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley define four steps that characterize this moral economy: appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion (Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992: 20-21). A technology is appropriated once bought, objectified when placed within the house, incorporated in the daily routine of individuals through its consumption, and finally converted into a means through which one creates meanings and competences utilized outside the domestic sphere (pp. 21-25). The originality of their work lies in their understanding of the household as a micro-cosmos which responds dynamically as a system to the external forces, and in which the means of communication are essential instruments for bridging the private and public spaces of interaction and meanings. Furthermore, their concept of the "moral economy" stresses the fact that we need to talk of "consumption" practices in relation to media more than of uses because they are not simply objects, rather they are resources and sources for meanings and identity-construction. Indeed, the authors interestingly include media, in particular television, along with those objects and practices which confer Anthony Giddens' "ontological security" (1992: 18; Silverstone, 1994: 5) to the individual. Silverstone (1994), in particular, explains how media, because ingrained in the everyday life, are central to rituals, rite of passage, and traditions. Hence, they are valued and treasured along with other elements, which individuals need in order to develop a psychological sense of security and continuity of their selfhood in time and space.

Moreover, in terms of audience studies involving new technologies, Shaun Moores' latest work relates to the cultural role of satellite television within the domestic sphere. A relevant argument that he raises within his research is the idea that the process of consumption needs to be considered as active and not necessarily opposed to the act of production. Indeed, consumption can be itself productive. However, one needs to be cautious when embracing this theory because it is very easy to follow into a celebratory approach to media use for meaning-making purposes by audiences.

Another aspect of the domestic consumption of media that was not analyzed in the depth in any research mentioned so far relates to children and their media practices and ideas within the family setting. One has to wait until the second half of the 1980s to find media qualitative audience studies in which children are considered as media consumers with their own media practices and ideas, and as influential members in families' media use.

Authors such as Patricia Palmer (1986) in Australia, David Buckingham (1993; 2000) and Sonia Livingstone (1997; 1999) in Europe have been producing excellent research in the past two decades in which children's consumption, not only of television, is analyzed within the domestic environment; and taken into consideration when discussing some of the implications related to media use, content, regulation and access. In particular, their research show the presence of differences in consumption patterns related to cultural and social backgrounds; and how children and parents have different perception of media consumption, and on what is considered good and bad. Important for our study here is that Buckingham (1993) stresses how listening to children does not imply that everything they say is taken at face value without contextualizing their responses within the social and cultural conditions in which they are imbedded.

As with the introduction of every new technology, new media have generated contrasting views about their value within society. Computers are seen as bad influence for children; for example, video games are accused to promote violence, to be responsible for causing lack of imagination, passivity and asocial behavior. Conversely, those who believe in the positive functions offered by visual media consider the new technologies as instrument for enhancing creativity, community and self-accomplishment. Thus, in contrast to television consumption, some academics support interactive technologies as constructive means for children, as opposed to television that is responsible for the disappearance of childhood. They consider computer as positive instrument for educational purpose by favoring a form of learning which is non-linear and more visual.

In addition, reception studies conducted by David Buckingham (1993; 2000) and other scholars such as Sonia Livingstone (1990; 1999) have shown how new media consumption, as in the case of old media, cannot be separated from its social, cultural and economic contexts. These contexts not only influence the patterns of consumption and of production but also they frame the discourses around the relationship of children and new media along with the concept of childhood within a capitalist system, the rights and duties of children, and parents' responsibilities.

In fact, through the understanding of media consumption as a practice imbedded in the web of our everyday life's activities, one can avoid considering computers either as the only source of all the problems afflicting children – violence, sexual abuses, family disfunctionalism, etc. – or as the only solution to them. In both ways, technologies are invested with feelings, ideas, and responsibilities for our social and individual practices that erroneously make them the central engine of our society. *As Buckingham (2000) argues:*

As with the debates around television, both positive and negative arguments draw on essentialist notions of childhood and of technology. In effect, they connect a *mythology* about childhood with a parallel mythology about technology. Thus, children are seen to possess a natural, spontaneous creativity, which is somehow (perhaps paradoxically) released by the machine; and, at the same time, they are seen as vulnerable, innocent and in need of protection from the damage that the technology will inevitably inflict on them. (p. 45)

The role of new technologies in the life of children needs to be analyzed along with the consumption of other media and considered as not the solely producer of social change (Seiter, 1999). In addition, technological advancement in mass media has not only been characterized by the creation of portable computers and Internet communications but it has also contributed to the massive proliferation of television channels, CDs and CD-ROMs, video tapes and video games. All these different media products are consumed simultaneously. Especially in the case of children, using the new technologies does not imply the disappearance of the old ones, and the content is often the same. Indeed, it is almost impossible to separate television programs and channels from the web sites that attract children, or the games and music they favor.

Following Buckingham, media researchers need not to conceive the relationship between children and new media as simply a matter of individual's consciousness, but rather by considering media use as a social practice. Presently there are not many reception studies that have been conducted on this subject since new media are in some way still a new phenomenon; and secondly, children in general are not unproblematic interviewees both with qualitative and/or quantitative methodologies. Nevertheless, an excellent resource is represented by a large international project, "Children, Young People and the Changing Environment" (Livingstone, 1997; 1998; Livingstone and Bovill, 1999) interested in the significance of new and old media within young people's life (aged 6-17), conducted by Sonia Livingstone and other researchers in twelve European countries. The project incorporated qualitative and quantitative methodologies. It focused on situating the use of new technologies within the larger realm of children's daily activities (mostly in the home but also in the classroom) and, on analyzing media consumption within a social context in which issues of privacy, interactivity, convergence, and consumerism were considered. The project was inspired by the British study conducted by Hilde Himmelweit and her colleagues in 1958 "Television and the Child" which focused on the introduction and impact of television within the lives of children and teens. This new project clearly distinguishes itself from the previous one for social and cultural differences that had emerged within the forty

years that divide the two studies. In fact, the children's age category has enlarged from 14 years to 17 years; the media environment has expanded too; and finally the most recent study has not investigated 'media effects' but rather individuals' interpretations, practices and role of media in the lives of children. Nevertheless, television in the 1990s is still a very central media for entertainment, although children would rather play outside than watch television or play videogames. Whereas, the new technologies are being integrated to pre-existing media rather than displacing them, and in the future they might follow the pattern of television and being used more and more in an individualized and routinized fashion within the household. In addition, Livingstone's report indicated children's differences in patterns of consumption according to age, gender, and social characteristics; in particular, in relation to the level of education, income and lifestyle of their parents.

Regarding the role of media in identity-formation and consumption practices, Livingstone and her colleagues highlight the importance of studying media consumptions within everyday practices because related to the fact that through the routines of everyday life social structures and meanings are created, negotiated and maintained also by children. Furthermore, as the scholar argues:

The leisure environment affords access to certain kinds of activities and interconnections among activities, depending on social arrangements of time, space, cultural norms and values and personal preferences and lifestyle. Within these arrangements, children and young people (and their families) construct their own local contexts and it is within these that media use become meaningful. Moreover, every choice is made meaningful by its mutual relation with all others: watching television means something different to the child with nothing else to do compared with the child who has a personal computer at home or friends knocking on the door. Thus conditions of access and choice within the child's environment are central to an understanding of the meanings of media use. (Livingstone, 1998: 441)

This research contradicts the negative image of computers as vehicle for passive and asocial behavior by showing how the large majority of children tend to use these machines with friends more than alone, and their uses and content as material for socialization.

Another interesting and resourceful research is offered by Toni Downes (1999) in Australia. He focused his research on parents' and children's discourses around computers generated and appropriated within the household. His research stresses how historically the symbolic meaning of computers has moved from 'computing as a hobby' to computers as 'future' (p. 105). His in-

interviews showed the tendency of parents to consider computers as useful for education, for the future success and self-accomplishment of their children. The same beliefs were shared by the children, who recognized the importance of mastering computers for obtaining a successful career as well as obtaining good grades at school.

Finally, the importance of studying children's narrative is also related to the fact that, if we consider the child as an active agent, one needs to acknowledge that this agency allows for even more possibility of influence deriving from the social institutions such as schools and mass media. That is why constructive criticism toward the new technologies should stress the need for educating children and parents to become critical about media texts and practices.

A case-study: Who Wants to be a Media Literate?

Locating Methodology

In the following section, first, a review of the most important media qualitative and interpretative techniques will be offered, in particular in-depth interviews, because they were further employed in my case-study. In the second part, I analyze the media narratives of my informants on the topic of Media literacy, that I define as...

Qualitative media research involves different methods of collecting data such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, field observation and case studies. Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 8) write that "the word qualitative implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry... They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning". According to Wimmer and Dominick (1997: 83), the difference between (media) qualitative and quantitative research lies in the different conception of reality. If for a quantitative researcher reality is objective, created by parts, which can be analyzed separately, for a qualitative researcher reality is strictly related to the observer's realm and cannot be fragmented. Moreover, quantitative research considers individuals as basically similar and looks for generalizations about their behaviors and thought. Quantitative research focuses on measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, and not processes (Denzin, Lincoln: 8). Qualitative researchers understand human beings to be different and, therefore, they cannot be properly categorized. "Whereas quantitative researchers

strive for breadth, qualitative researchers strive for depth” (Wimmer and Dominick 1997: 84).

Qualitative research has certain advantages and disadvantages. It allows the researcher to investigate in a more natural setting than a quantitative researcher, such as the interviewee’s home or work place, and to use more flexible methods, such as in-depth interviews. Qualitative studies usually involve a small sample of subjects under investigation and therefore they cannot lead to any form of generalization of data. In addition, reliability of these studies is a crucial factor. The researchers may lose their ‘objectivity’ when collecting data because they become too close to the object of investigation, their opinions may influence subjects’ responses. According to Guba and Lincoln (1981): “The naturalistic inquirer is himself the instrument, changes resulting from fatigue, shifts in knowledge, and cooptation, as well as variations resulting from differences in training, skill and experience among different ‘instruments,’ easily occur. But this loss in rigor is more than offset by the flexibility, insight, and ability to build on tacit knowledge that is the peculiar province of the human interest” (113). I do agree with Denzin and Lincoln (1998) that qualitative studies have to be carefully designed and conducted in order to achieve the highest level of reliability possible for the type of research under consideration.

The goal of in-depth interviews is to understand the subjects’ perspective on the issue under consideration. An in-depth interview allows the researcher to access information that is not directly visible. When examining thoughts and feelings, direct observation is limited to understanding people’s behavior more than the attitudes and beliefs that stand behind the behavior. Qualitative interview research techniques exist to focus on in-depth answers about culture, meanings, processes, and problems (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 26-29). There are structured and unstructured conversational formats as well as several types of interviews including life histories, evaluation interviews, focus groups, and topical interviews. I am inclined towards in-depth interviews. As Rubin & Rubin (1995) explain, “intensive interviews, or in-depth interviews, are essentially a hybrid of the one-on-one interview approach. Intensive interviews are unique in that they: Generally use smaller samples; provide detailed background about the reasons why respondents give specific answers. Elaborate data concerning respondents’ opinions, values, motivations, recollections, and experiences, and feelings are obtained. They also allow for lengthy observation of respondents’ nonverbal responses.” This form of interview gives the researcher some choice as to the order of the questions, freedom to attempt alternative wordings of the same question... I will follow the in-depth interview model, that is defined as an “interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions

of the lifeworld of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996: 5-6). Themes of experience, lifeworld, conversation, dialogue, and narrative are central to the in-depth interview.

My goal for this case study was to conduct in-depth interviews with University of Colorado-Boulder students whose countries of origin were the following: Norway, Canada, Japan, and the United States of America on *the meaning* of media literacy. I selected these nations as representatives of both the media-educated and non-media-educated sides of the coin. Norway and Canada have a strong tradition of media education as a course from first through twelfth grade. Japan and the United States do not have any tradition thus far. All four countries are economically and technologically developed, and have strong educational systems in general.³

I had considered focusing solely on undergraduate students and investigating their degree of media literacy; I especially feared graduate students, typically older and wiser, may have been influenced by other factors – particularly real-life experiences and undergraduate/graduate curriculum – outside of primary/secondary school media education. However, in my search for participants, I received responses from graduate students. Thus, in order to balance the composition of the demographics of interviewees, I chose two undergraduates and one graduate student from each country. Interviews were 45 minutes to one hour, and took place on campus. All interviews were conducted in English and were recorded on audiotape and then transcribed later.⁴

The following research on media literacy was partial in three senses. Firstly, it is limited in scope, since it focuses on a fairly narrow range of students. Secondly, it is highly selective, since all the students in our samples were chosen to participate because of their own willingness. Thirdly, it is partial because the researcher is an active advocate of the potential value of the notion Media literacy.

There are, understandably, some other basic limitations to this methodology. First, interviewing non-native English speakers proved to be problematic, particularly in the case of the Japanese students. Further, any type of language barrier restricts not only the use of colloquial expression but also some basic concepts, as well. Along this same line, since the project boasts an "American" flavor, participants – particularly expatriate Norwegians and Canadians – were forced to give examples from American culture rather than their own native countries.

Most importantly, however, the whole thrust of the project was an attempt to apply a normative definition of "media literacy" to people's subjective perceptions of the mass media. With this in mind, I ran into the pitfall of the de-

mand characteristic of social desirability among respondents. It became apparent after only the first interview that “media literacy” was perceived as a positive quality, and that participants would make every attempt to showcase their own degree or explain their own interpretation of what it means to be “media literate.” This final problem shall be discussed later in this paper.

Discussion

Investigation of the basic premise of research – to determine the differences between students who were exposed to media education and those who weren’t – was diverted from its expected course after transcribing the first interview. During the transcribing it became highly apparent that a demand characteristic of social desirability would be prevalent among participants. Piggybacking on the concept of “literacy” as a positive, beneficial quality, “media literacy” was similarly perceived as a positive trait. From this point on, it became evident that participants would make every attempt – consciously or otherwise – to showcase or explain their own interpretation of what it means to be “media literate”. The types of social desirability/demand characteristic responses I received were divided into two categories: *explicit* and *implicit*.

Explicit responses refer to direct or overt references to one’s own media literacy skills. Statements referring to viewing skills or approaches (“I’m a very analytical person,” “I try to be a critical viewer”) or allusions to the third-person effect and/or references to others’ media viewing habits or skills (“They’re not really thinking critically,” “I don’t think these people are critical at all in the first place,” “I think it affects other people strongly, but not me”) or statements claiming a resistance to media’s effects (“For me, it honestly doesn’t influence me that much”) were classified as explicit responses.

Implicit responses refer to indirect references or allusions to one’s media skills and thus were more difficult to recognize. Implicit responses aligned themselves with “common sense” arguments and included hackneyed statements about certain media fare (“Advertising manipulates,” “Media literacy would be beneficial”); references to socially desirable traits, in the media or otherwise (“Diversity is good in the media,” “Don’t buy into all that stuff that politicians sell all the time”).

Explicit responses – Active, External, and Aggressive

Explicit responses were divided into three categories – Explicit Active, Explicit External, and Explicit Aggressive.

The Explicit Active group is comprised of responses that were the most obvious and overt attempts to demonstrate the participants’ self-avowed “me-

dia literacy" skills. These responses were typically straightforward and included descriptions of one's own "critical" or "analytical" abilities when it comes to confronting media or mediated messages. They represent an obvious and clear attempt by participants to present themselves as well-equipped with media skills, as individuals who are not affected by mediated messages. Most important, in fact, is the term "Active." These responses show a manner of *taking charge* of the media, of taking a proactive stance toward mediated messages, rather than allowing media to have an effect or influence on them. Often heard over the course of an interview, these responses demonstrate a need to illustrate a power over the media, rather than vice versa.

Early in her interview, Liz (19 years old, an English student from the United States) wastes no time in stating that she possesses critical skills necessary for analyzing media. The repetition underscores what seems to be an inherent need to feel "media literate" and to illustrate that quality.

I'm a very analytical person. Anyone who knows me will tell you that. I go to movies, and I don't just go to be entertained. I don't go to sit passively; I go and I analyze everything afterwards. I was a lit major, y'know? I'm trained to do that or something. I don't know.

Later in her interview, she returns to the motif of her critical skills, describing her practices when watching television.

A lot of people will call me a pessimist because I'm "critical" ... but I'm not critical in the sense that, y'know, the negative things, saying bad things all the time. But that's what I do. I analyze and I think all the time.

Deb (28 years old, a Sociology student from the United States) has a similar self-assessment and explains how she has strong analytical skills. She enlists obvious terminology from her work in the social sciences.

I try to be a critical viewer, I try to analyze or deconstruct the images I'm seeing, how I do relate to them.

Robert (27 years old, a Speech-Language-Hearing Science student from Japan) also believes that he has an

ability to choose what is wrong, what is good and what is correct and what is incorrect.

The Explicit External responses cast the individual in a certain light in comparison to other people. Not as straightforwardly self-appraising, these re-

sponses serve to differentiate the speaker from others – others who are, in the speaker’s opinion, more susceptible to and thus manipulated by the media: the third-person effect. Further, the responses don’t demonstrate as much proactive activity toward media (as with those who enlisted Explicit Active responses) but rather a firm and solid resistance. People who enlist Explicit External responses position themselves, metaphorically, on a safe pedestal, immune themselves, while others are affected by a wave of mediated messages – an individual standing high on a riverbank as others are washed away by a swollen river.

Andrew (20 years old, a Political Science student from the United States) consciously recognizes his own “resistance” to television’s influence.

TV doesn’t influence my life all that much. I can see people who watch TV a lot ... the average of hours a day is unreal, seven hours or something absurd. For me, it honestly doesn’t influence me that much.

Two participants employ the third-person effect, however unconsciously and unwittingly. Bruce (25 years old, an Engineering student from Norway) believes that he is

more critical than others ... to things I see and read.

Deb (28 years old, a Sociology student from the United States) goes to greater lengths to deny the third-person effect by defending her own position in relation to mass media. However, she returns to her own analytical skills based in her education and profession, a kind of defense that is rooted in her “Explicit Active” response.

I think it affects other people strongly, some people more so than others. I’m not trying to say, like, that I’m a better viewer, that I don’t get impacted by these things, that other people do ... but I think that’s part of my field that I’m able to critically analyze shows more so than the average TV watcher does. I think it has a large impact on people.

Liz (19 years old, an English student from the United States) has a similar approach to that of Deb – a detailed explanation that casts her in sharp relief to her roommates while at the same time reaffirming her own self-acknowledged “critical” skills.

I’ll get in moods where I’ll watch TV with my roommates, and I’ll sit there, and can you imagine: “Do you know what (the writers/producers) are doing?” They’ll start laughing and say, “Liz, aren’t you reading into this too much?”

And I say, "But there's this undertone," or "This is coded into that," y'know? They'll ask, "Aren't you reading into this too much?" I'll say, "Are you ...?"

Or aren't you reading into it enough?

Exactly. It's just ... it's just my roommates do a lot more passive watching ... they just watch to be entertained. That's a priority for me, and it's not a priority for them.

"That" being ...?

Reading analyzing.

As with Deb, this again underscores how Liz also employs the Explicit Active responses in conjunction with her Explicit External responses.

The third category, Explicit Aggressive responses, almost paradoxically and ironically, appears both elitist and defensive. These responses express a view that negates television (television representing perhaps all media, including advertising, film, Internet, and the like). Those who employ these kinds of responses clearly do not want not to be labeled as viewers of television, and even indicate – overtly or subtly – a disdain for the programs, the viewers, or the very structure of "television." Those who use these responses clearly express television's lack of value and judge these programs against some unspoken aesthetic barometer.

Michael (22 years old, a Biology student from Canada) attacks trash talk show television and remarks on the gullibility of its habitual viewers.

Like, I don't understand why people watch Jerry Springer all day long, but they do. And if they wanna believe it, they wanna believe it. It's OK with me.

Lee (20 years old, a Business student from Norway) also finds fault with talk show television, but, curiously, she defends her viewing habits in a manner similar to an Explicit Active response.

Sometimes I'll watch those really bad talk shows, and I'll kinda analyze it sociologically. Or that's the excuse I give myself for why I'm watching that show. Kind of like a cultural critique.

Finally, Andrew (20, United States, Political Science student) recognizes the prefabricated quality of television programming and remarks on a lack of spontaneity brought about by the producers/writers total control of the image and narrative.

I think that (television) ... I would look at it more as a world. I don't know if that's because I know that TV is all staged and all scripted, or at least the majority of it. It's definitely a world, now that I think about it even harder. Just because you see what they want you to see. There's no randomness to it at all. There's no unpredictability, so to say. It's strictly channeled. You're seeing exact shots. You're seeing exact angles to convey what they want. It's very specified.

Like those who use the Explicit External responses, the Explicit Aggressive responses place the individual in a similar position – high on the riverbank, but in this case attacking both the rushing water and those trapped in it with an elitist, high culture approach.

Implicit responses – “Common sense”

Implicit responses were defined as indirect expressions of or allusions to one's media skills, expressed not as possessing certain critical skills but rather as a “common sense” or “layman's opinion” that people have about mass media. While the responses themselves may or may not refer directly to the media, these kinds of “secondary” references indicate the demand characteristic of social desirability that lurks beneath the surface of the spoken word and is apparent through a clichéd rhetoric. The responses we received address such classical media debate issues as advertising's capacity to manipulate, politicians “selling” their ideas, diversity being “good,” and newscasts being “skewed” or “subjective” and serving some political interest. What further confounds the very nature of the “implicit” responses – more pronounced here than with any of the Explicit responses – is determining the degree to which the statements are veracious; clichéd rhetoric often risks becoming common belief, if only for the repetitive mantra that inculcates it in the public's mind.

Robert (27 years old, a Speech-Language-Hearing sciences student from Japan) remarks on how uneducated viewers might confuse popularity with quality.

Well, like in Japan, people may think that high rating program is a good program, and I think it is a bit of problem.

Bruce (25 years old, an Engineering student from Norway) discusses the susceptibility of viewers to political and commercial advertising rhetoric.

If people are more to be skeptical, and hopefully ask more questions, maybe they wouldn't buy into all that stuff, that politicians sell all the time ... plus politicians have to be more honorable.

I don't think they ... uh ... I don't think these people are critical at all in the first place ... well, maybe they become more critical and less ... uh ... (susceptible) to be fooled by the commercials and advertisement ... and TV shows ...

It will be stupid to believe everything on TV and ... newspapers ... or an advertisement and buy everything ... of course that's their goal.

Stewart (22 years old, an Information Systems student from Norway) has a similar comment on the nature of advertising:

Like with advertising, (education) can show you how it manipulates. That's important.

Bruce also gives the "politically correct" statement regarding representation of minority groups on television.

I: But is that important for you that they address these (minority) issues?

H: Well, I think it's important for all of us.

I: In what sense?

H: 'Cause diversity is good, right? Diversity is good.

I: I don't know

H: I mean ... uh ... C'mon, here you have black entertainment TV, it's a black channel only for black people, you have Spanish channel and everything ... and you have a white channel even if you don't call it white. If you say diversity, you do have diversity.

Deb (28, a Sociology student from the United States), a self-proclaimed "critical thinker" whose comments practically created the template for "Explicit Active" responses, accuses the news of being biased and viewers of that news as being simplistic in their manner of viewing.

I think so many people turn on the news at 10, like the ABC news or the local news, and think that that's the truth and don't realize that it could be, like, a swayed version of the truth or facts are being left out or ... so I think that is

problematic that people aren't exposed to alternative methods of news or entertainment. They're not making a conscious decision to watch certain types of programs or they're not really thinking critically about how they're absorbing what they're looking at or what they're reading.

Some implicit responses refer to the influence of mass media – particularly television – and how, in the face of these mediated messages, one is still able to preserve a sense of autonomy despite an acknowledging an effect. Janice (29 years old, a Speech Pathology student from Canada) credits age and maturity in her capacity to resist, if only partially.

I form my own ideas on how I feel. So I don't think now TV has near the impact on me as it did when I was growing up.

Lee (20 years old, a Business student from Norway) makes a similar statement, acknowledging television's influence but also her capacity to filter out that influence and create her own reality.

I don't want to be doing the whole "third-person" thing (third-person effect), y'know, and say it doesn't affect me because I know that it does, y'know? But I'd like to think that I do some of my own shaping, y'know what I mean?

Stewart (22 years old, an Information Systems student from Norway) echoes both of these women.

(Television) probably does influence me (laughter), but I would like to act like it doesn't. It probably does.

Finally, and perhaps most poignantly, Andrew (20 years old, a Political Science student from the United States) makes a generalized statement about "media literacy" – the very thrust of this project – that falls perfectly in line with the implicit, "common sense" statements arranged here.

I think at an early age if kids realize what the media is and all these messages that are shooting at them, they learn to decipher that code, they learn "media literacy," so to say, I think at an early age, that can only be beneficial. I think that the more media literate kids were, the more values, so to say, would be circulated around because kids can learn to look at things and decipher messages. I think it would be extremely beneficial.

Conclusions

Although the link between media, the social order, and identity construction is a common theme in critical approaches to the media, it is an underdeveloped connection as far as the themes of media and research methods are concerned, particularly with respect to the discourses of audience research, the creation of an identity, and the role of the media in these processes. This article then first dealt with the few important works within the realm of audience research. Their chronological positioning reflects the gradual development of the field itself while in progress. Although the majority of the studies mentioned were devoted to television, I believe the models that they offer are fundamental for understanding and investigating the new technologies, or some other phenomena within the context of everyday life. I consider media to be not simply means of/for communication but also, as Silverstone points out, objects with a particular place within our culture.

In addition, this research has briefly provided some ideas as to how much common-sense arguments about media power operate within and among the students themselves. The major argument here is that "media literacy" represents a "new" norm, pattern, and vehicle for an identity formation, both on personal and societal/cultural grounds. Identities created through and within different media systems have yet again been reimagined, challenged and transformed in response to new social conditions. There are different paths in approaching "self-identity" via mass media (e.g. explicit vs. implicit search for self-boasting). I suggest that there is, in identity itself, a 'kaleidoscope' of specificities about loyalty and commitment to social groups, community, and localities. I do not want to neglect the fact that in our daily lives we live with multiple identities – and the mass media provides but one expression of them (Denzin, Lincoln, 1998). But in our 'kaleidoscope' of identities, the mass media may play a dominant role. Mass media become central to economies and societies, and identity becomes an organizing principle of social action in the emerging "information society". And within this framework, "media literacy" starts to represent a desirable goal for most of my informants.

What is at issue in this article is precisely the question of research methods, media, identity, and social order, and how the articulations fostered by the media result in specific ideological justifications for my informants, that further define important issues in political and civic arenas.

The article further argues that what we need are new perspectives on the necessity of Media literacy for the general public that will help to understand how important it is create an educational framework which encourages intelli-

gent and active responses to the new media and enables us to grasp the nature of knowledge itself.

NOTES:

- ¹ There are audience studies that have been conducted on similar topic such as Janice Radway (1987) on women reading novels and Andrea Press (1991) on working and middle class women and television.
- ² Ang highlighted the tendency of women to project their lives and feelings into those experienced by the characters in order to obtain a sense of legitimization and recognition of the hard task of being a woman in our society.
- ³ Recruiting participants was comprised of multiple steps. First, I sent an announcement to the International Students office at the University of Colorado via e-mail to distribute word that I was looking for students from Norway, Canada and Japan. The international advisor then forwarded this announcement to the students from these countries using their student list. The students from the United States were randomly chosen from different classrooms.
- ⁴ One of the major problems in conducting interviews with non-Anglophones is that the fluency of English can affect the quality of the interview. For instance, the Japanese students were not significantly fluent English speakers since they had been in the United States only six to seven months.

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Zala Volčič

Tko želi biti medijski pismen? Metode medijskih istraživanja i njihova primjena na koncept “medijske pismenosti”

SAŽETAK

Područje medijskih istraživanja bavi se pitanjima koja uključuju složeni proces konzumacije masovnih medija i njegov odnos s praksama stvaranja značenja u publici.

Jedna od trajnih tema medijskih istraživanja jest pitanje moći masovnih medija, njihovih učinaka i uloge kao sredstava kulture. U nekim se pristupima masovne medije analizira tek kao propagandna sredstva s izravnim medijskim učincima. U istančanim inačicama smatraju se snagom koja oblikuju svijest javnosti određivanjem što je vijest i prikazivanjem događaja na svoj način ili pak time što daju tipične načine tumačenja svijeta. U članku se u uvodu opisuju glavni metodološki pristupi kojima istraživači medija analiziraju publiku i ulogu medija u njezinu svakodnevnom životu.

U drugom dijelu članak prikazuje rezultate istraživanja koje kvalitativnom metodom ocijenjuje razumijevanje značenja pojma medijska pismenost. Daje se poredbeni međunarodni pregled potrebe podučavanja studenata medijskoj pismenosti, te se jednu od opisanih kvalitativnih metoda pokušava primijeniti na studiju slučaja. Članak ispituje značenje koje ispitanici, mladi studenti pridaju pojmu – medijska pismenost. Iscrpnim dubinskim intervjuima 12 studenata iz različitih zemalja (SAD-a, Norveške, Kanade i Japana) pokušalo se doći do normativne definicije “medijske pismenosti” na temelju subjektivnih percepcija ljudi o masovnim medijima. Pritom se iscrpno analizira diskurs “medijske pismenosti” ispitanika.

Članaka dokazuje da postoje dva prevladavajuća interpretacijska sklopa značenja medijske pismenosti, eksplicitni i implicitni. Većina je ispitanika smatrala medijsku pismenost pozitivnom i nastojali su svaki način pokazati koliko su “medijski pismeni” ili iznijeti vlastito tumačenje što znači biti “medijski pismen”.

Ključne riječi: medijska pismenost, masovni mediji, uloga medija, medijska istraživanja